



Staff photo by Mike McEwen

Tommy Wilson, Bill Chelmowski, Glenn Roach, Vicki Roach, Truman Stockdale, David Dodd and J. Connie Drown are part of the team working with Living Free Ministries.

## Group helps with life-controlling problems

By **Jebb Johnston**

Staff Writer

Corinth resident Tommy Wilson was a slave to drugs and gambling who sold his own car to finance his habits. But he found a way out, and now he's trying to help others find the freedom of the clean life.

"I was a drug addict, a drug dealer and the local bookie," said Wilson, who founded a faith-based support network in Corinth called Living Free Ministries. "Sev-

en years ago, almost, I gave my heart to the Lord and asked him to change my life. He took me out of all that mess."

Living Free is meeting each week at 6:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday at the Alcorn Baptist Association office at 1612 Hinton Street. Its goal is to help people overcome life-controlling problems and addictions.

"A life-controlling problem can be a positive thing or a negative thing," said Wilson. "It's easy to spot the negative

things — drug addicts, alcoholics. Some people's life-controlling problems is their jobs. A hobby could be a life-controlling problem."

Meetings began in February.

"It's been unreal the phone calls we've got so far from people wanting help," said Wilson.

It's not just for people having problems but also family members who may feel powerless when it comes to turning around a loved one's life.

The trouble for Wilson, a

Booneville native, began with marijuana and alcohol while in high school. He then moved on to cocaine.

"Cocaine became so a part of my life that I couldn't do nothing," said Wilson. "I thought I had to have my cocaine to have my friends. A drug dealer usually has a lot of friends hanging around with him either because of his drugs or because of the money in his pocket."

Within a day or two of go-

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ing to court for selling cocaine, he was doing it again. It was Dilaudid that finally "did me in," he said. "I stuck 12 or 15 of them a day in my arm."

He said there's no normal day for a drug addict.

"You're doing everything to either go up or down," said Wilson. "You have to do a lot of things to support the habit."

Things began to turn around for Wilson after he went to church on Easter Sunday in 1998 while at a low point. After a few more services, he decided it was time for a life change. He moved his family to Corinth, where he became a member of Oakland Baptist Church and began working for the first time in his life. He now oversees numerous Subway restaurants.

After attending meetings of

a group in Savannah, Tenn., Wilson was inspired to do something similar in Corinth. A number of volunteers are assisting, and the group just expanded meetings to twice a week.

Substance abuse is the number one problem the group has seen, but there are many others, such as financial and marriage problems. And success stories are already emerging: Wilson recalled one individual who has been clean for two months now, and several others have gotten involved in church activities.

"I think it's a two-step program," he said. "The first thing is you've got to make up your mind you're through with it. The second thing is ask the Lord to help you."

Vicki Roach and her husband recently became volunteers with the group for family members of those with problems after hearing Wil-

son's testimony.

"In years past, he and I have had life-controlling issues we've had to deal with, and we've seen members of our family going through them," she said.

They are excited about the response, which has included positive feedback from law enforcement officials who are eager to send people to them.

Wilson hopes the group can eventually provide a place for people who are recovering from problems to stay.

He now spends many Sundays visiting churches to share his message.

"God has just changed my life so much," he said. "I believe that's the reason I'm where I'm at today wanting to help others. I know it can be done."

For inquiries about the group, phone the Alcorn Baptist Association at 286-8215 or Wilson at 287-5394.