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Sholten Singer/The Herald-Dispatch Greg Posey, founder of MOW Recovery, a landscaping business for recovering addicts on Wednesday, May 27, 2015, in Huntington.

Man helps others work their way sober

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By JEAN TARBETT HARDIMAN

HUNTINGTON - When Greg Posey moved to Huntington in 2005, newly sober, he had no idea that 10 years later he'd be running a sober-living house and a recovery program based on the same tools and principles that helped him along his own journey.

Posey, 58, is the founder of an alcoholism and addiction recovery program called Within Reach West Virginia, which just received its 501(c)3 designation last month, and he also runs a landscaping/handyman business through that called MOW (Making Outcasts Winners) Recovery.

Posey is very clear about what worked for him and the strategies his program uses to achieve success in recovery.

Foremost is acknowledging a power greater than yourself to help you overcome the struggle. There are a lot of different types of addiction and a lot of 12-step programs, he said.

"The solution for all of this is all the same - believing in a power greater than yourself to solve your problem," he said.

Also, he thinks it's important to work the 12 steps diligently and to have employment so you're staying busy and earning money to pay what you owe people, be it child support, alimony or restitution.

Posey is 10 1/2 years sober after many years as an alcoholic. The Dayton, Ohio, native and self-declared "computer geek" moved to West Virginia from Ohio in 1991 to work in computer sales and marketing. He had been living by himself in Parkersburg when that day came.

"God did for me what I couldn't do for myself. All the players and everything was lined up the way they were supposed to be lined up when my daughter called me on a Sunday morning and she said, 'Dad your drunk,'" Posey said. "I lied and tried to get out of it and everything. ... Two hours later, there was knock at the door. My daughter had driven from Huntington to Parkersburg, and 15 minutes later, there's another knock at the door. She had called my parents in Zanesville, Ohio, and they had, basically, what's a little intervention."

They told him he wasn't going to live by himself anymore.

"Proudly and very humbly, I moved back in with my parents at 48 years old," Posey said. "I hadn't burnt that bridge, so to speak. From there, one spiritual experience after another led me to a 12-step fellowship where I guess the willingness was there to go to any length to solve this so-called problem, which I thought was drinking at that time."

He's since learned that addiction is not a disease of alcohol or drugs, he said. It's a disease of the way the mind works.

"I went to a lot of meetings and worked the 12 steps very quickly," Posey said. "And I had a spiritual experience, a spiritual awakening. Normal people call them 'aha' experiences, coincidences, fate, luck, chance, destiny. It's all God doing for us what we can't do for ourselves. It's God being anonymous."

In his recovery, he eventually moved to Huntington to live with his daughter. They moved into an apartment building in the 500 block of 5th Street downtown. Posey was on home confinement at the time, but he went to 12-step meetings faithfully and worked handyman jobs for his landlord not only on the property but around town. He had lost his drivers license, but he carried his tools on his back and rode a bike around Huntington, which was permissible for work purposes.

His daughter eventually moved out, but he stayed on, going to church, going to 12-step meetings and working for his landlord. Meanwhile, he was trying to help other guys in recovery along their own journey by inviting them to help him out with jobs.

He remembers getting his home confinement bracelet off, then in rapid succession, the joy of seeing the Reds play in Cincinnati, traveling to see his daughter graduate from college, getting his driver's license back, being sold a beat-around car.

His hard work and success left an impression on his landlord.

"In 2008, my landlord comes to me with a proposal, and says, 'I'm impressed with what you're doing. You're helping people, you're on time with rent, you've done a lot for me,'" Posey said. "He said, 'Why don't you buy this place?' "

Posey was doubtful, saying that his credit was shot, and he didn't even have a driver's license. But his landlord was firm. The 1919-built, three-story building received a \$106,000 appraisal, but the landlord offered to sell it to Posey for \$70,000.

Posey and his wife bought it.

For a while, they rented out space to college students and eventually those tenants graduated and moved away. Gradually, with Posey's interest in helping guys on the road to recovery, it became a sober living house with a special niche in offering employment through MOW Recovery. Giving guys a chance to get right back into working quickly so they can stay busy and earn a living is key, Posey said. He sets up electronic payment accounts for the guys so that their payments for child support, restitution and so on are deducted right from their pay. They pay rent. They work on getting their drivers license back.

"Why I work with others is because it's part of the 12-step program I work," Posey said. "I have to give back in order to keep (what I have). I've always helped a lot of people. There are some people I can help and some I can't help, but I want to help them all until the brick wall comes up and I throw up my hands and say I can't help you anymore."

The program now has nine residents and is busting at the seams. It could use support in the way of equipment, trucks and living space, Posey said.

At this time last year, MOW Recovery had four accounts. Today it has 104 private and commercial accounts, and one of the accounts has 128 houses. So many more guys want to get involved, but Within Reach and MOW Recovery can't accommodate anymore right now without some extra support, Posey said. He would love to house more guys and put more crews out to work.

He attracts participants in the program from all over this region and the state. He has a close relationship with probation officers in Fayette County.

One of the men he has helped is James Chapman, who has been working with Posey for about 18 months.

Chapman came to West Virginia by way of New Orleans. He's a West Virginia transplant after Hurricane Katrina. Before the hurricane, he was sitting pretty as a tugboat captain that landed ships on the Mississippi River. He had a sizable house with a pool in the backyard. He drove a Jaguar.

After moving to West Virginia, he experienced a downhill slide with alcoholism until, "18 months and a few days ago, I was underneath a bridge, drinking a gallon of vodka a day," Chapman said. "I had been doing that about two or three months, until a few of my friends did an intervention and took me to a 28-day treatment program."

Afterward, he learned about Posey and came to Huntington.

"When I came here, I didn't have a penny," Chapman said. "What worked for me was Greg Posey. I asked him to be my sponsor. He became my sponsor, my friend. I admire what he wants to do. He wants to help people. ... I'm a lot happier today. I don't drive a Jaguar... but I'm a lot happier."

Posey's foreman is Ken Yates, who came to West Virginia by way of Massachusetts. With 17 years experience in landscaping, he was in Fayette County last year working on the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve campground when his drinking started to make him sick.

"I took some time from work and came to the sober house," Yates said. "He took me in. ... I tagged along with him two or three months. I wasn't shaking anymore. I was in meetings every day. I started feeling better. I wake up every morning, and I'm sober and I can't believe it. I don't have to look for beer so I won't get sick, and I love it."

After Yates had time under his belt sober, Posey started giving him more tasks to do, and eventually asked him to be part of the new business.

He said, "You want to help me help more people?" " said Yates, who will celebrate a year of sobriety next week.

"The ones we do help, it's really rewarding," Yates said. "You do get some guys who are doing it for legal issues. Some are doing it because they don't want to go to jail (or another reason). If they're playing a game, they weed themselves out."

Posey does drug tests, but only under suspicion. He believes dignity is an important part of recovery.

The ones who are dedicated do well. They stay busy in the summer with landscaping and the winter, with handyman work.

"If you keep a person busy, they don't want to be out there drinking and drugging," Yates said. "If the guys aren't working, we want them in meetings.... We learn from each other. We get educated on our disease at these meetings."

Yates is impressed with Posey.

"Greg started this company with no startup money," Yates said. "(The Poseys) went without a lot to help other people, and that says a lot of his character right there. ... We fight like any boss and foreman would, but at the end of the day I love that fellow. He's a perfect gentleman in my book."

Greg Posey

Hometown: Originally from Dayton, Ohio. Now lives in Huntington.

Age: 58

Family: Married with two grown children and two stepchildren.

Job: Founder, executive director of Within Reach West Virginia and MOW Recovery, a sober living environment and landscaping and handyman business to help men recover from addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Education: Wayne High School in Huber Heights, Ohio; The Ohio State University
