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TVCC GED program offers SRCI inmates new opportunities

By William Anderson
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ONTARIO — While trying to cut down on recidivism, Treasure Valley Community College and Snake River Correctional Institution have teamed up to provide an opportunity for inmates to earn their GED.

"Research clearly indicates that inmates that obtain high education levels while incarcerated are less likely to return to prison," Eddie Alves, TVCC's director of correctional education, said about the program. "That is why the ODOC (Oregon Department of Corrections) supports education. The entire department continues to work toward research solutions to recidivism."

Monday afternoon, the two institutions held a GED graduation, in which 156 inmates graduated from the GED program, and 24 graduated with certificates in the Building Construction Trades Certificate program, a one-year degree earned through TVCC.

"The Oregon Department of Corrections contracts with Treasure Valley Community College to provide educational services at SRCI," Alves said. "Inmates without a GED or high school diploma have an education requirement to get their GED while at SRCI."

Monday afternoon, there were 91 inmates in attendance for the program, and more than 120 visitors came to celebrate their accomplishments.

"Many of the other graduates have been moved on to minimum facilities and other institutions throughout the state," Alves said.

The GED program itself is a self-paced program, giving the inmates the opportunity to complete the program on their time.

This year's graduating class was the largest since 1999-2000, with 156 inmates earning their GEDs at SRCI last year.

"In 2000-2001, the education programs with the Department of Corrections began taking serious cuts and this has continued," Alves said. "We lost two or three final part-time faculty and still had 156 GED graduates at SRCI. This is the most since 1999-2000. "

Along with helping inmates complete their GED, SRCI offers inmates who complete their GED or high school diploma an opportunity to take part in the professional-tech program at SRCI.

"This is one of only three in the state," Alves said of the program.

"This is a Building Construction Technology program. There are 24 seats in this program, and this year we overfilled the program with 28 students. We had 24 completions. The program then offered the inmate-student the opportunity to work in the shop and improve

(or) perfect their skills.”

During the ceremony, GED graduate Steven Davis addressed the crowd and thanked his mother and family.

“I did this for my mom and my kids,” he said. “I should have done this 14 years ago, but it’s never too late to do the right thing, and this is a stepping stone to bigger and better things.”

His mother, Peggy Davis, who traveled from Eugene to see her son graduate said, “Being here and seeing him do this means everything.”

Through tears, she said her son was set to graduate from high school in 1997 but instead started on a path that led him to prison.

Mitchell McGinnis also spoke during the ceremony and thanked the TVCC Education Department for all of the help and support his teachers gave him.

“When we came to prison, we came empty-handed,” he said. “But when we leave, we’ll be taking something good with us.”

Shawn Temple said coming to prison was a wake-up call for him to do something better with his life, and getting his GED was the first step in accomplishing that.

“Prison rescued me from myself and my bad choices,” Temple said. “Education shows us that it’s not what we did, but what we do from here on out that defines us.”

Kevin Couch, who earned his one-year degree in Building and Construction Trades from TVCC, described his new degree as “a brand new path laid out in front of me.”

“Before coming to prison I bounced from one dead-end job to another, but now I have new opportunities and a chance to turn things around when I get out because I have skills and a degree,” Couch added.

Couch also expressed appreciation to the instructors in the BCT program.

“These people may get a paycheck from DOC or TVCC, but I can tell you that they work for us. They work to see us succeed, and I can’t thank them enough for what they do.”

Treasure Valley Community College Public Information Director Abby Lee also contributed to the article

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