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Breaking News

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Lucedale's Bethel Home gets new name, education plan, organizer says

LUCEDALE - John Fountain, the director of the newly named Eagle Point Christian Academy, previously known as Bethel Boys Academy, said Thursday the school is entering a new era for working with troubled youth.

"Our goal is still to turn around lives," he said. "We have new staff members and we are going to make our program work better."

Fountain said he and his attorney Trey Bobinger came up with the new name and still haven't finished all the legal wording. "I hope to put a new face on it."

He said the program, which has 105 young men enrolled, gets away from the "boot camp" mentality.

"I don't believe in corporal punishment," he said. "It doesn't work for the kids now days."

He said it could be more difficult to maintain discipline, but that he and his staff would work through that.

Fountain said local educator Bobby Walker is principal of the academy.

"We will be getting a library and adding computers," he said. "We must do that so the youngsters can get into the new technology."

Fountain said the academy would abide by all state rules and regulations. "If we expect the youngsters to go by the rules, we certainly have to do it ourselves."

He would not talk about suits alleging mistreatment of youth which he said came during the past administration. "Our attorney is handling that."

The name change is not unprecedented with the academy, which was founded by Fountain's father, Herman.

It was called the Bethel Home for Children in 1988 when it was raided by state welfare officials who removed 72 abused and neglected children. A judge shut it down in 1990 and Herman Fountain reopened it as the Bethel Boys Academy four years later.

"Life's a learning experience, I've learned a lot from the mistakes my father has made and still learning everyday and wanting to make a change," Fountain said.

Fountain called the abuse allegations "hog wash."

"Some of them are so far fetched, it's almost funny," he said.

George County authorities cleared the academy of abuse allegations last year, but parents continued to complain of visible signs of injury to their children.

Fort Smith, Ark. attorney Oscar Stilley, who is representing parents of former cadets suing the academy in federal court, said the case is heading to trial and at least two similar lawsuits are to come.

Bobinger said even though the abuse allegations, which are two years old, are still the subject of a lawsuit, there are no pending legal issues with the state.

The school admits about 100 students, ages 11 to 17, whose stays range from eight to 12 months, Fountain said.



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