

THE CHRONICLE

FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 1992

DUKE UNIVERSITY DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

CIRCULATION: 15,000 VOL. 87, NO. 138

That championship season

See Sports for the second installment of senior Brian Davis' road to the Final Four and Championship #2.



Workshop teaches prison inmates how to start a business

By ERIC LARSON

For some people, the only thing they can imagine prison inmates crafting is a car license plate or a road sign.

But at least two people believe prisoners' potential exceeds that. Two area businessmen who built their own companies shared their know-how at a local prison last week with inmates who, when they get out, will have a tough time finding a job, whether the economy is in a recession or a boom.

Brian Hamilton, Fuqua '90, and Rev. Robert Harris visited the Orange Correctional Center on Apr. 16. Hamilton is president of Hamilton and Associates Inc., a managerial consulting firm in Durham. Harris owns and operates Mable's Headstone and Monument Company, which he founded in 1973.

The minimum-security prison houses 188 inmates, most of

whom will be out on the street within the next four years and looking for jobs. Thirty inmates signed up to attend the small business workshop taught by Hamilton and Harris in the hopes that they could learn to become their own bosses.

While it may be next to impossible for an ex-convict to obtain bank loans providing capital to start a business, or to convince individuals to invest their money in his idea, there is still a great deal of opportunity for personal initiative, Hamilton said.

"The premise that you have to have a lot of capital is basically incorrect," said Hamilton, who ran a contracting business before coming to Durham and receiving his M.B.A. at Fuqua.

In fact, some of the nation's most successful businessmen—Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, to name a few—began with little or no

help from others. Ford, for example, built his first car by hand outside of his job as a machinist.

Furthermore, many of the country's most successful entrepreneurs had little or no formal education. While some of the inmates attending the workshop had college degrees, many had dropped out of high school, Cochran said.

Harris, who preaches at Raleigh Road Baptist Church in Oxford, gave testimony to how he found business success in the face of certain failure. He told them how he went from "a hoe, a shovel, and two bags of cement," raiding junkyards and quarries, and hauling materials in a '59 Chevy, to running his own headstone and monument business that currently employs 12 people, and that earned for him in 1987 recognition as Minority Small Businessman of the Year in North Carolina.

Harris said his advice was as much motivational as informational. "You have to start somewhere. I didn't start with a big company. I just started with an idea." The first headstone he made was for his mother who had died, since he couldn't afford to purchase one.

"It's not time to give up," Harris told the prisoners. "Each fall should make us stronger. Like a baby—he will fall, but he will get up again."

Hamilton's speech concentrated on the details of starting a small business in today's market economy. First he talked about developing an idea—becoming an expert on the product or service you are selling—then analyzing it, talking to others in the business, enlisting free counseling services like Small Business and Technology Development Centers, SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), or the small

business centers in community colleges.

The next step involves putting together a team of workers, which includes an accountant, banker, entrepreneurial partner and attorney. Next comes forming a business plan—developing long-range goals and ways of meeting those goals. Then comes organizing resources—which will vary according to the business—and concentrating on sales and production.

"Most of the points I made could be applicable to any business, large or small," Hamilton said.

Furthermore, he made no attempt to water down the information for his audience.

"They already know what the challenges are out there," Hamilton said. "They were very hungry for good information. I haven't taught a class where 15

See BUSINESS on page 7 ▶

Small business workshop offers opportunities for inmates

■ BUSINESS from page 1
hands would go up out of 30."

Eileen Cochran, program director at the prison, said the workshop was different from most classes offered at the prison, both in focus and in the response it received. Currently prisoners may attend courses brought to the prison by Piedmont Community College, a GED class, a

chemical dependency course and job-seeking course, as well as the occasional college-level course offered by University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The small business workshop was something different.

"This is the first class that they actually came up to me and said how much they liked it," Cochran said.

"As far as I know there's nothing quite like this" at most prisons, Hamilton said.

Harris, who has volunteered his services at prisons before, sees the workshop he and Hamilton did as important, but that the needs of prisoners and free citizens are not mutually exclusive. "You don't have to be in correction to be locked up," he

said. "You can be anywhere and locked up in mind."

Both men said they would do the workshop again if given the chance.

"It turned out beautiful," said Harris. "They really didn't want to leave when we stopped talking."