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## LOCAL MAN FINDS NEW HIGH IN LIFE

WEST POINT, Miss.—Mike Walker will soon mark his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday, and this year he has much to celebrate.

A recovering alcoholic and drug addict, Walker has been through much in lifetime. “I had 16 years of sobriety and then relapsed,” he said. “I spent a year in prison on drug-related charges.”

Out of prison for 18 months, Walker said he has never felt as secure as he does now. “I made some bad choices and I had to face the consequences of my actions,” he said. “Prison was the best thing that ever happened to me, because I am convinced that I’m not a career criminal.”

Walker had lived in West Point his entire life, retiring after 33 years working with Bryan Foods. When he returned home from prison last year, Walker got involved with several area support groups and his church. He started walking for exercise every day but still felt something was missing. At his checkup in February—where he weighed in at 226 pounds, the most he had ever weighed—he asked his doctor for clearance to join North Mississippi Medical Center-West Point’s Wellness Center.

He went straight from the doctor’s office to join the Wellness Center, and he hasn’t missed many days since. “I can’t do anything in moderation,” Walker said. “I finally found somewhere that I can use my obsessive-compulsive disorder for something good!”

Fitness specialist Ken Ashford developed a workout “prescription” to help Walker meet his goals and worked with him every day for the first six weeks. “I wanted to go all out, but Ken helped ease me into it,” he said. “They are professional at what they do. For someone like me with an addictive personality and a lack of discipline, this has made such a big difference.”

He rides the stationary bike, walks the track, uses a variety of weight machines and recently added free weights to the routine. In less than seven months, he has lost 30 pounds and feels better than ever. “I go every day, not because I have to but because I want to,” he said. “Working out gives such an adrenaline rush—it’s the same feeling I used to chase every time I rolled up a joint.”

Tracy Stebbins, an exercise physiologist and director of the Wellness Center, says the staff is immensely proud of Walker. “We always talk about the physical benefits of exercise,” she said, “but Mike is really a walking testimony to the other benefits.”

Because glaucoma has left Walker legally blind, he depends on friends—and sometimes Ashford—to drive him to the Wellness Center and home. “If I’m not there, they want to know what’s wrong with me,” he said. “It’s good to be missed because I remember a time when nobody wanted me around.”

Walker also devotes his time helping others by sharing his story with support groups, youth groups and churches. “I’ve been running my mouth all my life,” he said. “Now I finally have something good to tell.”

As his birthday draws near, Walker is thankful for the changes God has brought his way this year. “I was always chasing happiness, thinking ‘I’ll be happy when this happens or I’ll be happy if I get that,’” he said. “I finally figured out that happiness is a choice. I can be happy when I choose to be.”

-30-

**Suggested Cutline:**

Most days you can find Mike Walker working out at the NMMC-West Point Wellness Center.