

The Advertiser-Tribune

BREAKING NEWS

Level 1

Seeking to raise addiction awareness



Melissa Jimmerson, who celebrated 10 months of sobriety Friday, speaks at Tiffin University Tuesday.

A woman who celebrated 10 months of sobriety Friday says she is proud of where she is today, and it is important to love people where they are in life.

"I have normal everyday problems. The only thing that's different today is I actually handle my problems as they come. ... My worst day sober is by far still better than my best day high," said Melissa Jimmerson, who originally is from Bryan.

Jimmerson was one of the keynote speakers during a program Tuesday evening at Tiffin University titled *"Cultural Awareness for a Cause,"* which sought to help people understand addiction.

Jimmerson said everything she probably never would have done a year ago, she is doing today. She is paying bills, has her own home and has a job and a car.

"Life is such a blessing," she said.

"Cultural Awareness for a Cause" was presented in TU's Osceola Theater Tuesday evening.

Students collaborated to create literature, a publication, works of art and music centered around the theme of understanding addiction.

Joyce Hall-Yates, dean of arts and sciences at TU, said the nation is changing, and its population is becoming far more diverse and facing multiple critical challenges. There is a need for future leaders who possess an understanding of the dynamics of culture and who are innovative thinkers, she said.

“Our students are part of our future leaders,” she said. “There is a challenge facing us, not only in our nation, but specifically in the state of Ohio. The framework of this challenge is that it is our human problem.”

Society, Hall-Yates said, has a problem of people suffering from the disease of addiction. It impacts everyone who attended Tuesday’s program: individually, as family members, as community members and when they’re in the health care system, she said.

“It affects every one of us. It challenges our legal system,” she said.

Jimmerson, 27, explained her parents got divorced when she was young, her father was an alcoholic who was in and out of prison all the time, and she was sexually abused between the ages of 5-8.

Jimmerson explained she was a normal child who liked to play outside and play sports and went to school. She started having some flashbacks of what happened when she was younger.

“As a kid, I didn’t know what to do about it,” she said.

Jimmerson started smoking marijuana and was stealing her mother’s cigarettes. She said she learned she could block out every bad feeling she ever had in her life.

Her situation progressed. In high school, she was drinking, was smoking every day and was dabbling in other drugs. She said she was an alcoholic by her sophomore year.

Later, she tried opiates, psychedelics, cocaine and methamphetamine. She said she snorted her first line of heroin when she was 17 or 18. Everybody seemed to have heroin, she said.

Thank God, she said, for Surest Path Recovery Center in Bloomville. She went both times to the women’s facility because she wanted to.

Tracy Elder, who retired from full-time ministry after 27 years and is

continuing the work of Seneca Community Chaplain Corps, also spoke at Tuesday's event. She said addicts in recovery are the bravest people she ever has met.

Elder said those in addiction cannot explain it, and those with a rational mind have a hard time accepting it. The struggle for both is real, she said.

Addiction, Elder said, devastates everything.

"Nothing is left untouched by addiction," she said.
