

# MECCA marks 4 decades of fighting substance abuse

By Anna Lothson

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IOWA CITY — After 40 years, MECCA will take some time today to celebrate and reflect.

The community-based, non-profit Mid-Eastern Council on Chemical Abuse offers substance abuse prevention, early intervention, evaluation, detoxification,

treatment and aftercare.

CEO Steve Estes said MECCA's more than 170 employees in 37 locations serve more than 6,000 people across Iowa. In all, he said, the organization touches more than 15,000 people a year.

"It has changed from very meager beginnings to a well-respected statewide program

offering new beginnings," he said.

A celebration from 4 to 6 p.m. today at the Iowa City MECCA building, 430 Southgate Ave., will honor the dedication of employees and patients.

Now with a budget of more than \$9 million, Estes said, MECCA has helped with problems including

drugs, alcohol and gambling.

In recent years, Estes said, politicians have been more attentive toward mental illness, so MECCA has been able to focus more on early detection and prevention. Resources such as mental health counseling and transition housing ensure patients are properly diagnosed and cared for, he said.

Though MECCA has faced challenges, he said, the remarkable growth and success of the program deserves a celebration.

"It's 40 years of folks who have faced their addictions, battled them and gone on to help their communities," Estes said.

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