

Prayer network continues drug abuse fight in Richland County

By ANGEL N. ROSS
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MANSFIELD -- Religious, civic, government, social and business leaders came together Tuesday at Eagles Mount Christian Fellowship with the hope of stopping drug abuse in Richland County.

"Together we can make a difference," said Mansfield Assistant police Chief Jim Boyer at the Transformation Leadership Luncheon hosted by the Richland Community Prayer Network. "Law enforcement can't do it by themselves. Everybody needs to band together."

Mayor Don Culliver, attorney Jim Allen, Richland County Sheriff Steve Sheldon and representatives from area churches and businesses discussed efforts last year to fight drugs in the community.

On Oct. 28, Concerned Citizens and Christians for a Drug Free Richland County held a Project Turnaround march that included area churches and community members. They marched from the north and south sides of town in an effort to show they want to rid the community of drugs.

Organizers said more than 1,000 people participated in the march.

"Churches came together," said the Rev. El Akuchie. "With the help of God, we all need to deal with the issues of drug abuse and alcoholism."

The prayer network surveyed 40 area pastors last year to ask them their thoughts on drugs and the church.

"Seventy-three percent of pastors said it's important the church is involved in the fight against drugs," Akuchie said.

Due in part to that community effort, prayer network representatives said the METRICH Enforcement Unit received 2,000 drug tips. Sixty percent of Mansfield city employees are now randomly drug tested and some area schools and county agencies are considering drug testing.

After the luncheon, guests were captivated by a documentary called "Approaching Fire," where graphic images were shown of war, global poverty, famine, genocide, terrorism and drug abuse.

"Humanism has given way to hedonism; hedonism has given way to hopelessness," the 30-minute film stressed.

Ben Mutti, a member of the prayer network, said the purpose of the luncheon was "to develop corporate communication and to foster a partnership.

"We have a commitment to this community. We would like to see the spiritual DNA altered in our community."

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