

Energized by life, ex-felon gets voting rights back

By Iris B. Holton
Special to Sentinel-Voice
TAMPA (NNPA) - If one were to ask Eddie Lee Darien, Jr., how he's doing, his response would be, "For today, I'm doing fine." Darien celebrates each day that he stays away from drugs as a victory. After years of existing as a functioning addict, a convicted felon, Darien is searching for balance in his life.

One of the first major steps he has taken is to restore his citizenship and the right to vote. The process took about 18 months, but Darien now proudly displays his paperwork, issued on April 13, 2004, in a vinyl binder.

After reading articles in the Florida Sentinel Bulletin about workshops for Rights Restorations, Darien decided to attend a workshop. State Representative Arthenia Joyner organized the workshop.

And a group of dedicated Tampa attorneys volunteer

their time to assist with the process.

"I never had to touch a piece of paper. All I had to do was answer questions. The attorneys did all of the paperwork. The only thing I did was to be persistent and call Tallahassee on a monthly basis. The attorneys walked me through the process. It doesn't cost anything and all you need is to watch for the next workshop," Darien said.

A native of Tampa, Darien attended the schools of Hillsborough County. But even while a student at Blake, he admits to smoking marijuana. "I started using drugs in 1958. Drugs were available, they were just more covert during the 50s. I was using marijuana when I graduated from Blake in 1963," he said.

Darien moved to Detroit and that's when he was first exposed to heavy drugs, such as heroine. And although addicted at the time, he contin-

ued to work at Ford Motor Company as what he refers to as a "functioning addict."

In 1970, Darien enrolled at Meharry Medical School and earned an A. A. degree as a Mental Health Assistant. In 1974, he transferred to North Carolina A & T State University, on a full Presidential Scholarship.

Earning a degree in the mental health field was relatively new at the time and North Carolina A & T State University was the only historically Black school to award degrees in the field.

"I was using drugs the entire time. I graduated in 1976 and went back to Detroit. Cadillac Motor Division hired me," he said.

After being laid off, Darien said he experienced crack cocaine for the first time. In fact, he said, he was given a severance package of \$10,000 and smoked it all up within a year.

His first arrest came about

in 1989 when he returned to Tampa. He was charged with possession and sale of cocaine.

Darien didn't seek help even after he was attacked in June 1990, at Union and Dunbar and nearly beaten to death. He remained comatose from June 30 until July 5. Once released from the hospital, he returned to the street and to using drugs.

But when he violated the following year, he was sent

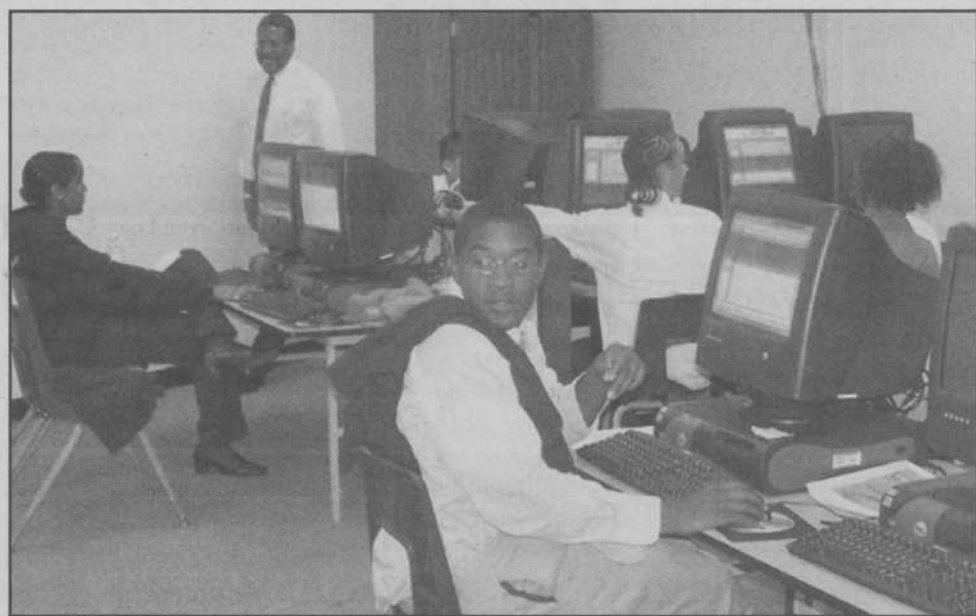
to prison. Darien said that would be the first of four trips. When he was arrested in 1996, he requested treatment in a drug facility and was sent to Avon Park, and admitted into the Center for Dual Diagnosis Program. He successfully completed the program, and spent five months in an after-care program.

"I'm trying to become a productive member of society again. I try to give back

what was given to me," he said. "You have to keep the faith in your higher power and remember to change your condition by changing people, places, and things."

"You also must have a positive attitude and understand that God has only one law — cause and effect. If you make the cause negative, the effect will be negative. And faith must always be accompanied by reason, logic, and harmony."

Wall Street



Darronicka McCoy is one of dozens of students who participated in the Wall Street Whiz Stock Market Challenge at Clark High School last week. *Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy*

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ogy found in the Wall Street Journal, including market trends and all of the events that brought the booming market to its knees in 1929.

Jarron Gray, 17, said he enjoyed the program because not only did they learn valuable information that will help them with their careers, but they also received cash prizes during the competition for completing and answering various questions correctly.

"I like money and this is exciting," Gray said. "I'm learning about Wall Street, how to read stocks and how to make good decisions. This is a simulation of what led up to the crash in 1929, so we are also learning how to make different decisions as stock-brokers."

Gray added that the Academy of Finance has geared

him towards an interest in a career in business and finance. Looking at numbers and how to make a profit is part of what the students learn in the program, which is helping Carina Llamas, 16, plan for a productive future.

"I want to own my own business and this helps me learn about what I want to do in the future," Llamas said. "We've been learning about trends and which stocks to buy. You know that if it's (the stock) going up, it will eventually come back down."

UFSC said this high school investment simulation is a component to its annual conference. During the week of May 31 to June 6 at the MGM Grand Casino, UFSC will celebrate 30 years as the premier professional organization for minorities in the finance industry. This year's

theme is "Building Upon Our Legacy: Preserving Our Values." The conference will focus on gaining a better understanding of career advancement in the financial industry, dissemination of financial services within our communities and economic development programs for local communities.

Also on June 2, during a luncheon at the conference, the winners of the high school Wall Street Whiz Stock Market Challenge will be announced. The first place winner will receive \$2000 in mutual funds, second runner-up receives \$1,000 in mutual funds and the third-place winner takes home a prize of \$500 in mutual funds.

For more information, contact Jerrie Merritt, local UFSC chapter president, at (702) 791-6207.

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