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**ALERT** **FEATURED** **TOP STORY** **EDITOR'S PICK**

## Drug court alumni share success stories

**TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN** News Editor

Aug 19, 2023

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TAMMY REAL-MCKEIGHAN News Editor

**L**indsay Blair has traveled the dark journey of alcoholism and addiction.

“At my worst, I was a homeless IV user that spent each day consuming over a gallon of vodka and helping myself to an obscene amount of narcotics just to maintain and survive,” the Fremont woman said. “I rarely drew a sober breath from the age of 12. I both witnessed and committed horrible crimes. Over a 10-year span, I racked up 33 arrests, had lost my children to the state two different times, and was trafficked for over a year of that span by men that I thought had my best interest at heart.”

Blair’s journey took a different turn, however, after she entered Dodge County Drug Court program. With almost five years of sobriety, Blair is raising her children at home. She enjoys a supervisory position at her job and is a dean’s list college student.

On Thursday, Blair was among drug court alumni who shared their success stories with Chief Justice Mike Heavican of the Nebraska State Supreme Court and fellow justices. Sixth District Judge Geoffrey Hall introduced the alumni, who received boisterous rounds of applause and – at the end – a standing ovation in the Dodge County District Courtroom.

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In addition, the group celebrated Ryan Kovar's graduation from the program. Hall commended the Fremont on his achievements, his "never give up" attitude and his eloquent graduation speech.

Looking back on her life, Blair recalled a dismal childhood.

"I was being raised in an environment that didn't offer me a chance in hell," she said.

As an addict and alcoholic, Blair said self-induced problems and hospital stays were her norm.

"I was a frequent flyer in and out of several different county jails and institutions," Blair said. "I was a habitual liar, a thief and a hustler who knew no other form of resiliency. I wasn't sure things could get any worse until they did—and they always did."

Blair's life-changing experience occurred after her 33rd arrest.

"A sequence of too many coincidental events led me to believe that God was sternly searching (for) me and had found me, picked me up, dusted me off and said, 'I have a plan for you,'" Blair said. "I was supposed to die, but I didn't. I was supposed to go to prison, but I went to inpatient treatment and bonded into drug court instead.

"God single handedly placed each and every person from this experience in my life just at the right time."

Blair said peers taught her empathy and true friendship. Family taught her forgiveness, trust and patience. The drug court team taught her discipline and integrity. Her therapist showed her how to heal from a turbulent past.

“Judge Hall taught me prudence, strength and honesty,” she said.

Blair commended the drug court program, which she said offered classes, resources and support that otherwise would not have been accessible to her.

She will celebrate five years sobriety on Aug. 27. She’s a server and supervisor with Village Inn and travels the country with the corporate team as a server trainer. Blair has a car and a home, where she and her children live. She attends classes for substance abuse counseling at Metro Community College and has maintained a spot on the dean’s list.

Other successful alumni, who shared their stories in the courtroom and with the Tribune include:

### **Joel McTaggart**

Now 52, McTaggart said he had no real trauma or bad childhood and had two loving parents.

The Fremont man isn’t sure why he turned to drugs, but was 13 years old when an older friend turned him on to freebasing cocaine.

He never forgot the feeling of that first high and a couple years later progressed to IV meth use.

“I chased that first high for so long, I got lost and didn’t know what I was doing or where I was going anymore,” he said. “I resigned myself to the fact that I would die with a needle in my arm.”

McTaggart was about 29 when he met Wanda Savoie, whom he said never gave up on him.

“Even with Wanda and the kids in my life, I didn’t quit. I adapted,” he said.

He’d work three jobs if necessary to pay bills.

“No matter how bad things got, my addictive brain could justify any action or reaction to make it OK to get high and keep feeding my addiction – even if it meant living on a park bench in Atlanta, living above King Lake Bar, a tent, several trap houses, living without power, you name it, I could justify it,” McTaggart said.

McTaggart believes addicts can have more than one rock-bottom experience.

“I personally skipped along rock bottom for 33 years,” he said.

After a drug bust, he took the opportunity to go to drug court, which he said taught him how to function positively in the world.

In an experience — both humbling and rewarding — McTaggart went through the program’s four stages.

“I’ve been clean since November of 2014 and graduated drug court in 2017,” he said.

Like others who’ve graduated from drug court, McTaggart’s charges were nullified.

“I have since reconnected with my family, pay all of my bills on time, take vacations, go to concerts, bought a new car and a house,” he said.

He and Wanda are still together.

After working in restaurants for 30 years, McTaggart decided to change careers four years ago.

“I got my foot in the door at Lincoln Premium Poultry as a third shift parts room clerk,” McTaggart said. “Since then, I have been promoted twice and now supervise a whole department. ... Before drug court, I never thought I could be where I’m at in life now.”

## **Bryon Brohimer**

“I had a great childhood,” Brohimer told the Tribune. “I excelled in math and science. I wanted to be an aerospace engineer. It wasn’t until I started using drugs and alcohol that I gave up all my dreams.”

Brohimer, formerly of Fremont and now of Omaha, was about 16 or 17 years old when he began using drugs and alcohol, something he attributes to “feeling uncomfortable in my own skin.”

“I did everything that I could to get as high as I could, while I could,” he told the Tribune. “I pushed away all my relatives. Anybody who loved me, I stole from, lied to or cheated.”

While sharing his story in the courtroom, Brohimer said his drug of choice was methamphetamine.

Brohimer told the Tribune he was 26 years old and in the Nebraska State Penitentiary in 2020 when he received a call that his father, Dave, had died. He couldn’t go to his dad’s funeral.

“It was that day forward that I decided I needed to turn my life around and I will never go back to it,” he said.

Brohimer later accepted the opportunity to go to drug court.

“It was a long journey,” Brohimer said. “I’m not going to tell you it was easy, but if I can do it, anyone can do it. I was lost. I was gone. I had no hope. No future. And I found hope. I found people that care about me, who want to see me do good. That gave me a sense of self love. It gets better every day.”

Today, Brohimer is a damage assessment technician at a collision center. He plays drums in a metal band called, Luminaries. He also plays in a Christian worship band, Beyond Measure, at First Lutheran Church in Omaha.

## Shauna Frederiksen

“The drug court program saved my life,” said Fremont Shauna Frederiksen. “I tried to get clean hundreds of times on my own and was never successful.”

She described her life before drug court.

“I was staying at a friend’s house, sleeping on her couch, not knowing where my older kids were staying,” Frederiksen said in a prepared statement. “Couldn’t hold a job. Without Judge Hall and the drug court team giving me a chance, I would be in prison or dead. I never thought recovery was possible.”

She’s been sober since July 2015 and graduated from drug court in 2017.

“By the grace of my Higher Power, working a program and my sponsor, I have eight years clean and sober,” she said.

Frederiksen met her husband, Mike, in 2016. They’ve been married more than five years.

“We have a very strong relationship,” she said in the statement. “We communicate on everything. He is my best friend. We are able to take vacations. I made it to Disney World, finally!”

Frederiksen is a work controller for Natural Management Resources and works as needed as a certified nursing assistant.

As he did with other alums, Hall expressed his appreciation for Frederiksen’s achievements.

“We’re very proud of you and the accomplishments that you’ve made,” Hall said.

Kovar, the recent graduate, said he now works at Smeal Apparatus in Snyder, which manufactures firetrucks, sold across the country. He was commended for his achievements and how he’s served as a mentor to other program participants. Hall

asked Kovar what made a difference for him.

“No matter how hard things got, I never considered giving up,” he said.

Kovar expressed deep gratitude to the drug court team, for the opportunity to participate in the program and for the guidance he received.

Blair encouraged those struggling with alcoholism and addiction.

“Recovery is hard, painful, and exhausting,” Blair said. “But so is living a life controlled entirely by a substance. ... I’m forever indebted to Judge Hall and the drug court team. Without them, I’m positive I wouldn’t be in front of you today sharing my experience, strength and hope.”

Heavican appreciated the alumni comments.

“This is so impressive to hear people talk about how their lives changed, because of drug court,” Heavican said. “That is very important for the community, for the state, and we are thankful for all of the support we get from communities like Fremont.”