

Painters from LSU



Pictured are students from Louisiana State University at Monroe, who painted the foyers of two of Project COPE's apartment buildings this spring. In the midst of their work, they took a lunch break with several residents and enjoyed food provided by COPE. Students from Webster University painted an apartment last fall. COPE welcomes such student groups not only for their work, but also in order to give students an opportunity to visit with residents.



Can you help COPE fill these needs?

COPE's transitional housing units are always in need of new furnishings and supplies. At the same time, our partners have urgent needs when they come to us from prison. If you can donate any of the following items, please contact (or bring them to) the COPE office:

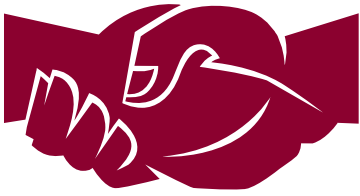
Fans
Sheets
Towels

Golf Tournament at Normandie Course **AUG 1** food at noon Call 314.389.4804



SPRING '09 NEWS

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PROJECT COPE
partnering with released prisoners

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LiNK

Congregation & Offender Partnership Enterprise

an ecumenical ministry engaging congregations in supportive partnerships with individually selected ex-offenders as they reenter the St. Louis community.

THE NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS, FAMILY AND PARTNERS OF PROJECT COPE

COPE welcomes new executive director

Denson replaces retiring McGivern

There is a brand-new face in the Project COPE office: the Rev. Adrienne Denson, who replaces the retiring Sr. Mary Ann McGivern as COPE's executive director. A St. Louis native, she is returning to this area after years away for education and employment, most recently as chief chaplain at the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women, where she was responsible for 1,300 prisoners.

"I am very excited about this taking this new job, coming back to St. Louis and being part of an organization that seeks to support ex-offenders as they

move back into the world outside of prison," says Denson.

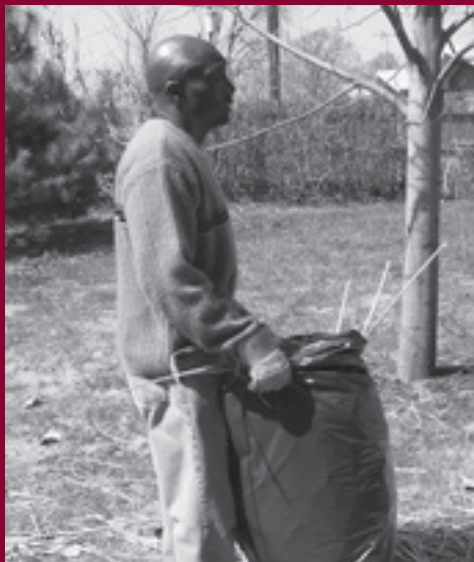
A committee appointed by the COPE board of directors selected Denson from a pool of some 40 applicants. She took over as COPE head on June 1, assisted by Mary Ann McGivern, who will overlap with her for two weeks to ensure a smooth transition.

As she shifts into her new position, Denson says, she will have some key goals in mind. First is building relationships on many levels. Who are the COPE partners and team members? Who are the key players in local prison work and the Department of

See Executive Director on page 2



Adrienne Denson came on board to begin her duties as executive director of Project COPE June 1.



Need yard work?

Project COPE residents at left do a little outdoor spring cleanup on the grounds of the apartment buildings on Marcus Avenue. This spring, the Missouri Department of Corrections awarded Project COPE a \$35,000 grant to assist partners who are interested in lawn care or gardening jobs. If a property owner pays a COPE worker \$7.50 (or more) an hour, the program will provide an additional \$3 per hour. COPE volunteers or staff will supervise the work. But there's one catch: The money must be used up by August 31, 2009. So hurry! Contact Adam Derby at Project COPE (389-4806) for more information or to schedule an appointment.

New executive director named continued from cover

Corrections? Who are the prospective employers willing to give ex-offenders a chance?

"I also want to read everything I can get my hands on," she says, "including past board minutes, data and statistics, the history of COPE. I want to understand the organization and find out what its hopes and dreams are."

Playing a key role in Denson's own history are her parents: her mother, Rosalind Denson, associate pastor of West Side Missionary Baptist Church; her father and stepmother, Howard and Vickie Denson, active team members and, in Vickie's case, former board president; and her two sisters, Yolanda Denson Lehman, an ordained minister, and Kimberly Denson, a college student.

Adrienne attended Parkway Central Schools, then Thomas Jefferson School. In 2000, she graduated from Williams College and in 2006 from Duke Divinity School; in between, she was a capital defense investigator in New Orleans. As a prison chaplain,

she served on the steering committee for the Transition After-Care Network, a program aimed at helping ex-offenders return to their communities.

In her spare time, she likes photography, travel, exploring parks and local attractions, and trying new recipes. At the North Carolina prison where she worked, she directed the choir. She hopes to buy a house in St. Louis and is "accepting suggestions" about interesting neighborhoods.

But working with prisoners and ex-offenders is her calling, she says. "It is what I was created to do. Both my parents are passionate about the community and social justice, and I learned from them. I also think there is a lack of programs and resources, though people are starting to see the importance of after-care support."

Now she will head Project COPE, a group that has long focused on this mission. "It amazes me that nearly 25 years ago, someone had it on their mind to establish this kind of organization — and had the wisdom to proceed," she says.

My penultimate day

By Mary Ann McGivern

Adam is managing the Department of Corrections grant for yard work. He made a mistake in his arithmetic and all the FICA for two dozen workers was pennies off per hour. Then Tyrone printed the checks — but the printer kept running two checks on one piece of paper. These two problems took hours to resolve.

Meanwhile a team leader called Bea to say he wasn't sure they could take on a new partner in June after all. And I was pushing to submit an interim report to the Lutheran Foundation on the \$50,000 two-year grant they gave us.

All this was happening when, at 11 AM, a dozen Lutheran women arrived for their business meeting, lunch, a presentation on COPE by us, and dessert supplied by COPE. Ernest ran out for ice cream and cake. I apologized profusely and cleared the table. Jon and Bea agreed to speak to the group and Jon made coffee and got out the paper and plastic ware. The Lutheran ladies, bless them, laughed during their meeting, asked us lots of questions, and gave COPE a check for \$125.

And Adrienne asked me what an ordinary day at COPE is like.

A glimpse of Project COPE by the numbers

On June 1, 2008, Project COPE had 32 active partnerships. This year, 17 have graduated, and six will graduate at our July 12 pot luck.

Two partners were hoping to be paroled but their requests were denied by the Parole Board. Three went back to prison, all for picking up drugs, but two will resume their partnerships when they are released later this year. Five are struggling. They have maintained limited contact with their teams but did not graduate from the program.

Today — May 26, 2009 — COPE has 27 active partners, including the six who will graduate in July and the two who went back to prison. One is still waiting for parole. In addition, six new partnerships are being formed with people

who will be released in June and July.

Over this 12-month period, COPE spent \$150,000. That comes to about \$3,000 per client. Of course, some COPE's partners used fewer resources and some more. For example, the St. Charles partnerships found housing and resources in St. Charles for their partners.

Those are the raw numbers, which mean that 48 partnership teams worked with men and women learning to make the adjustment from prison to society. Almost all COPE's partners committed violent crimes and served long sentences. Luther did the longest time; he committed a murder when he was 18 and he spent 34 years in prison, coming to COPE last July. He graduates next month!

COPE Potluck at COPE
JULY 12 5-7p
FOOD, FRIENDS, FUN

COPE client finds useful tools for first year out

AARP and COPE have helped Jon get back in the swing of going to work in an office, and now he's ready to put his skills to work elsewhere.

Jon is one of COPE's employees whose salary is paid through AARP's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP), which pays for four hours a day (16 hours a week) for up to four years. The intent of SCSEP is to help the participant update his or her skills while looking for permanent employment (see article below for details on SCSEP).

It's just one of the tools Jon has used to make the transition to life after prison. He was released on June 27, 2008, and lived in COPE's residential housing program until the end of May 2009. He volunteered in the COPE office first and then found out about SCSEP, which allowed him to keep honing his telephone and other office skills and be paid for doing so. "It gave me the experience of going to work, of being in a work environment," Jon said. "I've always been an office kind of person."

"I've had a chance to meet all the board members, to help with special projects. It's the best situa-

tion I could've hoped for," Jon said. In the midst of the busy atmosphere at COPE, Jon strives to maintain his focus. "Every single call is important," he says.

Another indispensable tool is Jon's partnership team from the Center for Spiritual Living, which through the past year has expanded to include the entire CSL community. "They've been my family on every level," Jon says. And former executive director Mary

Ann (below with Jon) has been a "key person. She's been my counselor, a friend...I'm not sure I would've made it without COPE and CSL."

Jon recently moved out of COPE housing and is looking for permanent employment, preferably serving clients or customers on the phone. "SCSEP and COPE have made it possible for me to lay the groundwork and prepare for a job." He's ready to build on that foundation.



AARP employment program helps participants and community groups

AARP's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) is for people 55 and older who meet income guidelines and who are seeking to improve their current employment circumstances. The program basically pays for participants to work in community service with a goal of helping those people learn or update job skills and then helping them land a permanent job.

In addition to COPE client Jon, COPE has employed Tyrone (with Jon at left) and Ernest (far left) through SCSEP. He came to COPE because COPE agreed to be a host agency for SCSEP. Tyrone relishes the opportunity to work with the latest graphic art software and to participate in COPE's important work. It's a great fit, Tyrone says. He also is looking for permanent work and is experiencing the frustration of job fairs and interviews that yield nothing.

But SCSEP allows participants to get a little money coming

in while they travel the job search path and allows community agencies to benefit from their work. The program started 40 years ago and is funded through the federal Department of Labor, the AARP Foundation, and other sponsors.



Second Presbyterian grant funds redesign of website, printed materials

You may notice that your newsletter looks different this month! Thanks to a \$4,000 grant from Second Presbyterian Church, a long-time COPE congregation, we were able to hire designer Scott Gericke to redesign our newsletter,

website and brochure.

In addition, COPE friend Douglas Dowd created COPE's new "clasped-hands" logo. Check out our much-improved website at <http://www.projcope.org>.