

Spartanburg man recovers from recession, finds motivational company

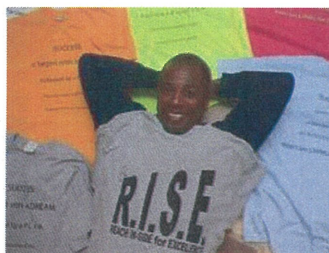
By [Linda Conley](#)

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At the height of the recession, Ronnie Rice was struggling to find work and provide for his family.

The Chicago native relocated to Spartanburg County in 1998 while working with a medical diagnostic and pharmaceutical company. In 2002, he was laid off but was able to find another job. It wasn't so easy the second time when he was laid off in 2008.



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Ronnie Rice has created a T-shirt apparel line called Reach In-Side for Excellence or R.I.S.E.

Another blow came to his family when his wife, Raye, was laid off in 2010. It was a challenging time for the family because two of the couple's three children were in college. A short time later, he was hired by MAU Inc., making \$15 an hour working the assembly line at BMW. He was promoted in March 2011 into the human resource department.

"I would encourage people who are going through something similar to keep their faith in spite of how dark it may seem," Rice said. "Keep your skills polished and don't be afraid to adapt to change or a new career."

Now almost three years later, both Rice and his wife are working. His wife found a job out of state and commutes. The recession put a strain on their marriage, but they are back together. It isn't the ideal situation, but Rice is grateful they are both working.

"We want to be together now but because of the economic downturn, we can't be," Rice said. "It was a painful experience, not to mention the debt you incur. Once you get back to work, you're in recovery mode and it takes years to rebuild. I went from a household with a middle-class income to almost nothing, and trying to keep it all together."

Dealing with unemployment was something Rice didn't expect, because he and his wife are college graduates. However, he knows they are lucky because many people are still unemployed. In February, the unemployment rate was 8.6 percent in South Carolina, according to the state Department of Employment and Workforce. The state is tied with several other areas for the 10th highest in the country. The national jobless rate is 7.7 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"We have not fully recovered from the recession," said Andrew Green, assistant professor of finance at Wofford College. "There are still a lot of people unemployed. There has been a major decline in income."

For those people who found jobs during the recession, Green said many had to take jobs that didn't pay as well as their previous jobs or the benefits at the new job cost so much the employees couldn't afford them at the new wage. He said many people had to trade down on their new jobs just to survive, but there is some hope.

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Charles Reback, associate professor of economics and finance at the George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics at the University of South Carolina Upstate, said the worst of the recession is over. He said the economy is slowly getting better.

Reback and Green said stock prices are rising, housing prices are up and construction of new homes has started again. The only problem is no one is sure when the economy and job market will return to normal.

"Nobody knows when things will get back to normal because we don't know the economy as well as we pretend," Reback said. "It's hard to articulate to say some great new thing will come out. I have no idea what part of the economy it will come in, but something always does. I am definitely optimistic."

Rice chronicled his unemployment experience by making a video and presented it at the Coffee Underground in Greenville. He said he never lost focus and is always looking for ways to inspire others.

Psychologists say coming up with a healthy way to deal with the stress of unemployment is important. They say many families are having a difficult time because of fear and worry.

"With anybody, there is a higher level of stress if you are not able to be the breadwinner for the family. There is a lot of worrying and being concerned about bills and how to make the mortgage and feed the kids," said Tracy Ksiazak, assistant professor of psychology at Converse College. "Being unemployed can cause depression and other problems. The change in one's budget or time can also be problems. You have to find something to do with your time or focus on a hobby."

Rice's latest project involves making T-shirts to share his story of going from unemployment to finding full-time work again. He created a T-shirt apparel line called Reach In-Side for Excellence or R.I.S.E., through his company R2 (pronounced R square) Enterprises, LLC. In March, some runners wore the SUCCESS shirts during the Reedy River Run in Greenville.

"I am a motivational speaker and wanted to come up with something different," Rice said. "I wanted to come up with something that could impact people in a way they can identify with."

Starting this month, Rice will have the shirts available with phrases including, "Make Footsteps, Don't Follow Them," "Don't Lower the Bar, I'll Raise It!," and "Move Mountain Move." The shirts come in a variety of sizes and colors and cost \$15 each. He hopes the shirts will become popular and create a niche in the market. His goal is for a large retail chain to become interested in them.

To order one of Rice's T-shirts, go to his website at www.rsquareenterprises.com to download an order form.