

Gen. Barry McCaffrey, VIP's come to Wilmington to talk about drug abuse treatment

*September 1, 2010
By Amy Hotz*



Four-star Gen. Barry McCaffrey is a former U.S. Director of National Drug Control Policy.

All of the panelists at the Wilmington Treatment Center's National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month ceremony were dressed in suit and tie, except two.

Miss North Carolina 2010, Adrienne Leigh Core, wore an elegant red dress with her silver crown. And Judd Berryhill, who sat at the end of the long table with the congressman, the company executive, the four-star general and others, sported a blue golf shirt and slacks.

But when Berryhill's turn at the lectern came, it was his story that seemed to capture the crowd's attention most. Not only has Berryhill marked 40 years of sobriety from alcohol, but he has gone on to spend years working at places like the Wilmington Treatment Center, helping other veterans and those still in the military fight drug and alcohol abuse.

"Some really great people saved my life," he told the crowd of about 100 who gathered at the center Wednesday.

In front of Berryhill sat treatment center workers, city councilmen, New Hanover County Sheriff Ed McMahon, Wilmington Police Chief Ralph Evangelous and others.

The Wilmington Treatment Center, 2520 Troy Drive, was selected as the national headquarters for Recovery Month by CRC Health Group, which owns the facility. Guest speakers included four-star Gen. Barry McCaffrey, the former U.S. Director of National Drug Control Policy; Dr. Barry Karlin, CEO of CRC Health Group; Assistant Secretary Charles F. Smith of the N.C. Division of Veterans Affairs; and U.S. Congressman Mike McIntyre.

"I was the drug policy director for five years," McCaffrey said during an interview before the speeches. "The longest job I ever had in my life, the most important thing I ever did in my life, bar none."

McCaffrey's other accomplishments include being the youngest four-star general in the U.S. Army and serving as assistant to Colin Powell when Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Drug prevention and education programs are fun, McCaffrey said, but science-based, research-based treatment centers like the one in Wilmington are paramount to the 23 million or so Americans who have a chronic substance abuse disorder. More than 600,000 of those people live in North Carolina. Nineteen million Americans, however, get no treatment. And that's what McCaffrey and others are trying to address.

"When I left government, I said, 'What I'm going to devote my time doing is not law enforcement, prevention, education (or) international cooperation but effective drug treatment,'" McCaffrey said.

McCaffrey has since become a director and senior policy advisor of CRC Health Group, which is the country's largest drug, alcohol and behavioral treatment provider.

Treatment of substance abuse is likened to such diseases as such as diabetes because it is a life-long process. McCaffrey said the line of science-based procedures like that offered in Wilmington has about an 88 percent success rate in the first 30 days. If a relapse happens, then relapse recovery models take over, he said.

"If you do get treatment, almost everyone does well in a structured program," said Karlin, CRC Health Group's CEO.

And this includes the growing number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with substance abuse, post-traumatic stress and depression issues.

The Wilmington Treatment Center has treated about 2,500 veterans and their families in the last decade. With the exception of prescription drug abuse, national drug abuse numbers have gone down dramatically, thanks to educational programs, Karlin said. In the military, however, McCaffrey said the numbers have doubled, but it is still a "tiny number if you discount alcohol."

During the series of speeches, Karlin also addressed drug issues in the military.

"As much as 30 percent of returning military coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan have reported symptoms of substance abuse," he said.

Smith, the assistant secretary for N.C. Division of Veterans Affairs, said it's tough to walk off the streets of Baghdad and onto the streets of Wilmington. Many in the military turn to drugs or alcohol to cope.

Berryhill, the veteran, said he sees it every day. But he also works every day to help those other veterans get through their issues.

"It's the greatest thing that ever happened in my life," Berryhill said of working with soldiers at Fort Bragg.

For the past four months he's taken those soldiers to the Wilmington Treatment Center where they meet recovering veterans who encourage them to continue working toward sobriety.

Once, Berryhill could just as easily have been in that crowd. But now it's his turn, and everyone's turn, he said, to give back.