

BRIDGEPORT

Road to recovery features roadside stand

By MARY WENDELL

Jeffrey Dwain of Comanche, Okla., stood underneath the metal port in the 100-plus degree weather, spouting information and facts about the locally grown produce and homemade salsas to customers.

Dwain, a regular worker at the U-Turn Ministries farmer's market, enjoys working there and talking to the customers who come through.

"You have to learn to talk to people. I love it," he said.

U-Turn Ministries recently moved its farmer's market from Justin to Bridgeport, and Dwain, a former alcoholic and program participant, is learning to run the "business," a combination of business and ministry.

Proceeds from this "business" and others support U-Turn's Men's Christian Recovery Home in Crafton, part of a three-phase program. During phase one, it is about building a relationship between the men and Jesus. Phase two allows the men to work at the farmer's market, scrapping metal or



Messenger photo by Mary Wendell

PRODUCING GOOD FRUIT — Jeffrey Dwain, a recovering alcoholic and phase three worker, and David Simmons, phase two home director, hold some produce at the U-Turn Ministries farmer's market in Bridgeport.

Jesus. Phase two allows the men to work at the farmer's market, scrapping metal or doing lawn care. The men then move to the home in inner-city Fort Worth, getting full-time jobs while having to resist a more readily available temptation of drugs, alcohol and prostitutes.

There are 10 men living at the Crafton home, but they currently have the capacity to house 16.

It costs roughly \$1,200 to \$1,500 per man, per month and instead of solely relying on donations, U-Turn Ministries' goal is to teach the men to earn their own way in life.

Dwain, 49, is taking that lesson to heart. He has been a part of U-Turn ministries since Oct. 17, 2010, an accomplishment of which he is quite proud. Growing up in Comanche, he got a football scholarship as a defensive tackle at Southeastern Oklahoma State University. Dwain said SEOSU is where his alcoholism started. After being raised in a strict Baptist

PRODUCING GOOD FRUIT — Jeffrey Dwain, a recovering alcoholic and phase three worker, and David Simmons, phase two home director, hold some produce at the U-Turn Ministries farmer's market in Bridgeport.

tist home, college was a new experience for him.

"I have a dear, sweet mother, brothers and sisters. I have no excuse," said Dwain.

"When all that was available, I was like 'yeah,'" said Dwain, but he admits not having a "shut-off valve" was the real problem. He couldn't just drink on the weekends. It was a constant must-have. Dwain left SEOSU after his third year because of a knee injury.

He has been in prison three times, two years for aggravated assault and two stints for DWIs, four years on the first, then due to a probation violation, he served six years of a 12-year sentence. During his third stint, he became a model inmate.

Once released, Dwain stayed on the straight and narrow for roughly six months, but he decided to go back to his old neighbor-

hood and fell into his old ways of drinking. He had been homeless for six weeks when he went to a park in Fort Worth. While there, he turned back to God.

Dwain looked across the park and saw a white-haired man. He was compelled to go speak to him. Sitting next to the gentleman, the stranger asked, "What is it, son?"

"I broke down, I told him all of my struggles," said Dwain.

The stranger listened and told him to go a few blocks over to the U-Turn Church; Dwain's life changed after that.

"Alcohol was not pleasant. I tried everything: AA, clinics, psychologists, prison, family advice. Nothing worked until I found the Lord," said Dwain.

Dwain is part of phase three but rather than go to Fort Worth, he is being trained to be a home director at the ministries after

he graduates. He is learning about the business and running the farmer's market.

"I'm excited for the opportunity," he said. "It's like what David (Simmons) said: You get to watch people change. You get to see men come in with their heads down, then one day you see it click. You get to see these men stand up straighter and become better men. It's a bigger paycheck than any amount of money could match."

Simmons is the phase two home director and currently runs the farmer's market.

For most of the men, U-Turn Ministries and people like Simmons provide a family and a system on which to rely. While more leave than stay, it is still worth it to Dwain.

He said there is a common thread that runs through all the men; they all come from living with addiction or being released from prison

but want to change. They all want to turn their life to God and become the men they are supposed to be.

U-Turn Ministries is hoping to spread its mission and start the relationships early. They are partnering with Warriors for Christ, who have a similar home in Lake Worth, and hope to open a women's home in Granbury. Together, they are taking 22 men into prisons to minister and recruit.

Also, they are attempting to become State of Texas approved to house parolees.

Giving a parolee who wants to change a chance is especially important to Simmons.

After spending six years in prison for intentionally burning his home after falling behind on bills, Simmons was forced to go on parole and stay in a halfway house. Simmons said that he wanted to stay in prison rather than go to the halfway house.

Simply speaking from personal experience, Simmons believes that if these men do not get connected to someone on the same path,

Simmons believes that if these men do not get connected to someone on the same path, the path of God, it's devastating. He plans on building relationships with the men in prison to help them.

U-Turn Ministries and Warriors for Christ will be joining efforts to raise money and awareness at the Biker Bash Texas in Granbury during Labor Day Weekend, Sept. 3 and 4. More information can be found at www.bikerbashtexas.com.

■ *The farmer's market, located off Texas 114 and Hovey Street in Bridgeport, is open Thursday through Saturday and sells an ever-expanding collection of locally grown produce, clothing, purses and barbecue. A customer checking out remarked that they had the best barbecue within a hundred miles.*

■ *U-Turn Ministries was featured in an award-winning series of stories, photos and a video last year. To read and view more, go to WCMess.com/uturn.*