

# Community Concern Gave Straight Its Start

This is second in a series of three articles on drug abuse, its treatment and its effects on young people in Sarasota County. Reporter Kathy Tyrity interviewed several individuals whose lives were nearly ruined by drugs. This is the story of a community's concern and the agencies involved in drug rehabilitation.

1980 saw the arrival of the Sarasota area's first drug rehabilitation facilities for teen-agers after a full force effort by local parents.

For five years, Straight Inc. has been operating a drug rehabilitation program for adolescents in St. Petersburg which has won national acclaim and been featured on Good Morning America.

It was built out of the community, which, onlookers say, gave it its most precious gift — involvement. Actually, its predecessor was a program called SEED, spawned by a "charismatic" ex-alcoholic who helped youths on the road to recovery.

When SEED closed down, parents and the professional

community began to see drug abuse as gradually taking over where alcoholism left off (statistics show alcohol use leveling at less than half the usage of marijuana, which has more than doubled in three years).

ARMED WITH ALCOHOLICS Anonymous' major principles (changed to "I am powerless over drugs"), St. Petersburg Straight founders, of which Venice Police Chief Ray Waymire was one, opened the door to families with youngsters hooked on drugs, alcohol or both.

Its clientele included 150 families from the Sarasota area who religiously made the twice-a-week trips to Monday and Friday night "open meetings" which often lasted late into the night (for some it was the only opportunity to see their children).

Parents, so firmly convinced the program was helping their children, continued the 50-mile jaunts until, after a couple of years, they began to see their numbers were so large they would welcome a program of their own. Straight at that time had no plans to open a program branch.

A YEAR AGO IN December, a half dozen local



businessmen (including a doctor, dentist, police chief and attorney) approached the Sarasota County School Board to explain their experience with the tragedy of drug abuse as it touched the lives of teens, and they asked for everyone's help.

What evolved was that one of those men, Dr. Charles Koch, gained a full measure of support from fellow citizens to organize a program similar to Straight to be called LIFE, "Life Is For Everyone."

It so happened that George Ross, who holds a doctorate degree in counseling and education, had left his previous position as assistant director of Straight in St. Petersburg after working for that program almost two years.

Ross was approached by the Sarasota parent group to direct the LIFE program, and Helen Petermann, a founding director of Straight, was hired as director of programming.

FUND-RAISING EFFORTS, headed by state Rep. Ted Ewing, R-Venice, and Sarasota businessman Ronald Hicks, planned to raise \$400,000 for a south Osprey facility, but the group opened temporary headquarters June 2 in a vacant furniture store for its initial group of 78 clients.

Ross said the new building in Nokomis should be open within the month with a capacity to serve 225 teen-agers.

Meanwhile, Straight Inc. was growing and decided, in fact, after months of consideration, to come to Sarasota. A "Straight-South" facility was planned.

Bill Holloway, formerly ROTC instructor at Sarasota High School, was chosen as the first director, he later backed down, and Cathy Schwartz, a mother of a former drug abuser, took over during the interim.

STRAIGHT-SOUTH BEGAN with 89 teen-agers at the (Please Turn To Page 2-B)

## Doctor Discusses The Dangers Of Pot Use

By KATHY TYRITY  
Herald-Tribune Reporter

"Marijuana is a far more dangerous drug than any of the experts had guessed," concludes Dr. Robert L. DuPont, president of the Institute for Behavior and Health of Washington, D.C.

In a talk to Straight Inc. staff members after a visit to one of their open meetings last year, Dr. DuPont candidly explained why he changed his mind on marijuana — from liberal support of decriminalization to firm opposition. He said the facts changed his mind.

What is wrong with pot?

According to the accumulation of research made available only recently, there are first of all, "acute" effects (associated with the immediate intoxication).

These include disruption of thinking, learning and remembering. Difficulty in finishing a thought or a sentence are used as an example. There is also disruption of all "motor" ability — driving a car, for example. Signals from the brain to function are impeded, which, combined with difficulty thinking, make for a less capable person than he or she normally would be, according to DuPont.

Then, there are "chronic" or lasting symptoms of marijuana smoking because of one major fact. Marijuana's active ingredient (delta-9 or THC), is not a water soluble chemical.

Our bodies are equipped to excrete water soluble chemicals (those that break up in water) and the blood, too, passes such chemicals. But marijuana's basis is only fat-soluble, like DDT. So it continues to accumulate in the body, no matter how small the dose.

That's how it affects the brain — a fatty tissue where it can dissipate. The chemical is proved to affect cell division, and new evidence points to brain damage associated with marijuana use.

THE OTHER MAJOR FATTY tissue it gravitates to is the reproductive system. The THC chemical is known to reduce testosterone (the male sex hormone) and has a major effect on the female reproductive system, according to recent research. The chemical increases abnormal menstrual periods in women, and when administered several times a month to laboratory animals, smaller infants, less healthy offspring and fewer births were noted.

(Please Turn To Page 2-B)

# Community Concern

(Continued From Page 1-B)

1401 warehouse on Cattleman Road and now, with a capacity of 300, serves 100 teen-agers.

Bill Geisz, who has a doctorate in psychology, serves the branch as professional counselor along with whatever staff the facility needs periodically from his parent office.

## STEVEN L. SOMMERFIELD

ANNOUNCES THAT

### THOMAS J. AUTH

WILL BE ASSOCIATED WITH HIM IN THE  
GENERAL PRACTICE OF LAW UNDER THE FIRM OF

### SOMMERFIELD & AUTH

AND THE RELOCATION OF HIS OFFICE TO

256 WEST MIAMI AVENUE

VENICE, FLORIDA 33595

PH. 485-4848

## Drs. GAUNT & TIMMERMAN

are pleased to ANNOUNCE the

Association of

PAUL H. PETTIT, M.D., F.A.C.S.

OPHTHALMOLOGY

Hours By: 370 W. Dearborn

APPOINTMENT ENGLEWOOD

Phone 474-5538 Florida

*Year-End*

In addition, student counselors who have completed the program assist in the daily process, and the teens say the student counselors best suit their needs "because they can relate."

Both LIFE and Straight operate with the same general structure and charge clients on a sliding fee scale. No one, however, will be turned away due to lack of funds.

APPROXIMATELY \$750 to \$1,750 is asked, depending on the length of rehabilitation time; \$35 also is charged monthly to pay for the child's meals (two a day), said Mrs. Schwartz. Both organizations accept professional and financial help.

"We are never solvent," explained Mrs. Schwartz. "It requires on-going community support."

She estimated about 60 percent of the students leave Straight "straight." Neither group makes any promises to parents.

Young persons are brought in (top age 21-22) and signed up for the program, with parents agreeing to conform to all the requirements including taking in a child for foster care when their own child advances in the program.

FOR 14 DAYS, the parents cannot talk to their children who stay with another foster family. Then they are given five minutes (in the company of two advanced students) to talk with their child after an open meeting.

At that time the child is expected to "make amends" for whatever he might have done to hurt his parents, such as stealing money, jewelry, etc.

When the child has "related" (come forward to talk about his problems) he advances to a second phase and can go home. For many students the first phase is a number of months.

From there, he advances to successive phases and can return to school, but the final phase is "giving back" or helping other kids in the program — a phase most of the children say they enjoy to the fullest.

EVEN THOUGH THERE are now two programs in the county doing basically the same thing, there are some differences. But LIFE's director Ross says "There's a dire need" in the area for rehab programs for youth and is certain the two programs will begin to fill that need.

For older drug and alcohol abusers, programs such as Storefront (for drug abuse particularly) and First Step for alcoholism provide care, as well as Sarasota Palms Hospital for alcoholism.

# Marijuana

(Continued From Page 1-B)

Because THC cannot break down in water, 30 percent of a single dosage remains in the body after a week. Even after a month, measurable amounts from that single administration remain in the body. So when a person smokes enough to continually keep THC in the body, he has the "chronic" and not just "acute" effect.

Other chronic effects are noted in the respiratory functions.

Marijuana smoke has more tar and known carcinogens than tobacco smoke, and puff for puff, there is good evidence in human tissue culture work that marijuana smoke causes cancer-like transformations in previously healthy tissues. (Marijuana smoke produces more of these changes than does tobacco smoke.) And, of course, marijuana smoked regularly produces bronchitis and chronic cough, actually causing more respiratory irritation than tobacco smoke.

One of the unhappiest chronic effects of marijuana smoking, according to the doctor, is its measured effect on mood. As opposed to the acute elevation of mood during one intoxication (on marijuana), the longer, chronic effect is one of isolation and irritability.

**WHY HAS MARIJUANA USE** grown so enormously? (Statistics indicate one out of every nine high school seniors gets high on pot every day.)

Dr. DuPont relates that increase to the passivity inherent in a youthful generation that grew up with constant television and lack of two parents in the home.

marijuana regularly.

From Bradenton to Naples, an estimated 10,000 teen-agers smoke marijuana every day. 2,500 youths were arrested last year in Sarasota, most related at least in part to drugs.

## GARAGE DOORS

FIBERGLASS AND WOOD  
ALL SIZES COLORS  
FAST SERVICE  
REPAIR SPRINGS  
PARTS FOR ALL DOORS  
LOW PRICES AT LOCAL FACTORY

"NEW DEALERS  
INVITED TO OUR  
FACTORY"

**OMEGA DOORS**  
313 Seaboard - Venice  
485-0029

AFTER  
**CLEAR**

**B & B**

21

- Red
- Cobalt

**SALE**

At any rate, the statistics (taken annually since 1975) show 11-12 percent of the nation's high school seniors smoke marijuana every single day, and the drop-outs from high school have an even higher rate. Only about half that many use alcohol every day. Marijuana use by seniors doubled from 1975-1978, while their alcohol use increased only slightly.

Among 18-21-year-olds, conservative estimates show more than 31 percent get high on