



CENIKOR

Offering a Chance for Change

by Gloria Trevino Tudon



Over thirty years ago, Ed Fresquez was in jail for the fourth time, the result of burglaries he committed to support his heroin habit. Even Fresquez thought of himself as the black sheep in his family, but he wasn't the only one by far — his addiction was shared with four of his brothers.

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“Over forty years ago, just a young man, I thought I was seeing something very exciting as I watched through a window while my older brother and friends were taking drugs intravenously. It wasn't long before I attempted to steal some of their drugs, wanting to see what it felt like. Had my brother not caught me, I would probably be dead today from an overdose. Even so, it was a very short time before I found someone who taught me how to shoot up. At that point, the thought of using was firmly implanted in my mind.”

“That was the beginning of my journey with drug addiction and my battle with Hepatitis C. In the mid-1960s, doctors thought I had Hepatitis A, but at that time they were ignorant of Hepatitis C. I was young and never realized I was killing myself. It took over twenty years before I began to experience the effects of Hepatitis C, the residual effect of heroin usage.”

Fresquez met his wife, Lynda, as both were going through the Cenikor program. “I always knew I could change my life,” says Fresquez. “I just didn't have a path; Cenikor gave me the way.”

A long way from the streets and prisons of Denver, no longer running from the law, Fresquez began running marathons — having competed for nine years in the Houston Tenneco Marathon. However, and unfortunately, his fight against drugs is not over. In spite of staying drug-free for years, Fresquez required a liver transplant, due in part to residual effects of heroin use 30 years ago.

“Your past eventually catches up with you; it did with me,” Fresquez warns. “We are aware that we risk being arrested or losing our jobs if we take drugs, but we may not realize we destroy ourselves irreversibly, without possibility of anything like a parole. I wish we could alert young people to the long-term damage done by illegal drug use.

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After acquiring social work credentials from Metropolitan State College in Denver, he attended Rice University to further his skills in business management. Today, Fresquez is President of the Cenikor Foundation, one of the country's largest non-profit, drug treatment, education and prevention organizations. He oversees the operations of five facilities; two in Denver, one in Fort Worth, one in Baton Rouge and one in Houston with a population of over 400 recovering drug abusers. Cenikor is not an institution but a special, inspirational, life saving, nurturing home to the residents who live, learn and work there, usually for about two and a half years. Cenikor is a free program, and there is no waiting list.

Under his direction, Cenikor has opened screen-printing businesses in all locations to give residents useful vocational training. He assures that Cenikor remains financially sound by having it independently audited each year.

Cenikor has drug prevention teams that go into the community to warn young people of the dangers of both short-term and long-term drug use. “One of the problems is that young people think they are immortal,” stresses Fresquez. “Drugs harm people at the time they are using them, and they do long-term damage even if a person stops using drugs. Thanks to the Methodist transplant team, I am alive and looking forward to living a very good life with my best friend and wife, Lynda, our son, Matthew and daughter, Natalie. I might have lost that opportunity because of my reckless use of drugs.” Fresquez devotes time to speaking with organizations, encouraging organ donations. He also supports fellow transplant recipients and lectures on the long-term effects of substance abuse.



THE CENIKOR FOUNDATION, INC.

Cenikor was started more than 35 years ago in prison by a group of inmates who were tired of the revolving door of incarceration. They dedicated themselves to staying clean and sober and helping others do the same. They established Cenikor as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization

to assist people in the development of their social, behavioral, vocational, educational and recreational skills to live a life-style free of substance abuse.

From the first small house in Colorado, the organization has grown to facilities in Lakewood, Colorado (part of which is for women with children), a facility in Fort Worth; one in Baton Rouge; a large facility in Deer Park, Texas and outreach offices in San Antonio and New Orleans. Make no mistake; the treatment program is long and tough. It is for men and women, 18 years of age and older, who have a willingness and strong desire to make significant changes in their lives. Treatment professionals or the judicial system officials refer clients, or many times, a person comes to Cenikor on his or her own volition.

One of the most important aspects of Cenikor is that everyone works his or her way through at one of Cenikor's owned-and-operated businesses, jobs in the facility or other on-the-job training programs. Such work helps raise money to keep the program going, helping each resident pay for his or her own treatment. Furthermore, the work gives residents training that will help him or her to get a good job when leaving Cenikor. Through the efforts of participants and the generosity of contributors, Cenikor does not rely on government support to fund its programs.

Businesses Operated by Cenikor

Screen Printing Company:

Called Screen Images and located in South Texas, this printing operation produces tee shirts and other promotional items for corporations and organizations. Working at this printing plant gives residents experience in sales, customer service, commercial artwork, inventory control and production.

Landscape Maintenance Companies:

Cenikor's Greener Visions is a program that sends crews of Cenikor residents to locations in the community where they are responsible for maintaining, improving and up-grading the grounds.

Industry Work Crews:

Cenikor work crews assist various types of businesses with job site duties such as general contracting, maintenance and set-up for special events. Employers like hiring drug-free and highly motivated Cenikor workers, as their enthusiasm even inspires regular workers to do better.

Cenikor Helps

During the last decade, increasingly younger children began experimenting with alcohol and other drugs; now the average age a child begins experimentation is 11. Consequently, Cenikor developed community outreach and education programs to help stem the tide of substance abuse throughout society.

The Cenikor Prevention Network provides alcohol and drug abuse education as well as skill-building presentations, which help students to learn basic life-coping skills and develop a positive lifestyle. The organization offers services to students in pre-school through high school. For students in pre-school through

third grade, presentations feature puppet shows with follow-up discussions to ensure understanding. Curriculum for students fourth grade and up includes face-to-face and media presentations, structured exercises and exploration discussions. Cenikor Prevention Network also offers programs for educating high-risk youth, parents, teachers, administrators and other concerned or affected citizens. All of Cenikor's presentations are age-appropriate to provide the most effective learning environment possible.

Each member of the prevention team must have completed the prevention-training course and be enrolled in on-going training programs before delivering services to the public. He or she must show a working knowledge of the subject and an ability to make prevention presentations. The Cenikor Prevention Network education program is presented from all Cenikor locations to over 100,000 people annually.

Special Events, Programs and Accountability

An exceptional place presents out-of-the-ordinary activities, yet must always be accountable for all it does. In addition to keeping the program financially sound, Cenikor has special annual events. You can tee off at a golf tournament, get strikes at a bowlathon, attend an elegant gala dinner or hear a celebrity guest speaker at a luncheon.

In Lakewood, Colorado, some of the female residents who have shown over a period of time that they are committed to maintaining a drug free life are allowed to gradually include their children. The "Family Reunion," which is the name of the program, usually starts with weekend visits. Eventually, with the help of professionals, the children move in permanently with their mothers. Once the women and their children leave Cenikor, they have the skills necessary to enjoy successful and satisfying lives.

To maintain excellence, Cenikor undergoes an independent audit each year, and officials are proud of the fact that 82 percent of its budget goes to program expenses. Only 4 percent constitutes fund raising costs. Management and general operating expenses make up the other 14 percent. Cenikor is one of few financially sound non-profit organizations that also keep fund-raising expenses at a minimum.

Amazingly, services per client cost approximately \$10,068 for six months at Cenikor. In contrast, the cost of incarcerating that same substance abuser for six months is \$26,895, per data from the U.S. Customs Services, Department of the Treasury, Washington, DC. The entire community benefits both economically and in quality of life when individuals control drug and alcohol dependence.▼

Gloria Trevino Tudon is the Public Relations Manager for Cenikor Foundation, Inc and Editor of their newsletter Knock Out News, in Houston, Texas. In 1995, she completed Cenikor's treatment program, which helped save her life from her addiction to crack. Today, Ms. Tudon celebrates nine years of sobriety and six years employment with an organization that she truly believes in. You may contact her for more information by calling (713) 266-9944 or email at: gloriat@cenikor.org.

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