



Helping youth

By Lacey Walters, countyreporter@laurelleadercall.com

— After spending time ministering to inmates in more than 150 prisons across the country, Dr. Rod Smith and his wife Vivian are working to institute a youth mentoring program in Jones County called Ring of Champions.

Ring of Champions was developed by Bill Glass in Corpus Christi, Texas, four years ago.

The program provides at-risk youth with mentors to help establish positive relationships. The program requires a 12-week commitment where a mentor will meet once a week with an assigned youth. Mentors are required to go through a criminal background check for security purposes.

“They are not teachers or counselors,” Smith said. “They are an adult who gives encouragement.”

Smith said that mentors can take their youth to the zoo, fishing or to a place to drink a soda and talk.

“The main thing is that they spend time together,” Smith said.

Smith said that in 2005 in Jones County, of 591 juvenile cases, 554 were violence related.

“Mentoring results in kids staying in schools, less drug use, less crime and lowers chances of going to prison as an adult,” Smith said. “In the United States, 108,000 youth are incarcerated,” he added.

According to Smith, mentoring a youth will result in better school attendance.

“In the U.S. one in three children do not finish high school and in Mississippi a little over 50 percent finish high school,” Smith said. “This information shows that we really do have a problem with our young people.”

Currently five people in Jones County have signed up to be mentors for the program, but more are needed. The mentoring program is a faith-based program that will be funded through contributions. Those interested in participating in the mentoring program physically or financially can contact Smith at rod@hopeeternal.com. Training and insurance are provided for volunteers.

Smith and his wife are also involved in adult prison ministries across the United States and are members of the Christian Motorcyclists Association. In the first two years that he had his bike, Smith put more than 40,000 miles on the Honda Shadow traveling to prisons.

“The most effective way to rehabilitate inmates today is moral rehabilitation,” Smith said. “A faith-based initiative is the most effective thing in prisons today.”

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Photos



Dr. Rod Smith shows off his bike he rides to prisons. Smith is currently working to begin a mentoring program in Jones County for at-risk youth. Laurel Leader-Call