

# TRANSITION TIMES



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## Roger Lesofski Retires

By Brenda Demers



**Roger Lesofski** is the patriarch of Great Falls Pre-Release, just completing his 30<sup>th</sup> year of employment as the Job Developer/System Administrator.

His career at the Center began in 1984 when a group of people that included Herb Waltermire, who was Roger's boss at the Job Service, formed the Transition Center. Herb tasked Roger to find employees to run the newly formed non-profit organization. Roger remembers that no one really knew if the Pre-Release would be successful, but the idea was to give people releasing from prison an opportunity to be productive members of the community. Once residents were housed at the Center, Roger, in his position at the Job Service, helped the residents find jobs. "The problem was no one was willing to hire felons." What was different about helping the residents compared to helping people off the street? "Nothing. I tried to treat everyone the same. Some had problems, but if you felt they could be a good

worker I would talk to the owner or manager and convince them the person could do the job."

Roger went on to be a business owner in another venture until Herb Waltermire called him in 1991. The Center needed Roger's expertise in helping the Great Falls Pre-Release residents obtain employment. Roger jumped at the chance and was hired as the Center's Job Developer. It all started in the building we call the West Campus. It once housed a number of different bar businesses. Jeff Barnhart remembers when the building was a bar. If you wanted to dance rock and roll you could go to one floor, and if you wanted to dance western you could go to another floor. The first office for the counselors was upstairs in the dorm, while the first Resident Advisor (now Compliance Officer) office was in what is now the linen closet on the main floor. Before long it was moved to what is now the pantry across from the stairwell. The Veteran/Federal wing and the lobby and administrative areas did not exist, nor did the Women's Center or East Campus. All of the outdoor area consisted of dirt and potholes. There were 33 male residents that came directly from prison. There were three counselors, one cook, and no inmate



## Roger Lesofski Retires - Continued

workers. The Center started using computers and a network in the early '90's. Roger said he was given a \$1 an hour raise to take care of four computers. Now Roger is the System Administrator for over 50 computers.

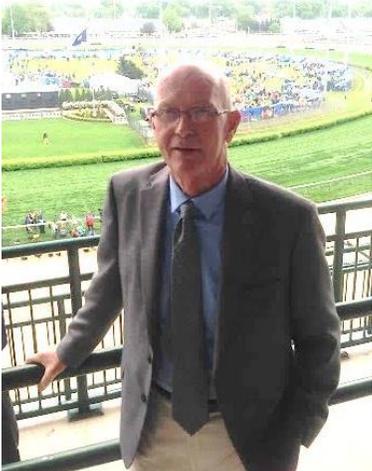
The first thing on Roger's agenda was to form relationships with business owners and managers. Roger also created what he calls "the chaos that is still here." The residents were rough looking, so he made some major changes, requiring haircuts, shaves, button down shirts with collars, ties, and slacks. He sent the residents out to meet the employers. Roger commented, "It worked out very well. A first impression is everything. We had people that had been down for a long periods of time and had no current work history." Roger started classes teaching them how to fill out an application and how to do interviews, which he continues to do to this day.

Roger voiced the importance of being actively involved in the community. He has done just that throughout the years. He served as president of the Chamber of Commerce Sports and Recreation Committee. He was also the president of the Four Seasons Sports Foundation which is now known as Cofero Sports. He chaired the Great Falls AARP and served on the Fair Board. Roger has been a member of the Optimist Club since 1983 and has served as President, Lt. Governor, Governor, and International Vice President.

Roger related that the tough part about working here is seeing first hand that the shorter the stays become for the residents, the less successful they are. When the program first started, the residents were required to be here between 12 and 18 months. They spent consistent time in a structured environment and got into a flow. It was also a different type of person coming from prison that wanted to be here.

Roger reflected that it's been a great 30 years for him. He calculated that it's given him the opportunity to help approximately 15,000 people. Of course, he's seen lots of repeaters. "Hopefully they come back with a better understanding of what they need to do so they don't come back again."

An accomplishment Roger is proud of is that Great Falls employers are more than willing to give our people the opportunity to work for them. The Center has become a predominant place for employers to find good workers that they can count on to show up for work. It's important to Roger that our residents have learned the skill of acquiring a job. He teaches them the importance of going out and meeting employers. "Most don't have the skills, so an application doesn't look so good to an employer. They need to meet the manager and make a good first impression and show they are motivated and want to work."



Roger is looking forward to retirement where he will enjoy his love of traveling, golfing, and horse races. "I intend on having fun, which shouldn't be too hard!"

**Roger at the Kentucky Derby**



**Roger in the big chair while he served as the Optimist Club's International Vice President**

## Employee Milestone

by Brenda Demers



**Sam Witherite** – Compliance Officer - 15 years: Sam was raised in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania, experiencing a typical 70's childhood. As I have gotten to know Sam over the years, I found that he always has a story or experience to share. He is interested in the history of places and things. He loves attending concerts, being outdoors, riding his motorcycle, and he'd rather eat a good burger than a steak.

Sam's love of music was inspired by his 6th grade English teacher. The classroom walls were decorated with Rock & Roll album covers. During quiet time (are you sure this wasn't kindergarten) the teacher would put on a record. Led Zeppelin and Boston hung on the wall next to Sam's desk, and he never forgot them.

Sam joined the Air Force and was assigned to Malmstrom as his first (and last) base. He met his wife a year after settling in Great Falls. Sam and Diane have been married for 33 years and have a son and a daughter. They have two granddaughters and a grandson on the way. Throughout his 20 years in the Air Force Sam worked temporary duty assignments in a number of stateside bases as well as in Europe and Saudi Arabia. He is especially fond of the time he spent in Belgium.

Upon retiring from the military, Sam worked for a construction company laying irrigation pipe and at Home Depot. Both jobs were seasonal, and he was looking for something more stable. Sam applied and was hired to be a Resident Advisor (now Compliance Officer) at Great Falls Pre-Release. This was in 2006 when staff members were being recruited to fill additional positions created by the newly constructed East Campus. Ironically, Sam spent most of his career working at the West Campus. Back then everything was done on paper. Sam admits that the TOM (Total Offender Management) system makes it easier. He remembers the camera downstairs in the Booter (now Veteran) room. The RA's could control it from the office. Whenever they would move the camera left, right, up or down, it would startle whoever was in the room and remind them they were being checked on.

Sam said that the hardest part of his job is dealing with all of the different personalities. The CO's are the front line and they can get the brunt of a person's emotions. "Everyone is going to have a bad day and we are the ones that see it." Sam is known to be calm and skilled at deescalating situations. He does this by talking the individual through whatever is upsetting them. He tries to steer the residents to a better path if he sees they are not being totally honest about something. What's rewarding to Sam about his job? "The guy that does a good program and leaves with money and doesn't come back."

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## New Staff

We would like to welcome new Compliance Officers **James Artel** and **Tracy Zinne** to the team!

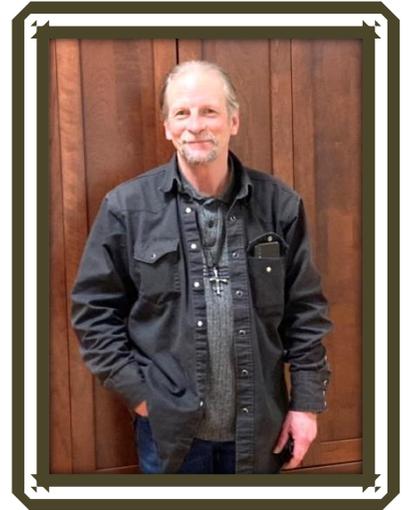
## Honoring the Memory of His Friends

By Sheena Jarvey

Earlier in his life, **Michael Turpin** had a home, a career, and a family. Then everything changed. Michael ended up living under a bridge in Great Falls for almost 3 years. Drinking was a constant which controlled his life, and, he believed, would determine his death. Michael recounted that at one point a friend, who also lived under the bridge and whom he drank with, suddenly grabbed Michael's hand and startled Michael by saying that they should stop drinking and change their lives. Weeks later, Michael's friend was dead.

Fast forward to today. Michael runs a positive program and keeps his resolve. He maintains steady employment, participates in group, helps other residents, and is getting his life back on track. Michael is now looking forward to his own apartment and enjoying life as a sober person who helps others. Michael has a quiet determination and optimism to do and be his best.

In this journey, Michael's friends who died, before they could fix their lives, are never far from his thoughts. Michael is generous in sharing his story and he explained, "I'm a 'we' person, not a 'me' person." His new motto is, "I can get off the streets and so can you." Michael Turpin is proof that a turn around to a positive life, is no matter what a person has been through, is always possible.



## An Opportunity to Better his Life

By Brenda Demers



When I asked **Jozeph Drummen** what motivated him to attend college, he told me he started thinking about what to do with his future. He asked Education Coordinator, Matthew Hauk, for guidance. Matthew suggested the Connections 101 program. The program is 14 weeks long, offered at Great Falls College MSU, and is designed to prepare individuals for college or a career. Students can obtain their OSHA certification and up to 6 college credits for free. They are taught work ethics and are guided with career exploration. Those wishing to continue on with their college degree can even get financial aid.

Tammie Hickey, Program Coordinator for the Great Falls Career & College Readiness Center stated, "What's great about this new program is that students will have the opportunity to learn about themselves and what they are good at before spending money on a degree that may not be a good fit for them."

Jozeph's goal is to own his own business, possibly in the sand blasting and painting field, since he has prior experience in those areas. He pointed out that the Success Strategies classes have been very beneficial. "They prep you on life, confidence, and tips for job interviews." He added that taking advantage of this opportunity has been good for him. In addition to going to college, he works full time. It keeps him busy and out of trouble, plus it gives him the satisfaction of doing something positive with his life. Jozeph said that the Connections 101 program would be beneficial for anyone. "It's a good opportunity and a good environment. It brings me around people that aren't in the same situation as people here. It's an opportunity to better my life."

## Rostelle “Rose” Beston - Honors Program Member

By Sheena Jarvey

**Rose Beston’s** year is starting off in an amazing way. She was named Employee of the Month at work, was featured on a KRTV segment on Pre-Release residents running successful programs, made the Honors Program and was awarded Resident of the Month. Not only that, the day of our interview, Rose’s daughter was on TV for a Groundhog’s Day special featuring first graders. When all these awards and recognitions started to sink in, Rose and I just looked at each other and began to laugh. “Wow” she said with a happy grin, “What’s really going on?!”

In the KRTV interview Rose looked and sounded like a pro. But the inner reality was that this interview was a huge challenge for Rose. (As the time drew near, she said she was shaking and feeling sick.) Being featured in the interview made her face her worst fear – public speaking- for a clip that would be watched by thousands of people. When asked what made her decide to gather her courage and go for it, Rose explained, “I wanted to do something I’ve never done before. If I can do that, I can do anything.” Seeing Rose on TV was powerful for her husband and sister, who cried when they watched. Her six year old daughter joined in the praise, “Mommy, I’m so proud of you, you were on TV!”

Rose is employed as a caregiver and says this is a job that provides meaning and value to her life. Rose said she was always drawn to taking care of people and especially caring for the elderly, who have a big place in her heart. When addictions took over Rose’s life, she didn’t work for a number of years. But now that has all changed and Rose shared, “I love to work – work is good. I got a job right off the bat. So proud of myself.” Rose has forged a close bond with her clients and said, “They just love me there.” She said one elderly woman, near death, waited until Rose was on shift, before she passed.

A commonality among people who do well in their program is that they don’t see their life in the Center as separate from their life on the outside. They carry with them the same values, discipline, attitudes and goals. Rose put it this way, “If I can do it here, I can do it out there. If you want it, you will get it. And really, it’s not that hard – it’s just everyday life.” Another trait of people running successful programs is that they own their happiness, no matter where they are. Rose expressed her contentment:

**“I really want this; how well I am doing. I feel it. It feels good to have a life. I can breathe.”**

Rose has been clean and sober for over a year and, yes, she feels so good about that. Some big hurdles for her were anger, blaming and trying to come to terms with the grief of multiple deaths, including by murder and suicide. She attributes her survival and her new found strength, “To the Grace of God. I see now that I was meant to do well. My mind is in the right spot.” Church and being baptized have given Rose comfort and support. Rose also credits the Victimology class at Passages for making her look at issues and her actions she had been avoiding. Rose is also grateful for the positive influence of the Center staff, even in the smallest of ways because, “when you need to talk, staff is there.” Rose said she will take all the little pieces of staff’s helpful encouragement with her when she walks out the door for the final time.

Being able to open up and talk is also new in Rose’s life and also extremely beneficial. Rose is finding her voice and it is powerful. Rose was, at the time of this writing, in our therapy group, and totally surprised me by saying that her meaningful insights and talkative engagement in group was a new thing!

Rose will be releasing soon and going back to her husband and her daughter. Rose credits her husband’s support and love as a huge plus in her journey. She is so very joyful at the thought of being with her husband and daughter and of never putting herself in a position to ever leave them again. Rose smiled when she said, “I know I am loved.” They are looking forward to picnics in the park, roller skating, long drives - any family activities, just so long as they are together.

Rose said she never thought this successful person could be her, but it is, and there is hope. Thank you, Rose. We are so proud of you for your multiple achievements and wish you the best.





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**MISSION STATEMENT**

Great Falls Pre-Release Services, Inc. provides a cost-effective alternative to incarceration for offenders through a variety of community-based correctional treatment programs. Great Falls Pre-Release Services, Inc. is dedicated to public safety and trust through professional, quality services which facilitate personal growth through positive change and individual responsibility of assigned offenders.



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**Vision Statement**

Dedicated to providing resources and opportunities that safely and successfully restore offenders into society.

**Statement of Values**

- *Motivation:* A desire to help others reach their full potential.
- *Professionalism:* Maintain proper interactions with staff, residents, and the community.
- *Accountability:* Take ownership for successes and shortcomings, to ourselves and others
- *Equality:* Ensure equality by expressing, in attitudes and actions, respect for all.
- *Dignity:* Model behavior in a respectful manner to instill a sense of self-respect and to bolster a positive self-image.
- *Community:* Develop a positive environment that facilitates healthy change as the residents integrate into the broader community.