

# 40 years see many changes at MECCA

By Rachel Gallegos  
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Much has changed for the not-for-profit organization MECCA Services in its 40-year history.

Take its name for example. MECCA — the Mid-Eastern Council on Chemical Abuse — refers in many ways to how the organization began as a community group that started with informal get-togethers to discuss chemical abuse assistance in the Iowa City area.

MECCA Services started with a small halfway house in Iowa City and a couple councilors, MECCA President and CEO Steve Estes said.

Now, there are 170 employees — about half work in the Iowa City area — and the organization provides direct treatment services in 37 of Iowa's 99 counties. Services are available to all Iowa residents.

MECCA Services is a community-based, not-for-profit organization that

**See MECCA, 4A**



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From left, MECCA board member Bill Nusser, former MECCA board member Dick Myers, MECCA board chairwoman Erin Brothers-Smith and MECCA President and CEO Steve Estes pose Sept. 17 at the Iowa City Open House for MECCA's 40th anniversary.

# MECCA

## From 3A

offers substance abuse and behavioral health services, including residential treatment centers, halfway houses and prevention programs.

MECCA is one of the largest nonprofits and one of the largest treatment organizations in the state, Estes said.

MECCA celebrated its 40th anniversary last month with an open house celebration in Iowa City. Celebrating 40 years showed the "outstanding difference" of what the organization looks like now compared with 1969, Estes said.

"We don't look older, just a great deal bigger," Estes said. "We're just getting started because it's not going to stop there."

Former client Laura Dickey said MECCA Services not only changed her life — they saved her life.

Dickey, now 25, said she came to the MECCA residential program in Iowa City on Sept. 1, 2006, because of her addiction to methamphetamine.

Before treatment, Dickey said she spent her time living on the east side of Des Moines "getting as high as I could."

"I didn't work. I didn't do anything but look to get high," she said.

Following 28 days of residential treatment and six months of MECCA Services' outpatient program, Dickey celebrated Sept. 1 her third year of being drug free.

People she works with say they can't believe she used to be a drug addict

because she is so far from that person now, she said. Dickey said she is working, going to school and taking care of her son.

"I'm lucky," Dickey said. "Without MECCA, I know I wouldn't be alive today."

Last year, more than 5,000 individuals were provided direct treatment services through MECCA. When prevention efforts are included, MECCA served 15,000 people throughout the state.

MECCA Services also provide transitional housing in Iowa City — 12 subsidized apartments where people can live for up to a couple years while they are receiving other MECCA services, Estes said.

Estes said he would like to see the successful Iowa City transitional housing program happen in other places as one way for MECCA Services to grow in the future.

"I fully anticipate future growth, not just for growth's sake, but for the demand and need of services we provide," Estes said.

One goal is to make MECCA Services a place where there is "no wrong door" — where people can receive an integrated treatment program that treats all their needs, such as a person who has a drug or alcohol problem along with mental illness, he said. A big step for the future also would be to incorporate primary medical care into the system, so people can receive primary health care, substance abuse and mental health care all in one location with all of the professionals signing off on one treatment plan, he said.

"There's a great deal of desire for this to occur," Estes said. "It will happen."