

An eXhalted new life

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NEW RICHMOND - If you knew Travis Penlend his freshman year of high school you might not recognize him now.

There is no new hair color, piercings or tattoos, but the transformation of Penlend's soul during the last four years is no less baffling to the naked eye.

Just a couple weeks into Penlend's freshman year at Glen Este High School, he was busted for selling drugs.

After a two months in the Clermont Recovery Center, Penlend was back with his same friends, doing the same thing they always did, which meant Penlend started failing his court-ordered drug test.

After several failed tests, he was sent away for a year to Starr Commonwealth in Van Wert, Ohio, where Penlend met a counselor who recommended a new future through checking out a church youth group.

"That was the key," he said. "You have to get yourself involved with the right people."

When Penlend came back to the area, his family had moved to New Richmond, where he started his junior year and became a member of the Bible Baptist Church in Mt. Orab.

"Now he is doing some counseling of other students and he wants to be a preacher," said Rob Burnside, assistant principal at New Richmond High School.

Which surprises Penlend as much as it may have shocked anyone else.

"A couple years back, I would've had nothing to do with the church," he said.

Also, because of the high grades he received at Starr and his continued focus on academics at New Richmond, Penlend will graduate with his class at the end of the month.

After graduation he plans to start studying under Pastor Charles Smith of Bible Baptist.