40 years of battling addictions

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In Rick Pine's third-story office are inspirational messages painted by his mother on slate fragments.

The familiar Serenity Prayer, which asks God for "courage to change the things I can," is propped near his desk in the Bensalem manor that for 40 years has served as headquarters of the Livengrin Foundation, a substance-abuse treatment center.

For Pine, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit center, inspiration comes from reaching out each day to those whose lives are controlled by alcohol or drugs.

"A lot of people think the taboo of addiction and treatment is gone when the Mel Gibsons and Robin Williamses step up," Pine said. "But to everyday folks, there's still a barrier to climb over. It's still something people are afraid to talk about.

"If we can move one person to make one phone call to give them help - before the job is gone, before the home is gone, before the family is ripped apart..."

Deb Beck, president of the Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania, said Livengrin is well-known nationally and has served as a model for other programs. "They've stayed steadily focused on what works in addiction treatment," she said. "Other programs come and go, and it's not an accident they're still there. They stay with the basics."

Pine said Livengrin treats an average of 70 patients each day in its residential programs and 375 in outpatient programs. On its 46-acre Bensalem campus, Livengrin has 91 beds for rehabilitation and detoxification. It also operates four outpatient counseling centers, including one in Doylestown Borough. A new center in Middletown Township is expected to open by the end of the year.

Dennis Franklin, program manager at the Fort Washington counseling center, said about half of the patients seen there have some college education or a college degree. The average age is 35, and 25 percent are females.

"The disease of addiction doesn't discriminate," he said.

A recovering alcoholic, Franklin has worked in the counseling field about 14 years. He said that Livengrin, which hosts 12-step meetings, played an integral part in his recovery process.
Livengrin, with an annual budget of about $7.8 million, derives nearly all of its revenue from fees for service.

"If we're fortunate to have surplus income for the year - which for years painfully we did not - the surplus goes back into facilities or program development," Pine said.

For each of the last two years, the Livengrin board has designated $200,000 to cover treatment for individuals unable to pay for services.
One of his biggest challenges, Pine said, is "finding ways to keep patients with limited resources - whether it is the insurance company footing the bills or patients paying out of pocket - engaged in active treatment." In the late 1980s, Livengrin extended its services to publicly funded patients.

Marge Hanna, executive director of Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission Inc., which finances care for those without insurance, called Livengrin a mainstay.

"It is well-respected and consistent in the quality of care the staff provides," Hanna said. "They have been quick to respond to new trends in drug abuse and addiction, and stay on the cutting edge of treatment science."

Three Livengrin professionals recently completed clinical trials on the effectiveness of a drug approved for heroin detoxification. Their research was published this year in the Journal of Addictive Diseases.

Livengrin opened in 1966 as a residential treatment center for alcoholism. The name is a play on the words *live and grin.* Treatment for drug addiction began in the early 1980s.

"Like it or not, the treatment field and by association Livengrin don't have close to a 100 percent recovery rate and probably never will," Pine said. "Historically, 60 to 70 percent of patients eventually achieve long-term recovery, most of the time with multiple treatments."

Livengrin's services also extend to family members. A formal family education program was implemented in September.

Sue Bright, Livengrin's director of administrative services, said it is not unusual for the family to be angry. "When one person in a relationship is 50 percent, someone else is picking up the slack," she said.

Livengrin, preparing for a reception next month to celebrate its first 40 years of service, is in the midst of strategic planning for the next 10 years.

"Sadly," Pine said, "the need for services is not decreasing."