

DAVID WILKERSON: 'The Cross and the Switchblade' Author Left Impacting Legacy

Few stories are more amazing than David Wilkerson's: A small-town pastor from Pennsylvania moves to New York to minister to the downtrodden and writes a book about it that becomes one of the most influential in church history.

Although *The Cross and the Switchblade* sold more than 15 million copies and became the basis for a popular movie, Wilkerson's legacy doesn't end there. The founding pastor of Times Square Church founded Teen Challenge, whose 245 ministry centers nationwide include 191 residential treatment facilities. His brother, Don, went on to form a global Teen Challenge network.

In addition, David Wilkerson organized World Challenge, an international missions organization now headed by his son, Gary.

Ironically, Rev. Joe Batluck, the new president of Teen Challenge USA, grew up under the ministry of Wilkerson's father, Kenneth, at Green Ridge Assembly of God in Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Batluck remembers Kenneth Wilkerson's faithful gospel preaching, a foundation Batluck says fueled Wilkerson's son and instilled in him the enduring belief that all things can become new.

"It's amazing how God can take a regular human being and pour a vision into him that will unfold as a worldwide ministry with an amazing legacy," says Batluck, who took office Aug. 1 after nine years as president of the Teen Challenge Training Center in central Pennsylvania.

"I cannot get any more profound than 2 Corinthians 5:17," Batluck says of the founder's vision that launched Teen Challenge 57 years ago. "It let him see things that day that didn't exist because of that rock-solid promise."—*Ken Walker*