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SERVING THE SPACE COAST

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OPINIONS

Saving young lives

Ex-convict's program with Rockledge police smart way to fight crime

Larry Lawton describes himself as a "big bald guy with the tattoos."

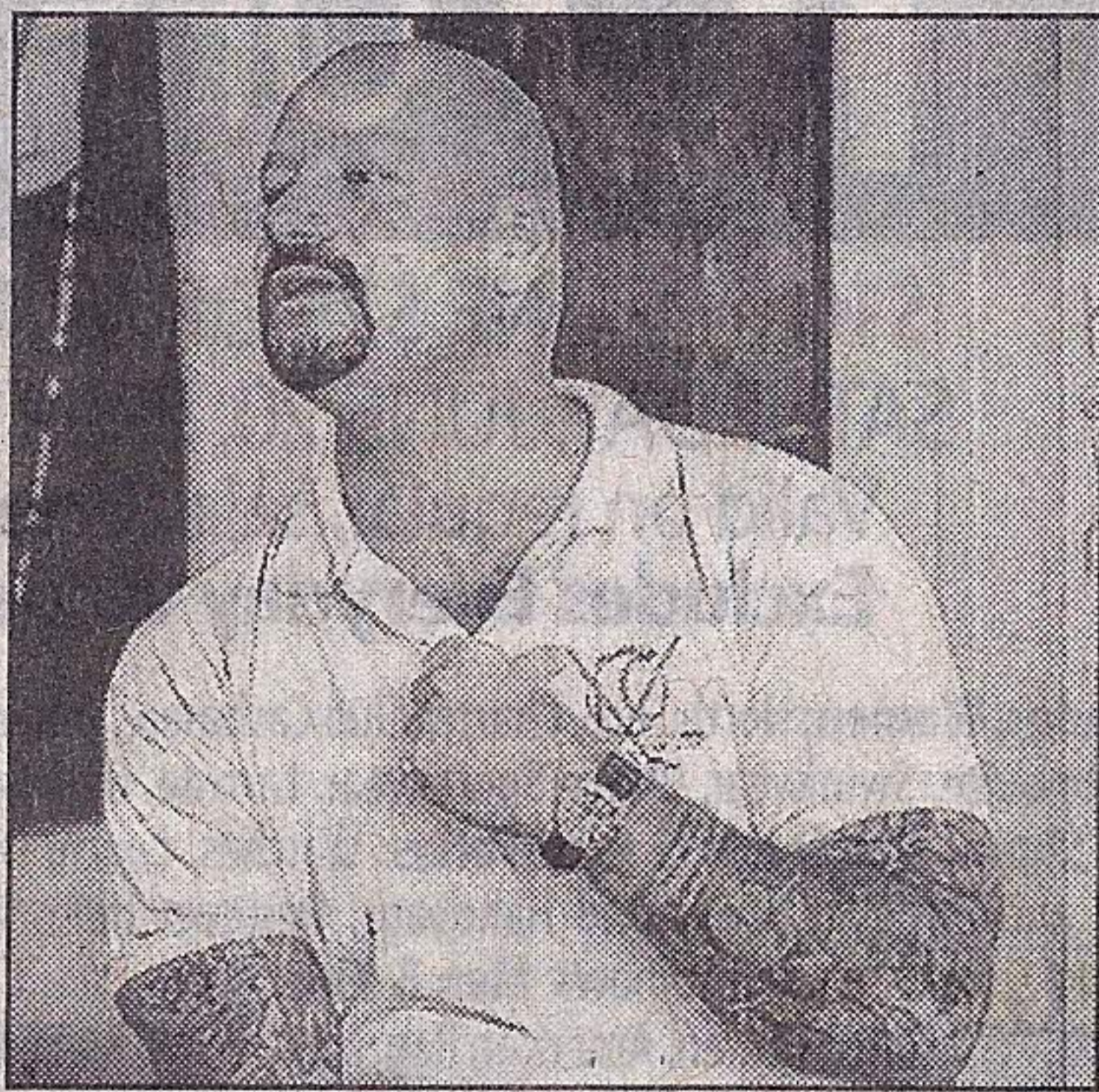
He's also an ex-convict who spent 11 years in federal prison, and is using the brutal experience to fight crime on the streets.

Lawton teamed up with the Rockledge Police Department this week to launch his "Reality Check" program that discourages juvenile offenders and at-risk youth from winding up behind bars.

Or dead.

He does it through DVDs that graphically show teens the consequences of their illegal actions. The DVDs will be distributed by police and Neighborhood Watch programs to families with teenage kids and used for sit-down discussions with police instead of arrests on minor issues.

Lawton and police say it might change the way these youth think while fostering better community relations between officers and citizens.



2008 FLORIDA TODAY file

Sharing experiences. Larry Lawton, who spent 15 years in prison, speaks to Palm Bay High students about prison life.

It's a good approach, and if the program can turn even one life around, it's worth it.

"This DVD opens their eyes, opens a dialogue with the family. In the back of the kids' heads, they're saying 'I'm not gonna go through what that big bald guy with the tattoos went through,'" Lawton said.

Kudos to Lawton and police for the innovative work.