

# He helped addicts, homeless

By Jennifer Hewlett

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

Dan Henderson could relate to down-and-out people because he had been in that position himself.

He had been a heroin addict, armed robber, convicted felon and prison escapee. So when he talked to Lexington's addicts and homeless, they listened. Some even turned their own lives around, friends said.

Mr. Henderson, a minister and executive director of the non-profit Lighthouse Ministries in Lexington, died Sunday at the University of Kentucky Hospital during a liver transplant. He was 53.

He found religion in the 1970s in a Detroit jail, where he was awaiting trial on armed robbery and escape charges. He expected to get a life sentence but, in a twist of fate, was not convicted of armed robbery. He served two more years for escape and previous convictions, then got on with a new life.

"I figured I would die as a criminal," he said in a 2001 interview.

Mr. Henderson started Lighthouse Ministries in Lexington in the early 1990s. Several times a week, homeless people, substance abusers and criminals would attend religious services, then get a free meal.

Money for the food came from churches and out of Mr. Henderson's own pocket. His regular job was working for the U.S. Postal Service.

"It was just a great ministry. It went on for years and literally got hundreds of lives turned around," said Marc Graviss, a friend who has done volunteer work for Lighthouse Ministries. "All the down-and-outers would come. ... He was just a big, old teddy bear of a guy."

Mr. Henderson had been working on the renovation of Lighthouse Ministries property on Elm Tree Lane when he became ill several months ago. He envisioned providing a temporary home for men with problems such as substance abuse and coping with life outside prison. The building had been a bar. Another goal was to someday have a building to shelter abused women and their children.

"He was hanging in there and



DAVID STEPHENSON | STAFF FILE PHOTO

Dan Henderson, shown in 2001, was executive director of the non-profit Lighthouse Ministries in Lexington. He had been an addict and done time in prison.

still working up until the bitter end," Graviss said. "It's just a huge loss to the inner city here."

Graviss said Mr. Henderson's effectiveness with people who had been in trouble with the law was astounding. "The people could relate to him. He spent a lot of years in prison back in the '60s and '70s, so he was where they were."

Ginny Ramsey, co-director of the Catholic Action Center, said Mr. Henderson's death is "a great loss to our community and to the disenfranchised of our community. He wanted to give them wholeness, respect for themselves, dignity as people."

Mr. Henderson also preached on the streets of Lexington, and he ministered at the Frankfort Career Development Center and the Jessamine County Detention Center.

"He had lived some of the life that these folks had, and he understood their brokenness and their barriers. He shared his story that had its brokenness," Ramsey said.

"I don't reject people because they drink and drug," Mr. Henderson said in the 2001 interview. "I share hope with them, that they'll be able to find that peace. I believe that God's hand is on your life. Many times I should have been dead, hundreds of times."

Said Ramsey: "People knew he

cared about them. That was the beautiful thing to me about him."

Mr. Henderson was born in Paducah and given the name Daniel Estes Strong. His mother remarried when he was very young, and he was adopted by his stepfather. Mr. Henderson grew up in Detroit. He served in the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War. He had lived in Lexington since 1987.

"From the person he used to be to the person he became, it's just amazing," his daughter, Danielle Lynn Henderson of Lexington, said. He was "always lifting people up and always encouraging people."

In addition to his daughter, Mr. Henderson is survived by his wife, Valerie "Tay" Henderson; his parents, Dalton Ray Henderson and Virginia Louise Henderson of Lakeland, Fla.; two other daughters, Allison Louise Henderson and Natalie Rachel Henderson, both of Lexington; two sons, Nicolas Daniel Henderson and Nathan Daniel Henderson, both of Lexington; two sisters; a brother; and two grandchildren.

Services will be at 11 a.m. Thursday at First Assembly of God Church. Visitation will be 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Kerr Brothers Funeral Home on Harrodsburg Road and after 10 a.m. Thursday at the church.