



Quarterly Update | Summer 2024

Creating A Safer Montana Through Accountability, Rehabilitation & Empowerment

DOC offers classes using mobile welding trailer

The Montana Department of Corrections is going mobile with a new welding trailer that will offer more educational opportunities to offenders under DOC supervision.

The new program kicked off in May at Helena College with the first class of students from the Helena Prerelease Center. After this, the trailer will travel to the DOC's secure facilities around the state.

"I want to have a secure job so I can support my wife and my children," said student Jerry Lantis. "Just like any parent, I want to make sure my children are safe and secure, and they don't have to need anything. That's the responsibility of a parent, to make sure their kids grow up in a safe environment and can enjoy life. Welding will give me that."



DOC, in collaboration with the Montana Department of Labor and Industry, Helena College, and the Great Falls College MSU, recently certified the first students in its mobile welding program. The participants completed a 4-week course led by instructor Cody Torres, earning entry-level welding certification.

Six students participated in the pilot program at Helena College. Before the class kicked off, students completed their

OSHA-10 certification. At the end of the four-week course, the students tested for their basic welding certification called a Delta 1.1.

While this is a DOC-led effort, many helping hands were involved in getting this program off the ground. The DOC rented the trailer from Great Falls College MSU and teamed up with Helena College

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“With this trailer, we’ll be able to travel around the state and provide valuable training to offenders in all our different facilities. This is another great educational opportunity for us to prepare offenders to enter our workforce with a trade and career.”

~DOC Director Brian Gootkin

Welding trailer, Page 11



Visitation Applications: Leaving “snail mail” in the dust

Submitting applications to visit family or friends in Montana Department of Corrections secure facilities just got easier. After decades of applications being received through the U.S. Postal Service, the department’s new, online application went live in June.

“Providing inmate family and friends with the best customer service experiences possible is extremely important to our operations at the DOC,” said Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken. “Bringing the visitation application process online allows for greater security and efficiency for members of the public and Visitation staff alike.”

New features available to applicants include:

- Efficient, online submission process.
- Notifications on the progress of applications, including approval or denial.
- Ability to communicate with Visitation staff throughout the application process.
- Improved security for sensitive information.



Visitation staff members are also looking forward to seeing what effect the online application will have on their work processes.

Correctional officers at Montana State Prison manage the bulk of visitation applications for the department, covering MSP, Crossroads Correctional Center, Dawson County Correctional

Center, and Saguro Correctional Center.

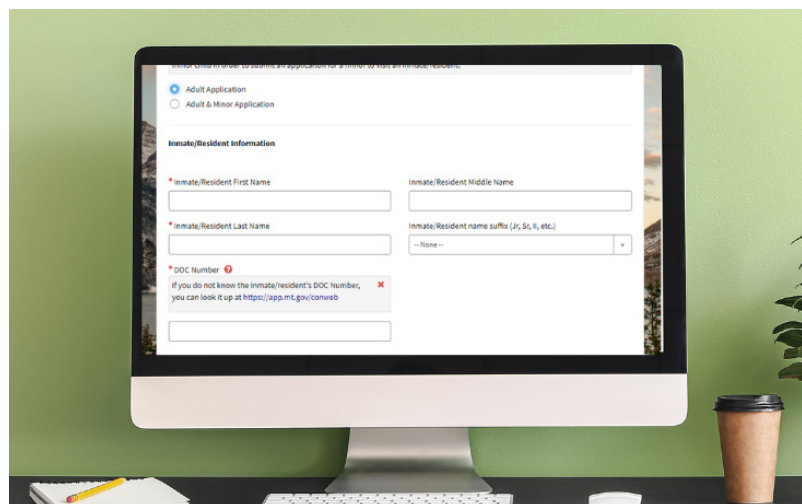
Not only do they work through stacks of paper applications each week, but they maintain hundreds of hard copy files.

“I think this process will really benefit our staff members and the family and friends of inmates,” said MSP Warden Jim Salmonsén. “And I’m particularly thankful to our staff who took the time out of their regular duties to provide feedback, test the new online application, and more to make this happen.”

Paper and printable applications are still available for inmate family and friends who don’t have access to the internet or are more comfortable with the hard copy process.

The process of converting the application to a digital version began in April and mustered staff members, including all the department’s Visitation officers, from throughout the DOC to work with SITSD to deliver an online system.

For more information about the online visitation application, visit: <https://cor.mt.gov/FriendsandFamily/In-Person-Visitation>



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~DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken



Mail goes digital at DOC Facilities

Mail at Montana Department of Corrections' secure facilities went digital May 1, allowing inmates to receive correspondence from family and friends on their personal tablets.

Since the digital mail service went live, contractor TextBehind has delivered almost 1,000 pieces of scanned mail to DOC inmates. Prior to the change, bags of letters arrived every day at DOC facilities for sorting and screening – all with the potential of containing contraband, including illegal drugs.

"We're excited about this shift to digital correspondence mainly because it makes our facilities safer for staff and inmates," said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. "Throughout the country, mail is unfortunately being used to introduce drugs into prison facilities. That is why prisons all over the country are moving to off-site scanning processes."

Now, rather than mailing letters to the facilities (Montana State Prison, Montana Women's Prison, Pine Hills Correctional Facility) at which their loved ones are incarcerated, family and friends send mail to TextBehind's facility for processing. The mail is then scanned and delivered to recipients through their tablets.

Crossroads Correctional Center and Dawson County Correctional

Center are equipped with mail scanners and employees scan the mail on site to be delivered to inmates digitally.

Legal mail, money orders, and packages are still managed in the mailrooms at each DOC facility.

Mail delivered digitally through TextBehind is one of the many ways the DOC ensures inmates can stay connected with family and friends. Other avenues include text messages, video messages, video visitation, phone calls, and in-person visitation.

Each inmate is provided with their own tablet to be used for communication, entertainment, education, and more.



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DOC/Helena College celebrate Prison Education Program (PEP) graduates at MSP

It was time to turn the tassel again at Montana State Prison as six inmate students celebrated graduating from Helena College’s automotive technology program on May 6.

This was the second class of students graduating from the program with a Certificate of Applied Science.

“With these certificates, offenders will have a foot up in the job market as they work on reintegrating into our Montana communities,” DOC Rehabilitation and Programs Chief Scott Eychner said. “We’re all happy to celebrate their accomplishments and grateful for our partnership with Helena College.”



Student Bryce Adams speaks at Montana State Prison during the Helena College graduation ceremony.

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“This class has been important to me because it has given me a formal education in a field I am passionate about.”

~MSP graduate Bryce Adams

Students at MSP paid for the course with help from the Prison Education Program, formerly the Second Chance Pell Grant program. Pell Grants are a form of federal financial aid available to students with financial need, previously unavailable to incarcerated students. With the expansion of the program, the U.S. Department of Education selected Helena College, Great Falls

Graduates, Page 11



Students pose at Helena College graduation at MSP.



What's buzzing at Pine Hills? Pine Hills staff welcomes beehive to facility

Pine Hills Correctional Facility employees are buzzing with excitement as they introduce the facility's juvenile residents to the art and science of bees.

During a brainstorming session earlier this year, Superintendent Steve Ray brought up the idea of having honeybees at the facility to help spark the youths' desire to learn. Staff members loved the idea, and the research began. Recently, the facility ordered three pounds of bees, which includes between 10,000-12,000 bees, and

collected other supplies necessary to start a bee colony.

PHCF Principal Tegan Stanley and Pine Hills' education team incorporated learning about bees into the school's curriculum for the youth. The science class is learning about bees and students are excited to work with the hives as well, she said. She added they hope honey can be used in resident meals or in cooking classes.

"Whenever we can encourage the students to change the conversation to positive

things and encourage them to be fascinated with education and learning, those are life-long skills that will serve them well," Stanley said. "And it's so fun for the staff and kids to be doing it together."

Registered Nurse Klista Roberts is lending a helping hand with the beekeeping efforts. Roberts has been a hobby beekeeper at home since 2020. She said it was her husband's dream to have a beehive and she's learned from him about beekeeping along the way.

Roberts said it's nice the facility can offer activities like this to show that the department has unique learning opportunities for its residents.

"I think it's neat because I know for me and my kids when you learn about something in science to see it in real life makes it that much more real," she said. "You learn so many things in books, but when you get to see it that cements it in. It might inspire someone to have a hobby hive on their own. The more things' kids get exposed to that pique their interest, it might put them down a different path."

For the summer, Roberts said the beehive will be low maintenance. They will check on the bees and make sure they have access to food and water. When the hive is full of honey to get through the winter, they will add a second layer that could be used to collect honey for the facility.

Pine Hills is an accredited school.



Pictured (l-r): Pine Hills nurse Klista Roberts, Principal Tegan Stanley, and Cory Hagemeister tend to the new beehives at Pine Hills Correctional Facility.



ANSO: Welcoming new hires to the DOC team



The Montana Department of Corrections has offices and facilities from Eureka to Sidney, and employees ranging from accountants to correctional officers. Despite the distance created by geography, and the diversity of career opportunities within the department, employees learn from Day One that they work for “One DOC.”

Since April 2024, new employees are required to participate in the department’s week-long All New Staff Orientation (ANSO) at the Central Office in Helena within four months of their hire date. This new training welcomes new employees to the DOC team by introducing them to the wide range of professional disciplines in the department and how they work together toward the department’s mission: Creating a safer Montana through accountability, rehabilitation, and empowerment.

“The work that each of us does every day – whether it’s transporting inmates across the state or processing payroll – plays a part in keeping our communities safe and helping provide positive outcomes for the

population we serve,” said DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken. “We need to work together as a team to be effective, and ANSO emphasizes that from the very beginning.”

Traditionally, new employees received their orientations at the facilities or offices at which they work. The curriculum varied based on their specific job duties.

Today, ANSO introduces participants to a wide range of DOC subjects including:

- How the DOC fits in state government, how DOC bureaus work together
- Employee professionalism, communication
- Employee safety
- Importance of evidence-based practices
- Native American cultural awareness

The classes also provide ample opportunity for participants to get to

know each other and begin developing professional relationships outside their immediate co-workers.

Upon completion of ANSO, employees return to their work locations to receive job-specific training. For example, correctional officers learn defensive tactics.

ANSO participants Coleman Mack and Kristi Oliver said they both enjoyed learning about various jobs within DOC.

“It was nice to learn how what I do ties in with what people in other areas of the department do,” Oliver, administrative assistant for the Rehabilitation and Programs Division, said.

Mack, Mental Health Services manager for the department, said: “I think the best part is to meet the people from work areas that you wouldn’t normally interact with.”

To date, almost 100 employees have attended ANSO.



Montana State Prison projects moving forward



Construction is kicking off this summer at Montana State Prison on construction projects funded by the 2023 Montana Legislature.

Through HB 5, HB 11 and HB 817, the Montana Department of Corrections received more than \$256 million to conduct infrastructure and technological improvements at DOC facilities across the state.

“We appreciate the support from the legislature and Governor Greg Gianforte for allocating these funds to improve much

needed infrastructure at our facilities,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “These funds are not only going to help staff members, but inmates will benefit from these upgraded facilities as well. We’ve created a fiscally responsible plan to utilize these funds in the best ways possible.”

While it will still be a while before noticeable construction gets underway at Montana State Prison, progress is being made on projects. That progress includes:

- Contractors completed an infrastructure study at MSP which

identified key systems requiring updates including water, sewer, electrical, and fire protection.

- Construction will begin this summer on a fencing project intended to secure the low side housing construction area.
- Contractors developed plans for three new low side housing buildings, three building design options for the Wallace Building upgrade, and the design process is almost complete for the new programs building.

MSP Projects, Page 9



DOC undertakes large-scale contraband search at MSP



In May, almost 100 correctional and Probation and Parole officers gathered at Montana State Prison, the state's largest secure facility, to undertake a wide-scale search for contraband to improve safety and security for staff and inmates.

"The scale of this effort is unprecedented in the DOC's history," Director Brian

Gootkin said. "We had correctional officers and probation officers from throughout the state working together to take a serious stance against the drugs and other contraband we have been seeing."

The department deployed teams to different areas of the facility to thoroughly search individual cells and common areas

for all types of contraband. All told, the effort took about 12 hours.

The search recovered a wide range of contraband items including suspected drugs (some of which will be tested at the State Crime Lab), tattooing paraphernalia, and more.

Contraband Search, Page 10



MSP Projects, Page 7



In total, there is \$211 million dedicated to Montana State Prison and these updates include:

- Replace Low-Side Housing - \$156 million
- New Multi-Purpose Programs Buildings - \$9 million
- Addition to Wallace Building - \$12.8 million
- Checkpoint Security Enhancements - \$3 million
- Low-Side Housing Unit D Renovation - \$18.8 million
- Replace Emergency Notification System - \$1 million
- Perimeter Fence/Security System Upgrade - \$1.5 million
- Roof Replacement - \$5.6 million
- Unit F water Supply/Electrical Distribution Upgrades - \$600,000
- Site Infrastructure Study - \$300,000
- Water Line Replacement - \$3 million

The department is working with DLR Group and Sletten Construction, which are managing the design and construction phases of the rebuild. At MSP, the DOC estimates roofing and upgrades will be completed in the fall of 2024, renovation of Unit D by September 2025, site infrastructure updates by September 2026, the Wallace Building addition by March 2027, the new low side buildings by October 2027, and the new programs building by September 2028.



Contraband Search, Page 8



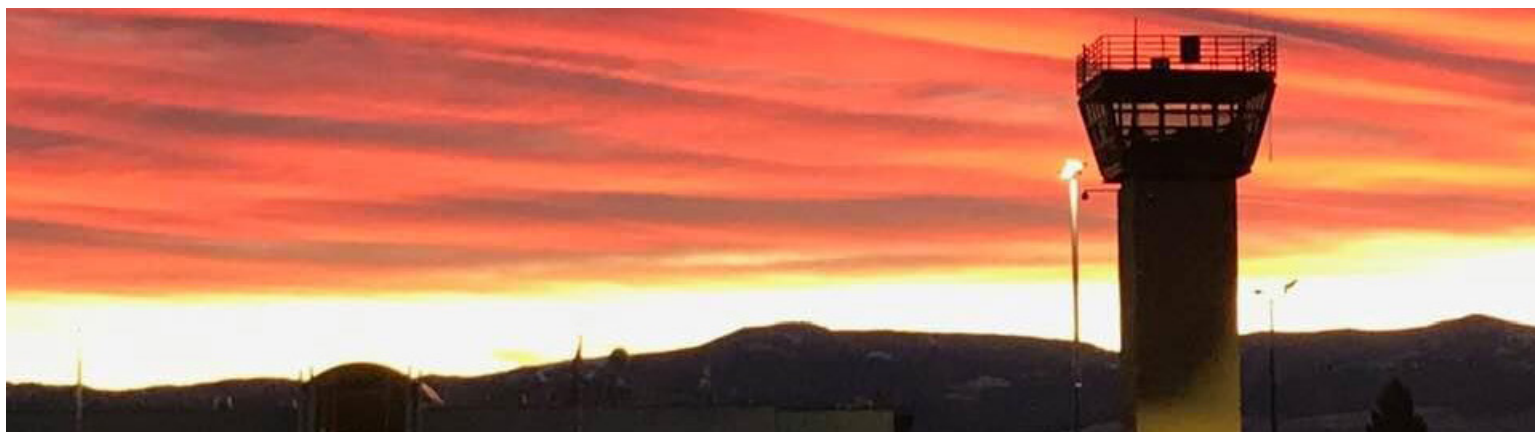
“The department has zero tolerance for any behavior that puts people at risk,” said MSP Warden Jim Salmonsén. “This facility-wide search was intended to disrupt that activity and I think we were successful in that. I’m extremely thankful for the response we received from the DOC team from throughout the state.”

Salmonsén said the department will continue to hold a hard line against the threat of illegal activity by conducting random searches, bringing contraband-sniffing dogs into the facility, and

using technology like body scanners.

In addition, the DOC recently shifted to delivering inmate mail digitally, removing one frequently used avenue for contraband entering the facility.

“We’ll continue to work the problem,” Gootkin said. “The safety and security of the public, our staff, and the individuals under our care are the department’s top priority.”



Welding Trailer, Page 1

to create the curriculum. Even though the trailer came equipped with the tools to weld, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry purchased personal protective equipment gear for the students to take with them when they complete the program using grant funds.

The classroom is housed in a trailer. It has six welding bays, its own power from a generator, and a classroom in the front.

“This program has been a work in progress, but we’re excited to have it up and running,” said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. “With this trailer, we’ll be able to travel around the state and provide valuable training to offenders in all our different facilities. This is another great educational opportunity for us to prepare offenders to enter our workforce with a trade and career.”



Cody Torres, the welding teacher at Helena College, created the curriculum and is teaching the first class. He helps lead the students through basic welding processes and teaches the classroom portion. For Torres, it has been a positive experience to teach this eager group of students.

“You can tell that every one of these guys here wants it,” Torres said. “As far as their attentiveness, how they ask questions, you can see in the way they represent themselves that this is something they want. This is one of those groups that you can tell are ready to go.”

Graduates, Page 4

College, Montana State University Billings, and Dawson Community College to provide postsecondary instruction to incarcerated students through the DOC.

Throughout the course, students did classroom lectures and hands-on learning at MSP. They also virtually attended classroom lectures using smart boards and other technology while the Montana Correctional Enterprises team assisted them with the hands-on portion of the program.

“This class has been important to me because it has given me a formal education in a field I am passionate about,” MSP graduate Bryce Adams said. “I have worked on cars my whole life but never had any formal training. This course has given me

the formal knowledge to be a professional technician. This class gives me a leg to stand on and possible employment that is not bottom of the barrel pay. This class ignited my desire to learn and continue future education. This class was important to me, and I could see myself doing this forever.”

Helena College Dean/CEO Sandra Bauman attended the graduation ceremony to hand out the certificates.

“All of us at Helena College are proud to celebrate the remarkable achievements of our second cohort of graduates from the Montana State Prison Automotive Maintenance program,” she said. “Their dedication to learning and their commitment to building a better future for themselves is truly inspiring. This program

exemplifies our belief in the transformative power of education and equipping individuals with the skills they need for successful reentry into their communities.”



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