



Brad Hicks/Johnson City Press

A large crowd participated in last year's Witness Walk in Erwin, an event that represents the journey Jesus made to the place of his crucifixion.

Annual Erwin walk set for Friday

By BRAD HICKS
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ERWIN — Members of the public are invited to take part in an event that has become a Good Friday tradition in Erwin.

The annual Witness Walk, co-sponsored by the Erwin Kiwanis Club and Unicoi County Ministerial Association, will be held Friday at 11 a.m., starting at the Food Lion store on North Main Avenue.

The walk includes the carrying of a large cross by participants to represent the journey Jesus was forced to make as he carried his cross to the place of his crucifixion.

From the Food Lion parking lot, participants will make their way through downtown Erwin, traveling down Main Avenue and up Gay Street, to Centenary United Methodist Church on Elm Avenue. There will be several stops along the way for devotionals and for seven different local ministers to recite Christ's last seven words from the cross.

The crowd is also invited to attend a Good Friday service and luncheon at Centenary United Methodist Church at the conclusion of the walk.

The Rev. Garland James, president of the Unicoi County Ministerial Association, said turnout for the event has been good over the more than 10 years it has taken place. If the weather is good, organizers are expecting around 250 attendees this year, James said. "Everyone just seems to really be blessed as a result of us having this," James said.

Recidivism documentary set for premiere

By LEIGH ANN LAUBE
NET News Service

"Outcasts: Surviving the Culture of Rejection," the locally produced documentary that looks at the high cost of recidivism and its effect on communities in Northeast Tennessee, will be premiered at 7 p.m., April 26, at the Wellmont Regional Center for Performing Arts on the campus of Northeast State Community College, Blountville.

Produced by Jane Hillhouse, of Hillhouse Video Works in Kingsport, "Outcasts" examines recidivism's cost, its affect on families and some viable solutions that are making a difference by providing a second chance for individuals who otherwise would remain on the fringes of society as outcasts. The film also explores the history of recidivism, as well as what writer/director Stephen Newton calls the culture of rejection and why it may unwittingly contribute to the high rate of recidivism in Tennessee, where more than 50 percent of offenders return to prison within three years.

"Outcasts" brings attention to Hay House, a residential treatment program in Kingsport founded in 1981 to help criminal offenders re-enter society as

responsible and productive citizens. Hay House costs taxpayers less than one-tenth the cost of imprisonment and has been recognized as a model program by the Tennessee State Department of Correction.

National recidivism rates indicate more than 40 percent of released offenders return to prison within three years. In Tennessee, that rate is 50 percent. Hay House, in contrast, has a more than 90 percent success rate.

"When we started this project, we wanted the answer to one question: If recovery programs for former prisoners reduce recidivism and help them get a second chance, why aren't there more of them?" Newton said. "The most surprising thing was that we answered that question."

The documentary also features regional programs like SteppenStone Youth Treatment Services, Frontier Health, Families Free and First Baptist Church's Celebrate Recovery — as well as national organizations like the Justice Policy Institute and Criminal Justice Policy Foundation in Washington, D.C.

It took two years to complete the project, Newton said, and the resulting work is 71 minutes long. Although the content is safe for

children, younger children may not understand it.

"We want people who view it to have a better understanding of the impact of recidivism and how the criminal justice system works. Most people's knowledge about it is garnered from what they see on television or the movies," Newton said. "That certainly was the case with us as well before we began this film."

Newton has been a communications professional for 40 years, including 23 years as founder and president of his own graphic design firm. In 2006, he started a new career making short documentaries for Tennessee non-profits. "Outcasts" is his first full-length documentary.

Working with Newton and Hillhouse on "Outcasts" were freelance photographer David Wood, composer Paul Vanderbeck and motion graphics designer Sergei Prokhnovskiy, a graduate of East Tennessee State University. Vanderbeck, a multiple award-winning composer and music producer who lives in New York, has worked with Johnny Cash, Melissa Manchester, Carole Bayer Sager and Peter Allen. He composed and produced the score for the award-winning "The RCAM Story: Building the 21st Century Workforce," pro-

duced by Hillhouse Video Works.

Tickets are free, but you should visit <http://cultureofrejection.org/> and use the RSVP button on the home page to reserve a seat. Tickets will also be available at the door. Northeast State is located at 2425 Tenn. Highway 75 in Blountville near the airport.

VI merger talks with Fla. school end without deal

Future uncertain for Bristol school.

By NATHAN BAKER
Press Staff Writer
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The future of a beleaguered private college in Bristol, Va., is uncertain after the announcement Tuesday that its plans to merge with a Florida school had fallen apart.

With deep disappointment, Virginia Intermont President E. Clorisa Phillips released a statement announcing the end of talks with Babson Park, Fla.'s Webber International University for a merger agreement between the two schools.

In the statement, Phillips said both schools regretted not being able to forge a viable model for the possible merger first announced in January.

Facing sanctions and a loss of accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges based on VI's bleak financial outlook, the school gleefully entered into a memorandum of understanding to merge with Webber International by July, which would have allowed it to share Webber's accreditation.

Virginia Intermont's accreditation was first threatened by the SACS in 2007, when the body placed the university under sanctions for two years and nearly forced it to close.

In 2011, VI was given a warning by SACS, a lesser sanction, then probation was again instated in December 2012, forcing the school to seek a merger or a partner to keep from losing accreditation and possibly closing.

In her statement, Phillips said the college would still complete the current semester, keep schol-

arship in place and hold graduation commencement on time. The eight-week summer session, ending in June, will still take place as scheduled.

After that, school administrators are "moving with haste to guarantee accredited options beyond July 1 for our students who are not slated for graduation," she said.

Faculty and staff meetings will delve into plans to keep the college operating over the coming months.

Webber President Keith Wade said Tuesday he was not aware of the specifics of VI's future plans to remain a viable institution.

"I can only pray that it is a good plan and that they have the stamina and resources to execute it," Wade said in an email. "We have nothing but respect for the people — students, faculty administration, staff, coaches, trustees — of VI. Lord knows they are committed to achieving the best outcome possible."

Wade said Virginia Intermont students were welcome to transfer to Webber, and college representatives are willing to visit the Bristol campus to interview staff members for open faculty positions, if VI was willing to allow it.

"I cannot provide details regarding the anticipated July 1 merger beyond stating that everyone involved tried to make it work and we just could not," he said, citing a confidentiality agreement signed by both schools.

The private school, like similar universities across the country, has experienced slipping enrollment numbers in recent years, leading to its current financial position.

From 2010 to the fall semester, VI reported a 35 percent enrollment decline to state authorities.

Other schools, like Lawrenceville, Va.'s St. Paul's College have been shuttered by falling revenues.

'I cannot provide details regarding the anticipated July 1 merger beyond stating that everyone involved tried to make it work and we just could not.'

— Keith Wade, Webber International president

GOOD FRIDAY, EASTER CLOSINGS

Here is a list of schedule changes for area governmental and other institutions for the Good Friday and Easter holidays.

Postal Service: The Postal Service will be on a regular schedule Friday.

Financial Institutions: Most area banks and credits unions will be open Friday.

Johnson City: All city offices and services will be on their regular schedules Friday.

Washington County: All offices at the Washington County Courthouse and George Jaynes Justice Center, both in Jonesborough, and the county offices located on Marketplace Boulevard in Johnson City, will be closed Friday. The Election Commission will not conduct early voting Friday, but it will be held Saturday from 9 a.m.-noon.

Jonesborough: All town offices will be closed Friday. Garbage and recycling services will be on their regular schedules.

ETSU: All university offices will be open and classes will be held on their regular schedules.

Elizabethton: All city offices will be closed Friday. Friday's garbage route will be collected Thursday.

Carter County: All offices at the Carter County Courthouse and Justice Center will be closed Good Fri day. The Election Commission will conduct early voting Friday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

and Saturday from 9 a.m.-noon.

Erwin: All city offices will be closed Friday.

Unicoi County: All offices at the Unicoi County Courthouse will be closed Friday. Early voting will not be conducted Friday, but the Election Commission will be open Friday from

9 a.m.-noon.

Mountain City: All city offices will be closed Monday. Garbage will be collected on its next regularly scheduled day.

Johnson County: All offices at the Johnson County Courthouse will be closed Friday.

Elect
Suzan Sell
Mitchell

Washington County Circuit Court Clerk

- Provide **Cost Effective** advanced online technology to better meet the needs of Washington County.
- **Communicate and Collaborate** with the judicial, law-enforcement, legal community and agencies providing services to the court.
- **Professional, Efficient and Courteous Service** to the citizens of Washington County.
- **22 years** with Washington County Juvenile Court.
- Appointed Juvenile Court Director in 1990.

Republican Primary: May 6th
Early Voting: April 16th thru May 1

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Happy Valley Church
of *Jesus Christ*
and
Pastor Donny Reagan
would like to
invite everyone to
Special Easter Services

Friday, April 18th • 7:00 P.M.
Saturday, April 19th • 7:00 P.M.
Sunday, April 20th • 11:00 A.M.

Featuring Special Guests

Jack Duff Fred Mullins Benny Perry Isaiah Chisolm Reginald Armstrong David Belton

Happy Valley Church
of *Jesus Christ*
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