

# Changing lives with suits and ties

By Caroline Hudson

There's nothing quite like the confidence that comes from wearing a freshly pressed suit.

A suit says to employers that a man is qualified and dignified. But unfortunately, some men don't have the money to invest in a good suit and lose out on job opportunities because of it.

These are the men Mark Taylor had in mind when he started SuitedNSuccess, a nonprofit organization that provides business attire for economically disadvantaged men in the Durham area.

"We all judge people just by seeing what they look like," Taylor said. "When you look good, you feel good."

Taylor's clients come from a variety of backgrounds. Some are homeless and looking to get on their feet again. Others are former addicts trying to lead a clean life.

And still others are looking for a new way to support a family after being laid off from a job.

The common thread is that each man is transitioning into a new life, and a simple suit can help them get to where they want to be.

Taylor said he had the idea for the organization after he realized there was a need in the community for a program catering specifically to men.

"There's a lot of things out there to help women get on their feet," he said.

"There really aren't a lot of programs out there for men."

Taylor can relate to the struggle many men face as they try to better themselves.

Originally from Rocky Mount, he opted out of going to college and instead moved to the Triangle area to live with his sister.

But years later, he realized he needed a more stable career to support a growing family, and he enrolled in a Duke University training clinic for medical software technicians.

Taking full advantage of this opportunity, Taylor dressed in his best shirts and slacks. Although he was



**Mark Taylor, the founder of nonprofit organization SuitedNSuccess, has lived in the Raleigh-Durham area for most of his life and wants to help men in need become self-sufficient. (Staff photo by Caroline Hudson)**

just another student enrolled in the program, he said people took notice of him and listened to what he had to say.

Taylor attributes the respect he gained largely to his attention to appearance. That's the idea behind SuitedNSuccess.

Taylor works with agencies in the community and relies on many of them to refer men in need to the organization.

His wife Annette has been his sidekick in starting the program.

She handles much of the public outreach to raise awareness for SuitedNSuccess.

"He likes to dress well," she said with a smile. "He knew that he could help people to look right."

Annette Taylor said the inventory has no concrete location besides their garage at this point, but they are hoping to find a donated space they can use to manage it.

SuitedNSuccess relies on private donations and volunteers to provide its clients with suiting as well as ties, shoes and belts.

The organization also provides men with access to the resources they need and helps to educate them about job interview etiquette.

Rev. Michael Delano Page of Antioch Baptist Church said he thinks that there is a real need to help these economically disadvantaged men, and that SuitedNSuccess' attempts to do so are admirable.

"They really need some support," he said. "What you give is so important."

Although the Taylors hope for the program to take off on a statewide level, they are content to help even one person in the area.

"I want to take it one client at a time," Mark Taylor said. "I'm not trying to reinvent the wheel."

Both Mark and Annette said the ultimate goal is to help reduce poverty in the home community they hold dear and help get these men back into the workforce.

"It's important that you look your best," Mark Taylor said. "Don't let something like that disqualify you."

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**Mark Taylor,  
SuitedNSuccess founder**