

DOC/DLI event allows inmates to hone job-seeking skills, raises awareness among businesses of untapped labor pool

For many inmates at Montana State Prison (MSP), it has been years since they filled out a job application or sat down for an interview. In April, 50 inmates at Montana State Prison had the opportunity to brush up on their job-seeking skills at the Inmate Job Fair hosted by the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (DLI).

The joint venture included months of planning between DOC staff and DLI's Job Services division.

"They (the inmates) were receptive to the feedback they got from the employers, and they appreciated the questions they were asked," said Montana Correctional Enterprises Bureau Chief Gayle Butler. "It



An inmate speaks with business representatives at MSP during the Inmate Job Fair at the end of April.

was very nerve-wracking for some of them to talk about their crime, but they did. The employers gave them feedback, and we talked about how, even if you're not getting out in the next year, you can build on these skills."

Inmates completed two mock interviews with business representatives during which

they answered questions, reviewed their job application, and received feedback. While no jobs were offered, the goal of the fair was to provide awareness to employers of this untapped, trained workforce, and allow offenders an opportunity to meet employers and sharpen their interviewing and job-seeking skills.

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“These inmates are working to be better people and to contribute to their community.”

DOC: Preparing inmates for success through The Last Mile coding program

In June, an inaugural group of 23 Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates from Montana State Prison will step into the classroom to learn computer coding and set themselves on a path to future success as part of The Last Mile (TLM) program.

The year-long training requires the inmates' dedication five days a week, 6.5 hours per day, with an end goal of attaining personal and professional skills that will make them highly marketable when they return to Montana communities.

"I first had contact with TLM at San Quentin when the program was just starting out," said Gayle Butler, bureau chief at Montana Correctional Enterprises. "I thought it would be a great opportunity for inmates in Montana then, and I'm even more excited about it now. The skills these inmates will acquire through this programming are in demand and have the potential to seal their success when they leave prison."

Established in 2010 by Chris Redlitz and

Beverly Parenti, the program has served almost 1,000 students over the years. According to TLM, 379 of the inmates served have successfully rejoined society with a zero percent recidivism rate. Montana is the seventh state to join forces with TLM.

The Gianforte Family Foundation provided funds to pay for up to 25 inmates per year

for two years to participate in the program. This donation covered equipment and most costs associated with offering TLM to Montana inmates.

Because TLM has strict guidelines regarding how the program is delivered, MSP was the only DOC facility for which the training is feasible at this time. For example, classes must consist of 18-25 students with dedicated workstations, power requirements, Internet access and more. Plus, students must be able to dedicate 30 hours a week to the

program with an expectation that they will be at the facility long enough to complete the full training.

"Identifying inmates who qualify can be a bit of a challenge," Butler said. "This population is constantly changing when you consider inmate paroles, movement among facilities, and writeups for behavior issues.

However, we have a full class identified and we are ready to get started."

To help ensure the DOC will graduate a

full TLM class, Butler's team identified an additional six inmates who could rotate into the class through the first three weeks should any of the class members decide the educational opportunity doesn't work for them.

A second TLM class is scheduled for June 2023.

To learn more go to: thelastmile.org



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DOC enhances internet access in secure facilities for educational, job opportunities

The Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) is always looking for ways to help inmates prepare to reenter Montana communities through educational opportunities, life skills, and job preparedness. To ensure inmates have the tools they need to be successful in these pursuits, the department needed to redesign the Internet access capabilities of the Inmate Computer Network (ICON).

Currently, internet access for inmates in secure facilities is limited for safety and security reasons. But, as life becomes increasingly digitally based, the DOC recognizes the need to find safe ways for inmates to access the internet. The ICON grants inmates extended access while ensuring safety and security in Montana prisons.

“This will be a great opportunity to help inmates get a jump start on reentering Montana communities or to take advantage of higher education classes while under our supervision,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “We want to make sure staff and employees are safe in our secure facilities, but we also know how important it is for individuals to complete classwork and be able to apply for jobs before leaving. The work the DOC staff and the Department of Administration have put into this project will help us find that safe balance of allowing access to the internet.”

Another benefit of this update will be greater ease to pursue educational opportunities. Next year, inmate students may take college courses with financial help from the Second

Chance Pell Grant. With the updated network, there should be fewer roadblocks to complete coursework.

Discussions about updating the inmate network at secure facilities began at the end of 2021. The DOC’s IT staff worked with the Montana Department of Administration to identify what type of access the department should offer to inmates. After that, the redesign focused on reducing barriers within the network.

Today, the redesign of the new network is complete. The next step is waiting for equipment to arrive and be installed at each facility in the fall. Once that is done, the DOC will gear up for classes and other inmate opportunities.

John Daugherty, the DOC’s Central Services chief, said it’s hard for people to function without technology in today’s world.

“We have our offenders in prison who are going to be released, and when they get released, they’re trying to find a job, place to live, and more,” he said. “Right now, from an inmate computer, they can’t look at Job Service resources or other sites that could help them find housing or jobs. From my perspective, this is an important and exciting time where we can start getting some of the tools offenders need to successfully move back into the community.”



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New DOC canine/handler duo helps improve safety in facility

Officer Don Chaney has worked in corrections for eight years. For the last four, he has been a member of the Montana Department of Corrections' Correctional Special Response Team at Montana State Prison, but was looking for another challenge in his career. Chaney found one in the form of a spunky black and white border collie named Trey.

Chaney is DOC's first narcotic detection dog handler. Trey was trained by the Washington Department of Corrections Canine Training Program.

canine training program. During the training, Chaney and other officers learned about training the dogs, maintenance training, and how to conduct drug searches. Chaney worked with two dogs aside from Trey.

"What's nice is that the school we got him from trains rescue dogs," Chaney said. "He's a rescue dog that was transformed into a search dog. I really like that story about him. I believe in animals and giving them second chances just like everyone else."



“*I believe in animals and giving them second chances just like everyone else.*”

"Unfortunately, we get people and inmates trying to smuggle drugs into our secure facilities which creates a safety hazard for inmates and employees," MSP Warden Jim Salmonsén said. "Last year, we got new mail scanners that can help detect if drugs are present in the mail entering the facility. Trey is one more addition to our team to ensure we're keeping everyone at Montana State Prison safe."

The duo has been working at MSP since the end of April. Trey is with Chaney 24/7, working shifts at MSP and then returning to Chaney's home when the workday is done. Chaney is equipped with a K9 vehicle in case they get called in for an after-hours search.

After Chaney was selected for the position, he traveled to Washington for a six-week

Chaney, who describes himself as a dog person, said that out of the dogs he worked with, he connected best with Trey. He said they have similar personalities and are both hard workers. After spending quality time together, Chaney knows Trey's quirks, and Trey knows his.

As Trey becomes an integrated member of the MSP family, Chaney hopes the duo can help continue to keep inmates and staff members safe at the facility.

"A safer workplace for everybody is the number one priority for me," Chaney said. "Just helping out any way I can to make it safer for all and to keep learning new things with the dog. I hope I can keep learning from new challenges with Trey and keep my drive going just like his."

Montana inmates to access postsecondary education through Second Chance Pell program

Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) inmates will have the opportunity to participate in postsecondary education thanks to the recent acceptance of four Montana colleges into the U.S. Department of Education's Second Chance Pell Experimental Sites Initiative.

Second Chance Pell provides incarcerated individuals access to postsecondary education opportunities and federal, need-based Pell Grants, helping them to prepare for successful reentry, develop specific skills for high-demand jobs, and contribute to the economy

"At the Montana Department of Corrections, it's our goal to make sure inmates leave pris-

on with the tools to never come back," said Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken. "The DOC has been helping inmates earn their high school equivalency certificate and develop marketable skills to ease their return to Montana communities for years. Now, by providing them with the opportunity to earn postsecondary credits through this exciting pilot program, their employment opportunities and contribution to the Montana economy will be even greater."

Dawson Community College, Great Falls College, Helena College, and Montana State University Billings were selected from colleges and universities nationwide to serve as the first institutions in Montana to participate in the Second Chance Pell Program.

"I am incredibly pleased that four of our outstanding colleges in Montana have been selected to participate in the Second Chance Pell program," said Commissioner of Higher Education Clayton Christian. "Delivering on the promise of higher education for all Montanans is a core mission of the Montana University System and we look forward to working with our partners in the Department of Corrections on this important effort."

The program was launched in 2015 and now supports 200 programs across the country.



Adults find educational opportunities at Pine Hills Correctional Facility

The Montana Department of Corrections' Pine Hills Correctional Facility (PHCF) is historically known for housing youth offenders in Montana and the educational offerings provided to those residents. However, once PHCF began accepting adult offenders in recent years, staff members ensured similar opportunities were made available to the adult residents. Adults at Pine Hills can now prepare to reenter Montana communities with new skills thanks to an array of educational and vocational classes.

When an adult is admitted at PHCF, they participate in the same educational testing as juvenile residents. Depending on their level of education, they can take high school equivalency diploma classes to earn their HiSET or choose from various vocational technology classes depending on their interests.

"A lot of times the adults that we see that need a HiSET average about a second to fourth-grade reading level," PHCF Principal Teagan Stanley said. "So, there's a significant deficit that we're having to overcome in a relatively short period of time. Usually, they're here with us for about six months."

The facility offers two programs to adults: the six-month training and treatment program and the three-month adult chemical dependency treatment program. During 2021-22, 29 adults were served in the training and treatment program, while 16 earned their high school equivalency diploma. In the chemical dependency treatment program, 75 adults were served, and seven earned their high school equivalency diploma.

If an adult has their HiSET or high school diploma, they can take several vocational

classes. Some of the courses include Life Skills, OSHA classes, Forklift, CPR/1st Aid, ServSafe, Craft Safety, Welding, Automotive, Basic Foods 1 & 2, Baking, Entrepreneurship, Drafting and Blueprint Reading. By completing these classes, participants earn certifications to assist them when they seek employment after release.

Jonathan Charlo earned his HiSET and several certifications while at Pine Hills.

"It gives me a good sense of direction in which way I want to go with my life instead of just going back to the same old thing I was doing before that could lead me into trouble," he said. "But with this (HiSET and certifications), then at least I got – they helped guide me toward the possibilities I can do with my life instead of just going back to doing nothing."

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At PHCF, an adult resident works on a car in the auto mechanic shop. If a resident has earned a high school diploma, they have options to take several vocational tech classes like auto mechanics.



An adult resident at PHCF crafts a rose from metal in the welding shop. Adults have access to a variety of educational opportunity ranging from HiSET prep to vocational tech classes.

Pheasant program gears up at Montana State Prison



A pheasant rooster walks around the breeder pen at MSP. As a National Poultry Improvement Plan facility, the birds are tested every three months for avian influenza.

The chirping sounds of baby pheasants are filling the air at Montana State Prison (MSP) as the Montana Department of Corrections’ (DOC) pheasant-rearing program kicks into high gear this spring.

During the 2021 Montana Legislative Session, lawmakers passed House Bill 637, which appropriated \$1 million toward a new state pheasant rearing and release program.

“We are excited to join in this collaborative effort with the Department of Livestock and Fish, Wildlife & Parks,” DOC Director Brian

Gootkin said. “This will be another great program that can offer inmates job training skills. Our agriculture programs provide inmates and offenders with various transferable skills that can be used as they reenter Montana communities.”

In mid-March, 700 hens and 70 roosters arrived at MSP. Recently, 250 chicks hatched at the facility. The program’s goal is to hatch about 5,000 chicks this year.

Four inmates are operating the facility, with a goal of 15 workers.



A rooster and hens explore their new home at MSP as part of the Montana Department of Corrections’ new pheasant rearing and release program. Seven hundred hens and 70 roosters arrived at MSP in March.

“We couldn’t have completed the barn in time for the chicks to hatch without the help of staff and inmate workers,” Montana Correctional Enterprises Bureau Chief Gayle Butler said. “All planning, construction, plumbing, and electrical was completed in-house by a great group of dedicated staff and inmates.”

The program aims to produce up to 50,000 birds annually for release to state wildlife management. One of the goals is to engage youth in hunting. Some of the releases will occur in the fall before the youth hunting season, while others could occur later to increase opportunities for all hunters.

In May, the Department of Livestock certified the DOC facility as a National Poultry Improvement Plan (NPIP) facility. As an NPIP facility, the birds are tested every three months for avian influenza and staff follows biosecurity measures to ensure birds and people involved in the program stay healthy.



The first pheasant chicks began to hatch at Montana State Prison in March. The goal is to hatch about 5,000 chicks this year.

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Tanner Woodward, programs supervisor in the DLI Workforce Services Division, said this job fair was an opportunity to dovetail off the mission of DLI’s workforce programs.

“The inmates are super excited,” Woodward said. “They’re like, ‘This is a great opportunity. Thank you for setting this up for us. We don’t get this chance to brush up on our skills.’ They’re having a blast with this. They said, ‘Honestly, this is something that we needed and wanted.’”

Inmates from two different units participated in the event. Tobias Sims said being incarcerated gives inmates a new appreciation for what life was like before.

“So, giving us that chance again, I’m more committed and know what I want in life now,” Sims said. “Given the chance, I won’t let you down. I want everything in life. I want to get back to my family, and I want to be there for them and provide and have a future for myself.”

Before the mock interviews, businesses were offered a tour of the MCE Industries

training programs. MCE provides a variety of education, training, and work programs to offenders at DOC-run facilities to teach skills that are in demand throughout various industries. An offender’s ability to secure gainful employment upon their return to the community is critical in becoming a productive member of society.

Michelle Cohens, with Sletten Construction, was one business representative who volunteered her time as an interviewer.

“These inmates are working to be better people and to contribute to their community,” she said. “They want to reenter the workforce. They’ve learned a lot, and they’ve gone through the different programs to become a better person. Most of them seem to have families, and they want to come and be able to provide for their families. So, getting on with a good employer is what their goal is. I think it’s good as the employer for us to be involved and see how we can help make a difference.”



Business representatives took a tour of the MCE’s Industries area to learn more about its programs.



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Pam Bovee has worked at Pine Hills for 14 years and has been a full-time teacher for nine years. With her degree in culinary arts, Bovee initially started as a cook at PHCF and now teaches cooking and baking classes. Bovee said she hopes that by completing their HiSET and some of the vocational courses, adult residents will have the tools to change their lives

“If they’re in one program, they have to get their HiSET, and a lot of them have never completed high school,” she said. “We’ve had several adults that, even just little things that they accomplish, they just feel so good about themselves. So that then they know, if I keep doing this, I can change my life.”



Residents at PHCF have access to HiSET prep classes and vocational classes to prepare for reentry into Montana communities. Many of the vocational classes offer residents certifications as well.

Congratulations Nicole Chandler

Congratulations to Montana Department of Corrections’ employee Nicole Chandler for her recognition by the National Correctional Industries Association as the National Staff Award Recipient in April! Every year, the association makes a special effort to acknowledge individuals whose extraordinary skill and leadership in their respective programs improve correctional industries as a whole. We are lucky to count Nicole as a part of our team, and we’re so proud she’s receiving attention at the national level for her hard work.



National Correctional Officer and Employee Appreciation Week

While the Montana Department of Corrections recognizes its employees year-round, the DOC joins with other corrections agencies every May during National Correctional Officer and Employee Appreciation Week to

highlight the hard work employees do.

Throughout the week, facilities and offices host a variety of celebrations to congratulate each other on another year of hard work. Some of these festivities include

potlucks, barbecues, ice cream socials and giveaways. There were signs hung around office buildings acknowledging employees and a billboard even went up in Deer Lodge to give a shoutout to DOC employees.

“I just wanted to give a huge shout out and thank you for everything that you do,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “You make a difference; you help people and there’s nothing more noble than what we do for a living. And so again, thank you, and keep up the great work.”

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National Correctional Officer and Employee Appreciation Week

DOC's Central Office BBQ



DOC's Pine Hills Correctional Facility BBQ

