

Teen Challenge Helps Addicts Turn Their Lives Around

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describing his experiences. Without Teen Challenge, he admitted that "I was bad, like the guys you read about in the paper. Without Teen Challenge, I would be dead of AIDS or violence."

Clancy is one of many who think the same about Teen Challenge.

The Teen Challenge Training Center began with eight men in a farmhouse on a dairy farm in Rehrersburg in July 1962. It was the result of Rev. David Wilkerson's efforts, who left a small town pastorate in Pennsylvania to pioneer work among street gangs and drug addicts in New York City.

Eventually a film, entitled "The Cross and the Switchblade," was made to tell about the beginnings of this worldwide ministry.

Funded through churches of all denominations, businesses, civic groups, and concerned individuals, the center encompasses about 350 acres, including an educational wing, dormitory areas, an office building, and shops housing more than 20 different vocational trades. Housed on the premises, along with a library, classrooms, and offices includes a print shop, auto body, and auto mechanic shops. There are also construction and industrial shops in addition to six greenhouses.

The youth, all men ranging in age from 18-60, are trained on the premises in a wide variety of vocations.

Importantly, there is also a horticultural farm which is home to several acres of strawberries and vine crops, according to Eric Hole, farm manager.

Including rented acreage, there are about 350 tillable acres, in addition to some pasture and woodland. On the tillable acres, the program's youth take care of four acres of strawberries, one acre of peppers, one of tomatoes, in addition to a half acre of watermelons. Other crops include 150 acres of alfalfa and other grasses, 100 acres of corn, 20 acres of barley, and 30 acres of beans.

In early April this year, a dispersal auction was held, which sold all the milking cows. The center has quit the dairy business except for some heifers which are raised on a contract basis.

Those who come to the farm are selected based on interviews conducted at any of several induction centers. Clancy entered Teen Challenge through the Germantown induction center near Philadelphia. Others come from many cities, including Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, or Baltimore.

Hole said, "Of the guys I have talked to over the years, I would bet probably 80 percent of the guys are from a broken home of some sort or another.

"It's amazing that it's such a



In all, there are about 350 tillable acres, in addition to some pasture and woodland, at the Teen Challenge farm. On the tillable acres, the program's youth take care of four acres of strawberries, one acre of peppers, one of toma-

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wide cross-section of society from which guys end up here. There are guys here from very well-to-do families, others who went to a dozen different (secular) rehab places, those one- or two-month 'instant cures' that just don't work for several thousand dollars.

"And we have guys that show up here with the clothes on their back. That's all they got to their name. Some are sleeping out who knows where, in a little old car, van, building, whatever. We have the full gamut and everything in between."

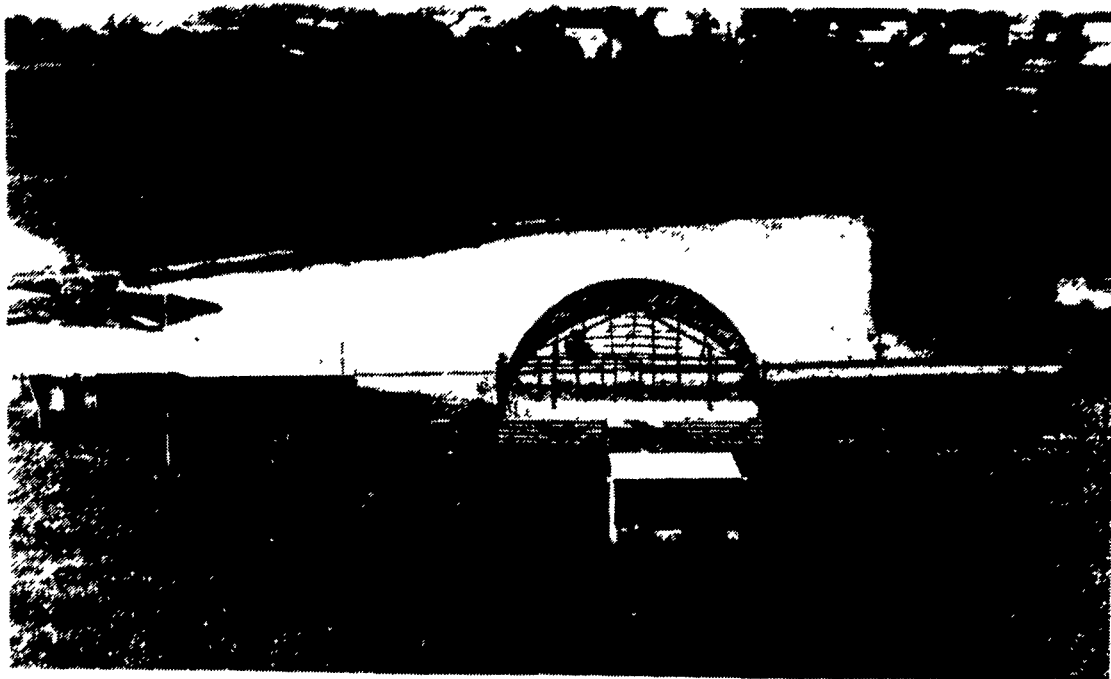
Those who sign up have to make a decision: how serious or how desperate are they to really make a change in their life?

Hole said, "If they really want to change, all the things are here to give them to be able to see that happen."

Altogether, according to the farm manager, the farm "has always been a positive thing to help generate some revenue to help keep the training center going here." The decision came last December by the board planning committee to discontinue the dairy and increase support for the horticulture center, which includes six greenhouses.

The nursery stock has increased dramatically, with the addition of several greenhouses in the past few years. The houses grow a wide variety of bedding and vegetable plants. The plants are sold through the Kutztown Production Auction, Leesport, and other retail and wholesale outlets.

Strawberries were planted for



Every year, alumni of the training center meet for a three-day celebration of what the program has meant to them. It's called Celebrate, and will be held this year from July 12-14 on the grounds of the training center.

the first time two years ago. This year, four acres of strawberries formed the backbone of a lot of early morning work for about 90 at the center.

This year, varieties of tomatoes and peppers are being grown to see how viable they'll be at the auctions.

The operation remains nonprofit, according to Hole. "We're trying to support ourselves as much as

we can to do the job that is out there to be done."

Classes in the Bible and Christian beliefs, money management, family relationships, including a solid work ethic, round out the experience for those who attend Teen Challenge.

"We use biblical principles to teach the work habits and the life skills that they're going to need. That makes the difference between

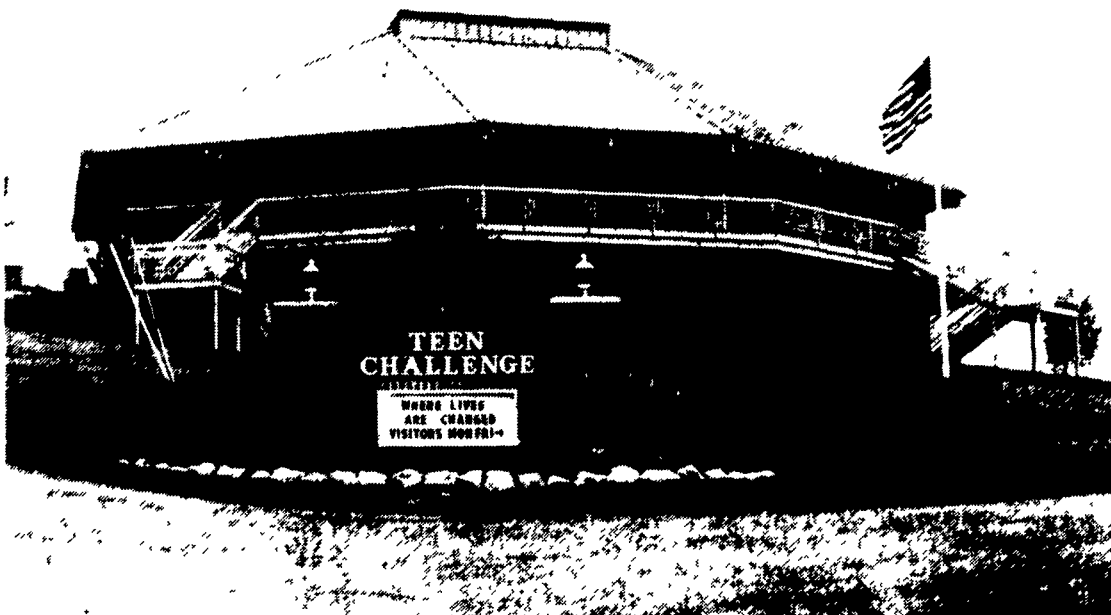
our type of program and others, and we give that credit for the success rate versus other state-funded rehabilitation programs," he said.

Hole provided information on a study that proved that the success rate for Teen Challenge was 86 percent — those who went five years or more without having to re-enter a drug and alcohol rehab program.

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A Teen Challenge member, Greg, feeds the calves at the training center.



The Teen Challenge Training Center began with eight men in a farmhouse on a dairy farm in Rehrersburg in July 1962. Here, the newly built Wilkerson Hall.