

## More than a passing grade: MSU students team up with MCE inmate workers

In order to graduate, students at the Montana State University Norm Asbjornson College of Engineering must complete a senior capstone project. One of the project options is working with Montana Correctional Enterprises (MCE), an inmate training program with the Montana Department of Corrections (DOC), to improve program operations.

The partnership between MCE and MSU began in 2019 when Industries Director Joel Miller reached out to the college. After the MSU professors took a facility tour and had several meetings, MCE hosted its first capstone group of students in 2019. The program was put on hold in 2020 due to COVID-19, but a second group of students is back this spring.

Students can select from various projects with different businesses and rank their top three choices. The final teams then tackle real-life design problems posed by their assigned sponsors which include businesses, MSU faculty, state agencies, and more. Students work with the sponsor to determine project details and specifications, then do research, consider alternatives, and per-



*Montana State University student Josh Seidler, right, listens as Montana Correctional Enterprises inmate worker Billy LeMond talks about MCE's furniture production. This is the second year a group of MSU students are working with inmate workers from MCE.*

form a thorough analysis before creating a final product or recommendation to deliver to the sponsor.

This year, the students are working to help reduce issues with waste and rework at MCE. They are also considering a new layout and production plan for the furniture shop.

The students will identify where materials and time are getting lost, along with pinpoint where defects in products originate.

Dr. William Schell, associate professor, said all capstone projects provide students

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# Message from the Director: 2021 Successes

2021 was a busy year at the Montana Department of Corrections, and the department underwent a lot of changes. One thing that has remained the same is the staff's dedication to creating a safer Montana through accountability, rehabilitation and empowerment. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge some major accomplishments from the last year, and extend a huge thank you to Governor Gianforte and the Legislature for their support.

## Director's Office

- Agency reorganization including hiring Chief Financial Officer Natalie Smitham and Public Safety Chief Executive Officer Jim Anderson.
- Settlement of Cascade County lawsuit and renegotiation of the DOC's contract with Core Civic, including transfer of inmates from Great Falls Regional Prison to Crossroads Correctional Center.
- Settlement of Missoula County lawsuit.
- Improved communication with the public through our new Customer Service Manager Renee McDaniel-Seiller, redesigned website, enhanced social media, and the DOC Quarterly Update.

## Central Services Division

- Creation of the Research Planning and Analytics Bureau to use data to tell the department's story.
- Development of 20+ electronic dashboards to help DOC staff in their day-to-day work and better communicate with the public.
- Hire of Facilities Project Manager, John Graham, to oversee infrastructure needs at all DOC facilities.
- Stayed within the department's budget with no need to request supplemental funding for the first time in 9 years.

## Public Safety Division

- Legislative funding and hire (some positions still in process) of 14 new Probation and Parole positions to serve Montana communities.
- Implementation of security enhancements at DOC secure facilities including new radios and cameras.
- Passage of bill allowing adult offenders to be placed at Pine Hills Correctional Facility.

## Rehabilitation and Programs Division

- Implementation of an Electronic Health Records (EHR) system to better manage



*Department of Corrections Director Brian Gootkin*

patient health information.

- The hire of two teachers at the Montana Women's Prison to ensure equitable educational opportunities between male and female facilities.
- The hire of 2.5 new positions in the Programs and Facilities Bureau to provide additional oversight for assessment, treatment and prerelease centers; and five positions in the Health Services Bureau to provide medical, mental health and addiction counseling at MSP.
- Creation of Evidence-Based Programming and Practices Quality Assurance Bureau to help reduce recidivism.

# New DOC Rehabilitation and Programs Chief Announced



*Scott Eychner*

Montana Department of Corrections (DOC) Director Brian Gootkin announced last month that Scott Eychner will be joining the department as its Rehabilitation and Programs chief (RPC).

Eychner comes to the department from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry (DLI) where he served as administrator of the Workforce Services Division for the past six years. In that position, he led the successful implementation of all workforce services/workforce development programs and initiatives. Prior to joining DLI, Eychner spent several years working for the Texas

Workforce Commission.

"Scott has the experience and proven leadership skills needed to complete our executive team," Gootkin said. "Scott's experience with DLI – particularly in the area of workforce development - will greatly benefit offenders as they re-enter society helping the department to fulfill its mission of 'Creating a safer Montana through accountability, rehabilitation, and empowerment.'"

The RPC oversees Montana Correctional

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## By The Numbers: MCE Training and Development Successes

In 2021, Montana Correctional Enterprises continued to help offenders prepare to re-enter their communities by offering inmates a multitude of classes and courses. With

these skills and certificates, offenders will be able to return to Montana towns with a set of skills that help them succeed. We can't wait to see what will be accomplished

in 2022. To learn more about MCE, visit our website at [cor.mt.gov](http://cor.mt.gov).

**22 offenders completed CDL training and licensing. 120 offenders completed their testing and licensing for Class D driver's licenses.**



**280** offenders completed hazardous material and safety training.

**137 offenders completed First Aid/CPR/AED/ Blood-borne pathogen training.**



**142 offenders completed OSHA-10 training.**

**164** offenders completed Forklift safety.



# PHCF Restitution Crews: Paying restitution while earning work experience

Mowing lawns. Branding cattle. Moving furniture. It’s all in a day’s work for members of Pine Hills Correctional Facility’s restitution crews.

Shawn Niedge, who coordinates the teams, says no two days are alike for the juvenile and adult males who participate as they earn money to pay owed restitution and save money for their release.

“We do all kinds of things,” said Niedge, a 30-year employee of the Montana Department of Corrections. “It’s a job they want to have.”

A considerable amount of work performed by the crews takes place on the Pine Hills campus. They are responsible for the grounds maintenance for the facility, and spend many hours on the ranch and in the garden.

Pine Hills’ ranch expanded last year, which translates to duties including caring for the animals, planting and tending crops, haying, and more.

In 2021, the fruits of the crews’ efforts included 300 pumpkins and 300 pounds of potatoes which were distributed to the facility’s kitchen and shared with the



Residents at Pine Hills Correctional Facility in Miles City can earn money toward restitution by joining the restitution crew.

community. According to Niedge, the teams are looking forward to adding corn to their crops this year.

Beyond the work that occurs on the Pine Hills campus, restitution crews assist in the community in a number of capacities.

“COVID has affected what we do,” said Niedge, who has coordinated the program

since 1996. “But I get calls all the time from people who need help.”

Before the pandemic, the crews would help numerous area ranchers brand their cattle. That has scaled back due to COVID-19 concerns, but Niedge hopes that will be an option again soon.

In addition, the offenders tend the city’s football and baseball fields, including striping, etc., and do odd jobs within Custer County.

Crew members are selected based on achieving a two-star level in the facility’s “star system.” The star system is based on a scale of zero stars (mostly applies to new residents at Pine Hills), to four stars (residents who have good behavior, passing grades in school, are participating in programming). Residents with two stars have

## Pine Hills Youth Restitution Paid

FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
\$28,320.00	\$25,225.00	\$23,795.00	\$9,742.50	\$11,391.25

\*Amounts decreased due to reduction in youth population at the facility.

## Pine Hills Adult Restitution Paid

FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021
\$10,705.29	\$21,411.22	\$29,035.07	\$39,686.95	\$49,435.56

\*Amounts increased due to growth in adult population at the facility.

# Identification documents offer endless possibilities for inmates

Tim Fields had not driven a vehicle on a public road since 1998. But as an inmate at Montana State Prison, Fields wanted to get his driver's license renewed after it expired. Not only did Fields get his Class D license, but he also pursued and completed the requirements to get a Commercial Driver's License (CDL).

"My first experience of driving in the public since 1998 was in a school bus," he said. "So, it was a little nerve-wracking, but my instructors were very calm and talked me through it. I'm just thankful for them and their patience to help me to achieve this goal."

It's challenging to resume life after being in prison without personal identification documents, and Montana Correctional Enterprises' Reentry Services team is making sure offenders have the option to get those items in order before leaving.

When an offender gets transferred to a secure facility, they often don't have personal documents with them. Anne Cole, a license permit technician, said many people are not in a stable living situation, so it's not unusual for records to get lost. Cole said they tell offenders to treat these documents like gold when they get them.

"Right now, how we are nationwide, it's all about having an original document to get a job, to get housing, buy a car, just the simple things," Cole said. "Their credit may not be very good, but at least if they have these documents, they can start small. Everywhere you go is, 'Where is your valid ID? I need to see the original.' So, by obtaining that through our reentry services, when they get out, it's huge for them, and they feel like they succeeded with a small portion of how their life is going."

Offenders are not required to get these



*Montana State Prison inmates Tim Fields, left, and Amuir Clausell, right, both drive the bus for Montana Correctional Enterprises.*

documents while under DOC supervision. If they choose to, MCE's Reentry Services is there to help. The reentry team can help offenders obtain driver's licenses, social security cards, birth certificates, or identification cards.

If an offender has no identifying documents, the first step is getting a birth certificate. Once an offender has a birth certificate, they can get a replacement social security card and driver's license. The group also helps coordinate with offenders to pay off reinstatement fees or fines.

From July 1, 2019, through January 2022, the reentry services team completed 1,896 requests for Montana identification cards, 637 birth certificates, 592 Social Security cards, and 273 Class D driver's licenses. Taking advantage of this opportunity through the reentry services team also helps people avoid long lines or waits for these documents.

"It's easier for them to get it here than to

make an appointment at the DMV," said Chris More, a driver's license coordinator. "A lot of them have limited ways of travel if they're in rural areas to get to the DMV to get the stuff. Then it's a three-week waiting period for the hard copy. If you do it here, as soon as you walk out the door, you have it. So that's one less thing you have to deal with when you get out."

Before Amuir Clausell could get his driver's license, he worked to pay off his reinstatement fees and fines.

"Prior to coming to prison, I was a habitual traffic offender, kind of a knucklehead not paying attention to laws and things," Clausell said. "I lost my license for a year, and that was pretty difficult. Most of the places you live, you have to travel. That was a hard thing to lose my driver's license. Now, being a responsible individual, it was very exciting to get my driver's license and to pay off old fines that I may have had lingering around. When I got my CDL I felt like that was a tremendous accomplishment."



# Billings Symphony brings music to MWP inmates

Thanks to the Billings Symphony Orchestra and Chorale (BSOC), inmates at Montana Women's Prison enjoy unique opportunities to experience the healing power of music.

In January, women at the facility were visited by BSOC's flautist, Tyler Menzales, and classical guitarist, Elizabeth Adcock, who performed "Folk Musings with Tyler and Elizabeth" for the group.

"The Billings Symphony Orchestra and Chorale has a mission to enrich lives through music," said Brad Constantine, general manager for BSOC. "Music heals and we believe in sharing the musical language of hope and healing. If one person is uplifted by our music, we have made a difference in their lives."

According to Constantine, BSOC first connected with MWP almost 10 years ago. Since then, musicians have performed for the inmates; hosted instrument "petting zoos" at which the inmates may handle the instruments and try to play them; and even taught guitar lessons.

"Those that have been part of the classes have increased their self-esteem, giving them an outlet for healing and hope," said Constantine. "My last visit inside provided me with an appreciation of this program. The ladies were extremely grateful to have these opportunities and stated they love to learn more about music and the musicians."

*Thank you to BSOC for all you do to help the DOC prepare inmates at MWP to be successful on their return to Montana communities!*





# Empty Place At The Table

An opportunity to remember the lives of loved ones lost or affected by crime.



Left to right: Department of Corrections Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken, Lt. Gov. Kristen Juras, Francis Meagher, Governor's Office Education and Corrections Policy Advisor Dylan Klapmeier.



The Empty Place at the Table exhibit in Helena occurred during a legislative luncheon. Members from the legislature and Governor's Office came by to learn more about the exhibit and DOC's Victim Services program.



The exhibit features place settings provided by victims and survivors of crime representing the loss of loved ones or some part of themselves as a result of a criminal act against them.



Left to right: Department of Corrections Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken and Sen. Russ Tempel.

## New Hire: Eychner set to start at DOC March 7

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Enterprises along with bureaus including Quality Assurance, Health Services, Community Corrections, and Victim Services.

The role is new to the DOC and is part of the reorganization undertaken last year by

Director Gootkin and endorsed by Governor Greg Gianforte. The new organizational structure supports the department's mission through its three main functions — Central Services, Public Safety, and Rehabilitation and Programs.

"This is a very exciting time to come into this organization," Eychner said. "I am

looking forward to the challenges and the opportunities ahead, particularly those related to the potential labor force."

The department publicly solicited applications for this position through a competitive process which ran from Nov. 10, 2021 to Jan. 9, 2022. Eychner's first day with the DOC will be March 7.

## MSU: Partnership benefits students, MCE workers

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with real-world experience to help prepare them for post-college careers.

"What makes our partnership with MCE unique is that our students also get the chance to be teachers," Schell said. "By helping inmates learn basic industrial and management systems and engineering principles, our students not only learn the principles better themselves, they support the development of the employee base at MCE."

Miller said the collaboration with the university has benefited MCE and the inmate workers.

"My hope was to provide an opportunity for inmates to work on their soft skills, teamwork, and critical thinking, which has happened," Miller said. "I also hoped this partnership would help break down the stigmas that people might have about inmates. For the students, it might be the first time they have met someone who is in prison."

MSU senior Josh Seidler said he picked the MCE project as one of his top capstone



*A machine in the Montana Correctional Enterprises shop carves a piece of wood.*

projects for two reasons. The first was that the MCE issues sounded pertinent to what they had learned in class. The second was his admiration of the MCE mission.

"These guys really take their jobs seriously, and they're really skilled," he said. "I think going and seeing some of the custom stuff they do - they're artists really - and it's really cool getting to see that. They're really committed to producing good work and satisfying their customers. On top of that, all the inmates have been really nice, pleasant,

and eager to work with us."

While the inmate workers hope the students get a passing grade, they hope students gain more from this experience.

"I hope they get a better mindset of the possibilities that our population can bring," said Billy LeMond, an inmate worker with MCE. "And the work level that comes out of here - they get a better understanding of that. Then they can share that with prospective employers or just the public in general."



# DOC: Making the holiday season better for children and inmates

The holidays can be a difficult time to have a loved one incarcerated, especially for children. Montana Department of Corrections' employees worked together last year to help make the holidays a bit merrier for the little ones.

## Giving Tree Program

For the past three years, DOC staff members have purchased gifts for the children of inmates at DOC prisons in an effort to provide them with a sense of joy and normalcy during the holiday season.

In 2021, the department delivered gifts to 431 children in Montana and throughout the country thanks to the generosity of DOC staff, employees from other state agencies, private sector companies, and the Inmate Welfare Fund.

Inmates sign their children up to receive gifts through the program.

"Having an incarcerated parent is never easy on children," said Marisa Britton-Bostwick, director of Education for Montana Correctional Enterprises. "The absence of a parent on important dates like birthdays or Christmas makes it even more difficult. We hope that bringing them some joy and normalcy during the holiday season through the Giving Tree does a small part in easing that."

Jordan Lopez, an inmate at MSP, appreciates the program and what it did for his children.



Haley Kelm reads a book for a recording in December that was sent to her children during the holidays.

"I felt like it was a way to help show them that I love them and care about them," he said.

The department would like to extend a special thanks to the program coordinators who worked so hard to make sure all the children received gifts. Thank you to: Marisa Britton-Bostwick, Melissa Burnett, Gayle Butler, Sherry Carlson, Kelly Crichton, Tammy Finley, Jennie Hansen, Malissa Johnson, Carolyn Murphy, David Phillips, Kathy Ralston, and Stacey Salazar.

## Recorded Book Program

The DOC's recorded book program is another effort directed to making the holidays happier for the children of incarcerated parents

Inmates at MSP and MWP sign up to record

themselves reading a story. The recordings and storybooks are delivered to their children to listen to and read along. Inmates may choose among popular children's titles including "The Night Before Christmas," "I Love You to the Moon and Back," and "Goodnight Moon."

In 2021, the DOC helped 99 inmates from MSP and 110 from MWP to record storybooks.

"When I first read the memo (about the recorded book project), I thought it was incredibly kind for the DOC employees to do that," said Meggie Morgan, who participated in the program at MWP. "You know, this is a really hard time of year to be in here. It's a hard time of year for my children as well. So, I was very happily surprised."

The program is funded by the Inmate Welfare Fund. Money in this account is collected from inmate phone calls and canteen purchases and is used to benefit inmates and their families.

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*"We hope that bringing them some joy and normalcy during the holiday season through the Giving Tree does a small part in easing that."*

## PHCF: Restitution Crews provide work experience



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completed evaluations, some programming, and are considered appropriate to work off campus under close supervision.

“They enjoy the work and have good camaraderie. I preach a lot to them about taking pride in their work,” Niedge said. “You can see their progression.”

Members of the restitution crews are paid for their work on the Pine Hills campus from a fund dedicated to that, and can earn up to \$100/week. All those earnings are directed to paying the restitution of the crew members’ victims. When the crews work off campus – like at the city’s football field – 75 percent of the offenders’ pay is directed to restitution with the remaining 25 percent going into their inmate accounts.

“Not only are we holding (crew members) accountable for what they’ve done, but I hope they take some of what they learn here with them back to the community,” Niedge said. “A lot of the kids have never

had a job.”

According to Niedge, it’s not uncommon for past-participants in the restitution crew to stop by to check in with him after they are released from Pine Hills. He’s also had many requests to provide reference letters for juveniles and adults when they return to the community and seek jobs.

“I like working outdoors and teaching (crew members) new things,” he said. “I really like seeing the kids succeed. I feel really good about what we’re doing.”

PHCF resident Kade Gies was a member of the restitution crew as a youth, and now again as an adult.

“As a kid, having the opportunity to work on the restitution crew really eased my time here, and it gave me the change to make right the wrong,” he said, adding that participating in brandings was the most “cowboy” activity he had ever done. “To this day I definitely think it’s an asset for both kids and even adults being part of the work crew here at Pine Hills.”

## Who let the dogs out? Facilities get K9 companions

The Montana Department of Corrections is excited to welcome two of its newest employees: Moxi, pictured left, and Antheena, right. These two superstar employees will be heading to the Montana Women’s Prison in Billings and Pine Hills Correctional Facility in Miles City as part of the DOC’s new comfort dog program.

“While working in corrections is a rewarding career, we recognize that our employees also deal with a lot of pressure and stress,” said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. “Moxi and Antheena will be great additions to our facilities to allow our employees some stress relief on the job. I hope these two will bring a little bit of extra joy to our employees’ days.”





# Native American activities help inmates succeed



*A group of women participate in a drum circle at the Montana Women's Prison. The drum circle is part of several activities offered to Native American women at the facility.*

Friday is Amanda Old Crow's favorite day of the week. On Friday afternoon, many women at the Montana Women's Prison can participate in Native American activities that connect them to their culture and help them succeed while at MWP.

"Once a week, every Friday at one o'clock, we get the honor of being able to smudge with the sage and sweet grass and say prayers," Old Crow said. "Like a talking circle. That is really good for us. The singing of course (during the drum circle). To be able to learn and to teach and to gain more

knowledge is very powerful for us. We each learn something from each other."

Eloise Leahy, the Native American Spiritual Leader in the chapel, leads the women through several activities throughout the week. On Wednesdays, women can participate in the Traditional Arts class where they work on crafts like beading or making dream catchers. On Fridays, the women can participate in a grief group, smudging ceremonies, and the drum circle. When it's available, women can also participate in a sweat lodge ceremony. The most recent

sweat lodge ceremony was held in February.

Despite coming from different areas and tribes, the women find connection through activities at MWP.

"I come from a lot of singers and it makes my heart feel good to just come here (and participate in the drum circle group)," said Shayla Cody. "Sometimes I forget that I'm in prison when I come here and drum with these ladies because it brings me back to home."

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