

Project Clean Slate: Fugitive Surrenders

By Lisa Loving
Of *The Skanner News*

After 13 years on the run from law enforcement, Timothy Luther McNair decided to change his life — so he called up Project Clean Slate.

Still the only program of its kind in the nation, Clean Slate is a cooperative effort between the African American Chamber of Commerce, the Multnomah County Circuit Court and the County District Attorney's office.

The program's participants — if they are accepted and fulfill all its terms — are able to resolve outstanding warrants and legal problems without becoming mired in the criminal justice system.

And they only get to do it once.

The idea, its founder says, is to "help people get back on track rather than building more jails to keep people behind bars."

"I'm doing this now because I have a calling in my life, as a minister, and also to effect change in the Portland area — and I knew I couldn't effect change with this hanging over my head," McNair told a bank of reporters last weekend just before turning himself in. He's been booked and is now at the county jail, where he's waiting to find out whether he

will be granted bail.

Charged in 1999 as an ex-felon in possession of a firearm — and violating parole for skipping town when he should have been at trial — McNair is now a minister who says his goal is to work with at-risk youth in his home town.

"We don't cut any deals, we don't make any promises," says Roy Jay, the project's founder, and the director of the AACC. "What we do is give people the opportunity to face the music and get on with their lives."

Clean Slate made a splash in 2005 with its first event, a massive "surrender day" for anyone with unresolved traffic tickets, fines, and other mostly low-level charges such as failure to pay child support and driving while intoxicated.

Nearly 3,000 people showed up, clutching old paperwork. Crews from the DA's office, judges from the Circuit Court system, volunteer attorneys and social services providers processed the paperwork and signed the applicants up for community service — and in some cases drug treatment, food stamps or health insurance.

Once they completed the terms of their agreements, the applicants' records were cleared, wiping out a huge backlog of unresolved cases for law enforcement while giving individuals a better chance at housing and jobs.

The program ballooned, then stalled for lack of financial

support. But that changed in 2007, when the Oregon State Legislature first folded the program into the state budget.

In addition to facing the charges against them, participants are required to go through an educational program taught by Clean Slate staff, with help from law enforcement.

"We also are trying to provide people with some tools and resources on how to clean up your credit, how to become a better citizen," Jay said. "So it's not about wiping the slate clean so people can start having the same problems over again — they must go through this rigorous process, but as I tell people in court, your attitude determines your altitude in life," he said.

Multnomah County District Attorney Michael Shrunck recalls a similar effort "many, many years ago" between the DA's office and the Public Defender, in which annual "surrender days" aimed at clearing a backlog of unresolved cases.

But, Shrunck says, Project Clean Slate does it better.

"It's interesting in talking to people around the country about it, they scratch their heads and wonder," he says.

"Most of the participants, it's a hindrance for them getting a job, hindrance getting a driver's license, hindrance for them to start going in the right direction, and so they get caught in this shadow culture," Shrunck said.

McNair told reporters that his life was changed by his brother, who started a nonprofit group serving youth. Recently the brother has become so ill he can't continue the work on his own, and McNair wants to step in and keep it going.

He admitted to reporters, before turning himself in, that he committed other crimes years ago that he was never charged with, including drug dealing.

"In a perfect world I would have learned that — ok the mistakes that I made were stupid, you know? I wish that instead of using my gifts in the criminal world, I had used them in the corporate world — we wouldn't be here today," he said.

"I destroyed a lot of lives with the amount of drugs that I dealt in the streets of Portland, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody."

Shrunck said two of the common elements in Clean Slate participants are that they never deny doing the crime, and they all look ahead to the future.

"They're not saying they didn't deserve to get the ticket or didn't deserve to get the conviction, it's just — what do we do now? Can't we move forward? And Clean Slate is one of the things that's making them move forward," Shrunck said.

"So it's been a win-win-win."

Reach Project Clean Slate at 503-244-5794.



Luther McNair

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Health

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"The impact of either the court invalidating the Affordable Care Act or some subsequent Congress repealing the Affordable Care Act would be devastating to small businesses," said Maryland Lt. Governor, Anthony G. Brown. "We would just continue on this same unsustainable path that we've been on for the last few decades. That path has put America as a nation at spending more per patient than any other country, yet there are at least 50 countries that best us when it comes to the quality of care and health quality outcomes."

The last part of the law to take effect will oversee a major shift in the way doctors are to be paid. Beginning January 1, 2015, physicians will earn their pay based on the quality of the service they provide. If patients are receiving low quality care, physicians will get a low quality check.

The Act has already made preventative care free of charge for Medicare recipients. Children can now be covered on their parent's health insurance up to age 26 and citizens 19 and younger can no longer be excluded from coverage because of pre-existing conditions.

Those arguments closed after three days and a decision is

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