



On Your Mark ... Get Set ... Change!

By ROSANNE DUNKELBERGER

“We face challenges every day of our life. Whether we have confidence or not, the challenges are going to be there.” –Deborah Hall, last year’s recipient of a Phoenix Project makeover

Debbie Baird Gets Ready for a Life-Transforming Makeover

They faced each other in matching wing chairs. Although they had just met, they already had a lot in common.

A name. An affinity for dressing in black and wearing multiple rings and ankle bracelets. Small-town living. A desire to “do” for family and others.

But most notably, both had been selected for life makeovers as part of the Phoenix Project, sponsored by WCTV (Channel 6) and several local businesses.

The big difference? Debbie Baird, of Cairo, Ga., just learned she had been selected from about 50 applicants and was about to be swept up in a three-month frenzy of self-improvement. Meanwhile, as the first recipient of a Phoenix Project makeover last year, Deborah Hall of Crawfordville already had been there and done that. The pair met recently in the WCTV studios, allowing Baird to hear from Hall about the process she was about to undergo.

“It’s great to feel this good again . . . the freedom you feel inside,” said Hall, whose improvements include losing 45 pounds, receiving extensive dental work and adopting a new hairstyle. She also attended counseling sessions, which helped her deal with life’s ups and downs.

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Baird was with a friend when she heard she’d been selected. “I felt like a kid (who) had just gotten the wish they wanted forever granted,” she recalled.

Watching Hall go through the Phoenix Project process last summer inspired Baird to apply for this year’s transformation. Divorced five years ago, the 46-year-old mother of two sons, ages 25 and 18, has struggled in the ensuing years. Comfort



The cameras are rolling (above) as this year’s Phoenix Project participant, Debbie Baird, is evaluated by cosmetic dentist Russell Rainey. Baird (left) and Deborah Hall (right) meet in the WCTV studios (right) to talk about the changes she can expect to undergo over the next several months.



eating and bad habits (“I eat all the wrong foods”) have led to a 40-pound weight gain. On top of a full-time job at the Georgia Department of Labor, Baird has taken on part-time jobs to help make ends meet. She’s also active in her church and busy coping with the happy commotion that comes with having two new infant granddaughters added to her life.

“I’ve just overloaded myself,” she said. “I’m always going . . . doing.”

At the end of her odyssey, which goes on from June through August, Baird said she hopes “the glasses will be gone,” to have some dental work, to lose weight and to

look good in a bathing suit again.

Rod Morris, account executive for WCTV, said Baird should get all of her self-improvement wishes (those glasses could be replaced by contact lenses or corrective surgery) from the businesses that have partnered with the station to develop this year’s Phoenix Project.

“We felt like she was ready for the changes,” Morris said. “We want people that will touch other people’s lives – and if she’s more confident with herself, she’s going to do a better job at that.”

Baird echoes his thoughts. “I am so ready to take it head on,” she said. ■