

Rehabbed, released, ready for a new start

Cecil Vorce was the first inmate to complete Deer Ridge's drug and alcohol treatment program. He walked out of prison with no high school diploma and a record littered with felonies, determined to stay clean and meet his new goals

By Lauren Dake / *The Bulletin*

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Pete Erickson / *The Bulletin*

Vorce impressed the manager at Ray's Food Place in La Pine immediately. "What was noticed right away with Cecil was his openness with the customers and employees to always be helpful," Brad Wilson, the store's manager, wrote in a letter.



Pete Erickson / *The Bulletin* file photo

Vorce was released from the Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras in May 2008.



Pete Erickson / The Bulletin file photo

Cecil Vorce, right, prays with a fellow inmate at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution prior to his release.

LA PINE — Every application was the same: Have you been convicted of a felony in the past 10 years?

Yes, Cecil Erwin Vorce would write.

When asked for an explanation, the 21-year-old would put, “will explain in interview.”

How many felonies was it? Vorce paused and counted on his hands.

“Seven?” he said. “I think seven felonies, and all in about six months.”

How, on a few blank lines on a job application, could Vorce explain seven felonies in six months? How could he explain the drug-addled high-speed car chases? Should he mention the first time he used methamphetamine he was 14 years old? Should he say his first six-pack came at age 7? How about the fact that while he was incarcerated, so were his grandfather, father and uncle? No, that could not be explained without a face-to-face conversation.

So, when Vorce walked into the Ray's Food Place grocery store in La Pine for his interview more than a year ago, he was nervous. He put on a tie for the first time in his life. He looked the manager in the eye, he gave a forceful handshake. He wanted the job and showed it.

He was hired and is now responsible for keeping the shelves stocked.

“He's an excellent employee,” said Brad Wilson, manager of Ray's Food Place. “He's always here. He never fails to do his task. If he's working the shift, the job will be done correctly.”

Vorce was let out of Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras in May 2008. The all-American-looking boy, with blond hair and hazel eyes, was the first inmate to complete the alcohol and drug treatment program at Deer Ridge. He was 19 when he was released. A Redmond native, he dropped out of high school his sophomore year. He's not sure what car he stole that actually landed him in prison. There were possession charges and several stolen cars. He spent 10½ months incarcerated at Deer Ridge. At that time, it was the longest he'd been drug-free since he was 8 years old.

Since his Deer Ridge days, Vorce has had a lot of firsts.

For the first time in his life, he's had responsibilities. He's set goals and accomplished them. He's finished his General Educational Development requirements. He's participated in and graduated from the AmeriCorps program. He went backpacking. And he got his driver's license.

“I was in my room last week, and I grabbed the calendar from 2009,” Vorce said. “I was just thumbing through it, and I saw a page of notes that said ‘goals’ that I wrote at the beginning of 2009. I checked them off, and I completed those goals. I mean, I've never completed any goals in the past. It felt good.”

Since Vorce's release, he's made a concerted effort to stay away from people and places that would entice him to revert to his old ways. He's been living at the nonprofit Shepherd's Inn in La Pine and went through the inn's 18-month program designed for Christians who were recently released from prison. Even though he's completed the program, he's still living at the house as he waits to hear back from Oral Roberts University, a Christian-based college in Oklahoma he hopes to attend.

Vorce has seen family members and friends from the past. For the first time he can remember, he spent Christmas with his father, who was recently released and is currently clean.

His father got Vorce a coffee mug with a Bible verse on it.

"He gave me a gift, and I opened it and looked at his face," Vorce said. "I've never seen him give me a gift like that. He gave this to me from his heart, and he was so excited to see me get it. ... It was more a gift to me to see my dad like that."

There is one 2009 goal that doesn't have a check mark next to it. The goal reads: "bring lil' sister to Christ." And next to it, Vorce wrote: "still in process."

While Vorce was in prison, his younger sister, who is now 17 years old, never wrote to him.

"She was pretty mad at me," he said.

But now, he's out and doing his best to be a role model for his younger sister.

Every note she's written him since he's been released, he keeps folded up in his room.

"Hey Cecil," one note reads.

"Thanks for all the help and support man. I love you."

Kevin Hormann, assistant superintendent of transitional services with Deer Ridge, said the recidivism rate for those who have completed similar programs as the one Vorce finished is about 12 percent. The general prison population rate is at 30 percent, he said.

Vorce had a lot of factors working against him the day he left prison: his criminal history, his lack of work experience and his family background. But he's stayed determined, he's figured out what he needs to do to avoid his previous lifestyle. And so far, it's working.

"I can see what it will do to me if I go back to that (lifestyle)," Vorce said. "I don't want to be a part of it. When I started doing drugs, I had this belief in the back of my head ... that it was do or die, all out or nothing.

"It was always the biggest high, the most drugs taken, the stupidest things you could do with your friends. ... And I still have that belief, it's all or nothing. I've just made a commitment into something I believe in my heart ..."

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