

Dive 'Over The Edge' and rappel for a good cause

Neil Coker, Democrat staff writer 10:13 a.m. EDT October 24, 2016



(Photo: Neil coker)

Fancy yourself an adrenaline junkie? If you've ever wanted to know what it's like to stare down a 16-story building, then coolly descend its length, Over The Edge Tallahassee may be the event for you.

Over The Edge Tallahassee, an urban adventure fundraiser, will see participants rappelling the length of the DoubleTree Hotel to raise money to end prison recidivism. Ashley White

Billed as an urban adventure exercise, it's a fundraiser in which participants will, with the assistance of professionals, rappel down the DoubleTree Hotel. Not for naught, doing so directly benefits the fight against prison recidivism, specifically local nonprofits The Living Harvest, Good Samaritan Network, the Kearney Center, and Big Bend AFTER Re-Entry Coalition.

These groups have come together at the beckoning of Dale White, founder and president of The Living Harvest, Inc. a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization whose mission is to help reintegrate individuals who have been incarcerated and to facilitate their growth.

If anyone knows the importance of what his group is trying to accomplish, it's White himself, who spent 6 1/2 years behind bars on a number of charges before he was able to pull himself up and be accepted by society again. The Living Harvest is one of the positive outcomes wrought from his personal struggle.

"Our mission is to work with the formally incarcerated when they return to our communities. A lot of people don't like that. What they don't realize is that if we don't give them help when they go home, two-thirds of them are going to commit more crimes and go back in. Most of them just want a second chance and we try to help make that easier for them," said White.

But how does leaping off the roof of a tall tower help the cause? That's where Over The Edge comes in. A special events company, the organization works through partnerships to raise money for nonprofits in both the U.S. and abroad. Rappelling may not be for everybody, but the group has established a lucrative track record.

"Last year, I was looking for something that would raise something a little more than a silent auction of golf tournament. When I started researching, I found out that they'd done 500 events in this country and others. It was something different that would get people's attention. It gave me a chance to have a conversation with the community about what we do, and why," said White.

Once participants raise the \$1,000 needed to enter, with the help of certified rappellers from Over The Edge, plus 60 other volunteers, they'll take turns making their way down the DoubleTree. On Thursday, 10 VIP rappellers selected from local press, politicians, dignitaries, and other sponsors will be the first to take the plunge. Among them is the Democrat's own marketing director, Leslie Smith.



That's a long drop down... (Photo: Neil Coker)

Smith is no stranger to extreme sports. Whether it's running to benefit the American Lung Association, getting dirty in the Mud Run, participating in obstacle courses at Urban Disturbance, or snorkeling for her own enjoyment, she's always ready for physical action. She's even rappelled previously for Leadership Tallahassee as part of the Safety Day drills at the Florida Capitol.

Describing the sensation of rappelling, she said "it kind of takes your breath away when you first step over, then you get your balance, and from there it's pretty much just like walking backwards."

On Friday, 92 others from the greater public will participate from 1 to 8 p.m. Adams St. by the hotel will be closed for most of the day and will reopen for the DownTown GetDown.

White said the event as a whole has been long and costly to set up. Involved was a year-long vetting process from Over The Edge that included building inspection and a \$10 million dollar life insurance and liability policy. It also cost around \$40,000 to put on, he said. But with the rights to do it for another 3 years along with the fact that first-year events are projected to raise up to \$150,000, White feels good about where things stand.

The project so far has raised over \$82,000. To see a current update on funds raised or to sign up to participate, visit overtheedgegetlh.org