

S-Man

(Continued from Page 1)
 ducted by U.S. Customs Service Agents and Las Vegas police.

It did not matter that he was in the background, he had a gun in his hand and there were five kilos of cocaine.

That was when a newspaper story described him as a one-man gang. He was 29.

He was sentenced to 17 and a half years in prison for attempted possession of a controlled substance and use of a firearm during a drug-trafficking crime. His sentence was later reduced to 10 years after he was granted a new trial.

Smith was sent to a federal prison camp in Colorado where he thought about the months he would spend behind bars and became determined to get out and never go back to prison. His behavior in prison was exemplary.

He also became determined to help people. Within the first few weeks, he was teaching an inmate to read.

"It broke my heart and made me angry," he said. "Prisons are just warehouses. There is no correction, no rehabilitation," he said.

He became friends with two inmates and the "three of us fed off each other," he said. All three were commit-

ted to physical, mental and spiritual health.

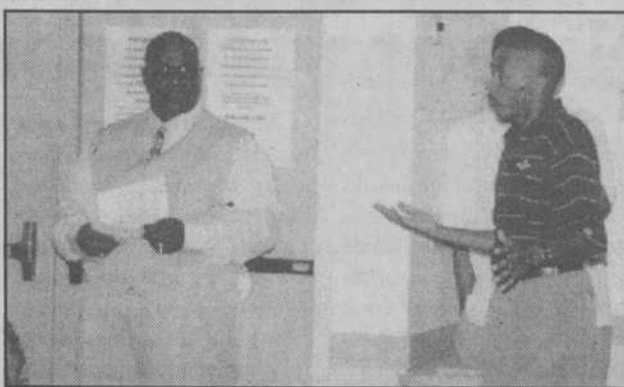
He never looked back. He worked and studied his way through the years until his release. He continued to lift weights, he studied Spanish, earned his GED, joined Toastmasters and went on speaking engagements. He learned how to operate a computer and how to type. He started GIFT, Guiding Individuals From Trouble, a mentoring program for at-risk youth.

Since his supervised release in 1997, he has added ex-offenders to the list of people he helps. He knows how scared they are when they walk through the gate of a prison with their bus ticket and \$21. He remembers that he was scared.

"How am I going to work? How am I going to live? I was looked up to in the community and I had fallen. How would they respond to me?" were some of the thoughts that went through his head.

As it turned out, Smith was an exemplary inmate who transitioned into life outside prison with little difficulty.

He was hired by Silver State Disposal Service soon after his release and began to preach his gospel of living right to any ex-offender who



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Councilman Lawrence Weekly, right, supports Shawn Smith's efforts to reintegrate ex-felons into society.

came to him for help.

He literally takes ex-offenders by the hand and gets them the help they need. He leads them to social service agencies, helps them fill out job applications and prepares them for job interviews.

"My deal is community outreach," he said.

He passes out his card with his cell phone number to strangers. When he sees them on the street and he picks them up and, as they ride down the street, he gets their story and finds out what they need. He hangs out near the basketball court at the Doolittle Center so he can talk to young people. He gets calls from mothers who have sons headed down the wrong road.

As soon as the Clark Center, a halfway house for ex-

offenders, gets clearance from the Bureau of Prisons, Smith will conduct classes there.

Everything about S-Man says, "I'm here to help. What do you need?"

He reminds ex-offenders how important it is to make the sacrifices they need to make. If they find a job across town and they have no car, then they have to deal with three bus passes to get to work. That is just how it is.

He helps them prepare for job interviews but requires them to wear a white shirt and tie. Their shoes must be buffed.

"That's how it has to be done," he said.

He advises them to drop their old crowds.

"No more homies," he said.

gether they are planning The Westside Ex-Offender Project, a self-sufficient community for ex-offenders.

"That would be the pinnacle," he said.

In the meantime, he sometimes runs into old acquaintances from 'back in the day.'

"They say I'm trippin'. But I tell them, 'You're on the same corner, doing the same thing. You're trippin.' I've changed for the better and I don't look back."

"The guys at Silver State ask me 'How do you do it? You're smiling all the time.' I tell them I'm smiling because I am able to come to work, I've got a home, my wife, bills are getting paid and life is good. I'm free, I work hard, and I earn my keep by the sweat of brow. I'm loving life."

And the community is loving Smith.

"He's one of the most positive, most trustworthy and nicest men you could ever meet," said Las Vegas City Councilman Lawrence Weekly. "He's a blessing for me to have even as a friend."

Smith and his wife, Marcella, are attending a family reunion in Detroit. They will return to Las Vegas next week. He can then be reached on his cell phone at 702-376-3090.

Panthers

(Continued from Page 1)
 Current on Wednesday.

Among their demands, the group had included rebuilding of the Doolittle Community Center. But while the city recently announced that millions of dollars have been designated for Doolittle's renovation, Current says that's not sufficient, therefore the march is "on."

The protest, a high-profile demonstration along the Las Vegas Strip, is tentatively planned for Labor Day weekend, and the group says specific details will be forthcoming.

"We are talking about total civil disobedience," Current explained, "that means we are going straight down Las Vegas Boulevard."

The extent of support for the Panthers is unclear. Some observers, including the mayor, have been openly cynical about the potential turnout. Current, however, said he is "overwhelmed, very enthusiastic about national attention that we have gotten."

Citing fatigue, Current had recently considered relinquishing leadership of the group, but, he said, after some consultations, "I have decided not to step down at this time,

and to see this campaign all the way through."

According to the Panthers,

the Labor Day demonstration, should it occur, ought not necessarily be seen as a soli-

tary event, but rather as the first episode in a series of "disruptions."

"We need for the people in this nation to know that this is not Las Vegas," said

Current. "It's time for this community to rise up. It's time for this city to grow up."

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