



The year in Gilmer: January–May

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The year in review

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Jorgenson's quintet to jazz up BEST Series

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Times - Courier

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2008 in review

April – July

April

- The Gilmer County Sheriff's Department became "officially certified" by the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police. Certification means the department "implements policies and procedures that are conceptually sound and operationally effective."
- Three cases of rabies have been reported in the Cherry Log section of Gilmer County.
- Divers pull two bodies from Carter's Lake. One body is believed to be the victim of

foul play, and the other body is believed to be that of a person who had drowned.

•Percy the 'Possum celebrates his fifth anniversary in the *Times-Courier* April 10.

•Local businessman and Democrat Bob Thomas was honored by the Democratic Party at the Ninth District Democrat kickoff banquet at Cohutta Lodge.

•Earth Day is celebrated Saturday, April 19.

•Gilmer County Sheriff Stacy Nicholson announces

he will seek a second term.

•Edward Lacey and Sid May are recognized for their service to Boy Scout Troop 402 in Gilmer County. Both men received awards at the Northeast Georgia Council Banquet held in Gainesville.

•Gilmer County detectives put a burglary ring out of service and recovered over \$15,000 worth of items.

•Another rabid raccoon was found in southwest Gilmer County April 14. Health officials have been warning pet owners to make sure their pets' vaccinations are up to date.

•Water authority members discuss reimbursing developers for costs incurred when they put in water lines.

•Members of the Ellijay City Council vote to go with a historic district designation for most of the downtown area.

May

•A small plane takes off from the Gilmer County Airport and crashes into some trees at the end of the runway. Two men from Ohio are injured and the plane is a total loss.

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It's Cookie Time



Photo by Al Summers

Gilmer County Girl Scout, Destyne Riblet, age 8, of local Troop 8146, displays a box of Dulce de Leche Caramel Girl Scout cookies on sale now through the end of January. It's cookie time!

News Brief:

New BOC to meet at new time, discuss new budget

The 2009 Gilmer County Board of Commissioners will hold its first meeting tonight, Thursday, Jan. 8, at its new time, 6 p.m., in the courthouse jury assembly room.

Newly elected chairman Mark Chastain and commissioners Will Beatty and J.C. Sanford are expected to discuss the county's 2009 budget, which has yet to be approved.

Last week, the outgoing commission authorized the use of the 2008 budget until incoming members could adopt a new one.

Chastain said he and his team are putting the "finishing touches" on the 2009 budget, and plan to adopt it at the BOC's Jan. 22 meeting. The budget will be advertised in the *Times-Courier* prior to adoption.

Also last week, outgoing commissioner Ken Bailey announced that construction of Phase II concluded with considerable cost savings to the county. An audit is forthcoming, he said, but enough funds remain to finish and equip the basement for the 911 center.

The BOC awarded the bid for the courthouse parking lot to two companies, Highridge Partners and Lance Grading for a combined amount of \$719,108. Chopped Oak and Flag Pole Roads were accepted into the county road inventory, on condition the right of ways are certified.

Also on tonight's agenda: The appointment of county attorney and county clerk, and a discussion of the future of the old voter registration building.

Seeking shelter:

New, local help for recovering drug, alcohol addicts

by Becky Antworth
bantworth@timescourier.com

On a damp Tuesday, about 100 strangers walked across the windy darkness of an Alpharetta parking lot toward the glow of a meeting hall and a Cocaine Anonymous meeting.

Spiky-haired teenagers, not yet old enough to buy beer, shoved their hands in their pockets and sat next to snowy-haired grandparents with decades of sobriety under their belts, their faces crisscrossed with the lines of hard living.

Some were from Ellijay, some from farther. Some stood and shared: Old friends can be an addict's worst enemy; temptations lurk in every dollar bill; a single bad day can wipe out miles of progress on the slow slog to sobriety.

Others silently picked up a white keychain — the color of relapse — or orange, pink, or green ones, representing various intervals of sobriety.

Doctors and psychiatrists sat beside construction workers and ex-prostitutes — all of them the same in those chairs, all of them recovering addicts.

In Ellijay, Alcoholics Anonymous meets six times a week. Narcotics Anonymous routinely holds five meetings.



Photo by Becky Antworth

The Isaiah House, a new, nonprofit transitional housing facility for recovering addicts, plans to officially open in Ellijay later this month. Founders Ed and Sally Jeffery have remodeled the house, and await a sunny day to paint the exterior. They'll hold open house Saturday, January 17, from 2 to 6 p.m. They welcome all citizens.

Just how bad is the drug and alcohol problem in Gilmer?

Take just one drug, methamphetamine, a speed-like derivative that's been sweeping the country. Sheriff Stacy Nicholson has estimated that one in ten in Gilmer are habitual users.

Pastor Glen Arnold, born and raised in Gilmer, has been working with local addicts for decades. With 18 years as the pastor of Harvest Missionary, 15 years as a prison chaplain, 14 years as an addict and 26 years of sobriety, he's seen, and ministered to, what must be thousands of people struggling with addiction.

His congregation alone, he said, is about 90 percent addicts in recovery.

"There's not a family in the county that doesn't know somebody who has some problems with [addiction]," Arnold said. "It affects every class of people," — including his own. Arnold was an alcoholic by age 12, he said. "In my family, that's just what we did."

To say it's hard for an addict to get off drugs or alcohol is like saying sum-mitting Everest is good exercise — a profound understatement, and an

insult to those who achieve it.

Depending on one's drug of choice, the detox process is a wrenching, sweaty, sickly ordeal. Cells seize in the absence of the substance they've been bathed in for months, maybe decades. It's a series of agonizing minutes that stretch into hours, days if you're lucky, in which the foggy minutia of life is lifted only by periods of painful withdrawal, punctuated by stabbing cravings.

But as hard as it is to get off the stuff, it pales in comparison to how hard it is to stay off it.

"Being an addict, you're always just one step away from being it again — for the rest of your life," said Arnold, who still struggles to stay sober.

Indeed, recidivism runs rampant regardless of drug of choice.

The biggest contributing factor to relapse? Returning to a toxic environment, local experts say. Even if addicts have gone through rehab, they often lack the necessary resources to survive in the real world. Desperation, feeling adrift in their own lives, drives addicts back to drugs as much as the siren song of the substance.

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Ellijay Community Blood Drive

Thursday, January 8
12pm-6pm

Ellijay Lions Club Building



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Shelter from 1A

Imagine, for example, you've just finished a six to nine month stint in rehab — not the Malibu spa-treatment sort, but the real, full-time, highly-restrictive kind, in which almost all access to the outside world is cut off and the closest thing to a controlled substance is a cup of coffee, maybe a smoke.

You collect your personal effects, shake hands with your doctors, and step through the doors that release you to the real world. You're clean. But probably also unemployed, close to broke, and cut off from family members — with perhaps a criminal record, and a collection of friends who are users. What do you do? Where do you go in the wide, unwelcoming world?

"The ability [for an addict] to pull out of that on their own is basically zero," said Steve Fallin.

Fallin is a substance abuse counselor with the Appalachian Circuit Drug Court Treatment Program. He also leads a support group, Lifeline, that meets on Tuesdays in East Ellijay. He's been working with addicts for over 23 years. And he's seen this scenario play out hundreds of times.

"At that point," Fallin said, "the only people who would even let you in their house are people living that lifestyle. Your options are so limited that turning over a

new leaf is almost impossible. If they don't get support after coming out of recovery or jail, they go right back to a life of crime and drugs."

Pastor Steve Fields of East Ellijay Baptist Church, who's been working with local addicts for several years, agrees. "If they go back to the same place they were living, and fall back into the same group, they start using all over again," he said. "What we need is something local for local people."

Enter the Isaiah House. Located in a renovated assisted living facility in Ellijay, The Isaiah House is a new, nonprofit transitional housing facility (also known as a "halfway" house), founded to fill in the gap between rehab and the real world. It is the first of its kind in Gilmer County. And it is a dream realized for founders Ed and Sally Jeffery — a couple on a mission to help local men stop the caustic cycle of addiction and relapse.

The Jefferys will hold an open house January 17 for anyone who wants to visit.

When it officially opens later in the month, Isaiah will house men from Gilmer, Fannin, and Pickens counties who have just finished a drug or alcohol recovery program. It will provide a safe, healthy environment, where men in recovery are held accountable for their actions

while being gradually reintroduced to the outside world. Men can stay until they're ready to live on their own, usually about a year. It will ultimately hold up to 13 men.

"That's 13 men who won't be committing crimes or doing drugs," said Van Cash with conviction.

Cash — "like money" — now 46, first met the Jefferys at Promise Land Ministries, a 9-month "regeneration program" (they don't participate in the 12-step system) at the Church of the Narrow Way in Gilmer. He was there to get help; they were there to give it. After Cash completed the program and had nowhere to go but back to his old life, the Jefferys took him in (in fact, during one six-week period, they housed 24 men from the ministry) and helped carry him through recovery.

"No matter what you've done in life, when somebody takes you in and believes in you, it changes your whole outlook on the world and yourself," said Cash. "I just can't express how much they've (the Jefferys) done for me, and a lot of other guys."

One reason transitional housing programs like the Isaiah House are so critical for turning addicts into productive citizens is that, while rehab teaches men how to live without drugs and alcohol, they may still not know how to live as adults.

The Isaiah House has one of the most comprehensive programs around. Men will learn social skills, strategies for sober living, stress and money management, physical and spiritual fitness, how to find a job and conduct themselves at interviews — plus how to load a washing machine, cook meals, and clean up after themselves.

"Basically how to be a man," said Ed Jeffery, who'll serve as director. He and Sally will both live at the Isaiah House full-time, leading classes, providing guidance, and making sure the

men stay on track.

They are, perhaps, the ideal couple to take on the task. Sally is recovering from a previous marriage to an addict. Ed's insights are even more intimate. He's been working with men in recovery for 18 years. Before that, he was one. Twenty-five years of drug and alcohol abuse have given regrets, sure — but also a direct line into the minds of the men he aims to heal.

"Addicts aren't stupid," he said of their frequent mistakes and false starts. "They're sick."

After he finished rehab at age 43, Ed, like so many others, had used up his last chance with his family. He turned to his sponsor, who took him in, kept tabs on him, and supported him until he regained his footing in society.

Leaning back in a chair in the Isaiah House kitchen on a cloudy December day, Ed recalled the career, the fortunes, and the family members he'd traded in for all those packets of white powder. He explained some aspects of the addict's thought process — patterns that are perhaps still more comprehensible to him than those of the nonaddict.

"Normal people, like Sally here, will have one drink and that's it."

He turned to his wife, who explained: "If I have a glass of wine with dinner, I stop if I start to feel it."

Ed smiled and shook his head. "You're a weird person," he said, still bemused by the concept. "Addicts will have another, and another, and another. It doesn't make any sense to have just one."

Having been through it all himself will give Ed a leg up on what the men are thinking. Anyone who shows they're not serious about changing — "And some of them won't be," Ed said — will be dismissed to make room for someone who is.

Ed also knows the criticality of getting men back in the work force — not an easy task. After years of living fix to fix, resumés are often thin, and recommendations from former employers may be less than complimentary. As a solution, Ed created his own nonprofit painting busi-

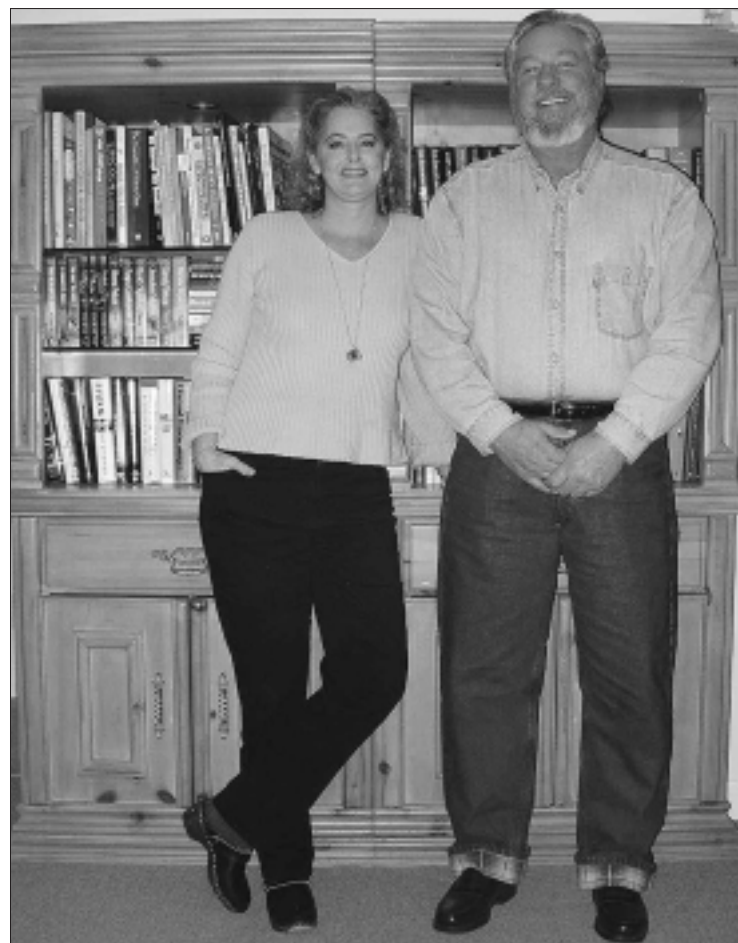


Photo by Becky Antworth

For Ed and Sally Jeffery, Isaiah House founders, the new facility is a goal finally realized.

ness. It will employ Isaiah House residents — thus teaching them on-the-job conduct, and providing a chance to prove they're responsible, while also giving them a lifelong, marketable skill to help secure work in the real world.

The business will also help fund the Isaiah House. Although residents must each pay \$130 per week, as a nonprofit organization the Isaiah House is reliant on donations for continued success. The Jefferys are also hoping area churches and other organizations will band together to sponsor men who can't afford the fees.

"It will be a tremendous positive thing to make our efforts more meaningful," said Pastor Fields, an Isaiah House board member.

"There's a lot of people like I was," said Cash. "Nobody cared, and I didn't have any place to go. But this thing can be beat. You just have to have a place where people believe in you, and can help you. [A place like the Isaiah House] is one of the most important things the community can have to help recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. There's just so

many lives that need guidance and direction."

No doubt, the Jefferys have their work cut out for them — finding the financial support to stay afloat, and the spiritual stamina to guide the minds of battered men to the shores of sobriety — while knowing some will still be swallowed by the sea of addiction, the waves of temptation rising too strong to survive.

"[Addiction] is really a cancer that's eating us and a lot of people just want to turn their head," said Pastor Arnold. "But I have hope for anybody I come across. You're not going to be able to save them all, but it's worth giving them a chance."

Said Isaiah: I've come to bind up the brokenhearted and set the captives free.

Said Ed Jeffery, "I don't have any doubt about what we're doing."

For more information on the Isaiah House, or to make a donation, go to www.IsaiahHouseGA.org, or call 706-635-5353. The Jefferys welcome all citizens to the Isaiah House open house, Saturday, January 17, from 2 to 6 p.m. The Isaiah House is located at 1242 Old Hwy. 5 South.

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