Former inmate finds education aids future

BY AARON MEDLOCK
Staff Writer

Charles could easily be a typical USC student. He has passed six courses, received NC's in two others and enrolled in five courses this spring. He likes to play basketball. Charles is a freshman and like others, he has not decided on his major. He cannot decide whether to remain at USC or transfer to Clemson next fall.

But Charles is concerned about the March 30 "Success Rally" in a Columbia prison because he is different. Charles was once an inmate at Manning Correctional Institution; in fact, he has been in and out of correctional institutions since he was 16 years old.

The "Success Rally" is being planned to encourage inmates to further their education, to start raising funds for a scholarship program for inmates and to bring national interest to the program, according to Ron Hudson, statewide chairman of the "Success Rally." Charles said, "It's needed really bad."

"I got my diploma through a high school program in a Georgia industrial institute," Charles said. He served three years of a five-year sentence for burglary in the institution.

"The judge wanted to give me 20 years," he said, but his lawyer who was an "all right guy" managed to get the sentence reduced. He was a youthful offender, 16 at the time of the crime, and his 12-year-old brother Johnny was caught with him. Johnny was sentenced to one year on probation. They were lucky according to Charles. "Another guy that was with us was shot and killed."

In the Georgia prison, Charles graduated an outstanding senior. He played football, baseball, basketball and ran track. After he was released, he went to Spartanburg and worked in a department store for a while.

He attributes his losing the department store job to his having a record. After being fired, he met another guy who was "down on his luck, too."

This friend had a job protecting payroll checks for a local business. With access to the checks, he encouraged Charles to help him pass bad checks throughout Spartanburg and Greenville counties. "This lasted for a couple of months before we were caught," Charles said. "I told the guy we were going to get caught but he wouldn't listen to me. At the trial we were accused of passing $2,600 worth of bad checks. I know it was more. Some people must have just absorbed the loss of the bad check."

Charles was sentenced to Manning Correctional Institution in Richland County. At Manning, he found the prison officials showed an interest in furthering his education. He said he and some others were given tests and those doing well on them started taking college work taught by USC professors who visited the institution.

"The prison officials will try once or twice to help those with some education, but guys that don't have the smarts are out of luck," Charles said. "There were about twenty of us taking classes."

He said Manning was the cleanest prison he had been in. "But the food was lousy," he said. "They feed you rice and beans every day at dinner. The milk is always warm and the

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