

THE ECHO

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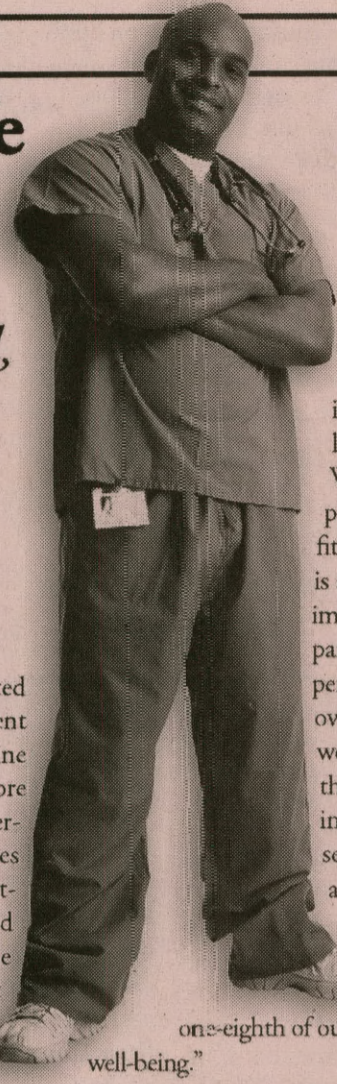
Fit for Life

Health and Wellness supports physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being

William Hill, ECHO Staff

For many incarcerated individuals, the extent of their exercise routine consists of little more than carrying bulging sacks overflowing with bi-weekly purchases of double-dipped chocolate pretzels, duplex cookies and assorted other snacks and treats from the commissary. In prison, the most popular diet seems to entail drinking a diet soda while consuming entire packages of chocolate chip cookies and pints of frozen deliciousness known as Blue Bell's Mint Chocolate Chip ice cream.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) recognizes it has a responsibility to provide individuals entrusted to its care with information needed to lead a healthier life. In response, the Windham School District (WSD) initiated an innovative Health and Wellness Program (HWP) to aid and encourage TDCJ residents, as well as staff employees, to make better lifestyle



choices in every life area. While physical fitness is an important part of a person's overall wellness, this initiative sees it as only

one-eighth of our "total well-being."

The evidence supporting a correlation between a person's physical, mental and spiritual health and their happiness has been well established since before the time of Aristotle. However, in recent years, experts have discovered that the happiest well-adjusted individuals share at least eight dimensions of healthy lifestyles. (For a list of the eight dimensions of wellness, see Bryan Moore's related story "Dimensions" in this issue.)

Fit for Life
continued on pg.3 >



Hats off to success: Windham honors graduates on Wynne Unit

John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

For many Windham School District (WSD) students, graduation and recognition for earning a High School Equivalency (HSE) certificate mark their first experiences with academic success. WSD's Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduates learn career skills and go through real-world learning experiences needed to join the workforce. For graduates, both accomplishments lead to higher self-esteem, an improved outlook and encouragement to take more steps toward life improvement.

Celebrations for Windham HSE and CTE graduates are marked by tradition, despite correctional settings, and February commencement at the Wynne Unit was no exception. Graduates dressed in black caps and gowns filed into the Rockwell Chapel at the Wynne Unit, their faces full of hope and pride. As the graduates were seated, the unit's honor guard posted the colors, marching up the chapel promenade at a dignified military pace. All in attendance, includ-

ing family members, rose to their feet as a trumpeter played the Star-Spangled Banner. Chaplain R. Lowe led a heart-warming invocation, and WSD Principal L. Pickett addressed the graduates.

"Gentleman, congratulations!" she began. "Each of you has come a long way, but you have made it to the finish line, and we applaud your achievement!"

Twenty-nine students received HSE or CTE certificates that Saturday morning, signifying their dedication to self-improvement and personal growth. WSD's Wynne Unit instructional staff was present to show support for the graduates, and members of TDCJ security staff also recognized the accomplishments of these men.

Those awarded HSE certificates were graduates B. Scott, S. Richardson, M. Osuna, M. Criner, and J. Austin. D. Byrd was named valedictorian and M. Crawford, who is also a CTE Welding graduate, was recognized as salutatorian. WSD student A. Olivo, who met different requirements, also received a High School Diploma.

Hats off continued on pg.3 >

Goodbye, Garza East! So long, Jester II! TDCJ announces 2020 closing of two units

After significant analysis of trends and data, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is announcing that the Garza East Unit in Beeville and the Jester II Unit in Richmond will close in the coming months.

According to the TDCJ News web column, the sustained funding of diversion, treatment and education programs by Governor Greg Abbott and the Texas Legislature, along with successful implementation by TDCJ staff, has led to a continued steady decline in the number of offenders incarcerated by the agency. The state recidivism rate has been on a steady decline for nearly a decade.

This decreasing demand for secure housing and projected stability in the offender population makes possible the decision to reduce state

spending through the closure of excess correctional capacity. The agency can close these facilities without negatively affecting public safety or causing any loss of jobs.

In all approximately 2,300 beds will be taken out of service. The agency will be offering positions at nearby units to all impacted employees.

These closures will make as total of 10 units closed in the last decade by TDCJ. In that same time frame the offender population has declined steadily from more than 156,000 in 2011 to 140,533 today.

Reprinted TDCJ News web column: https://www.tdcj.texas.gov/news/TDCJ_to_close_two_units_2020.html

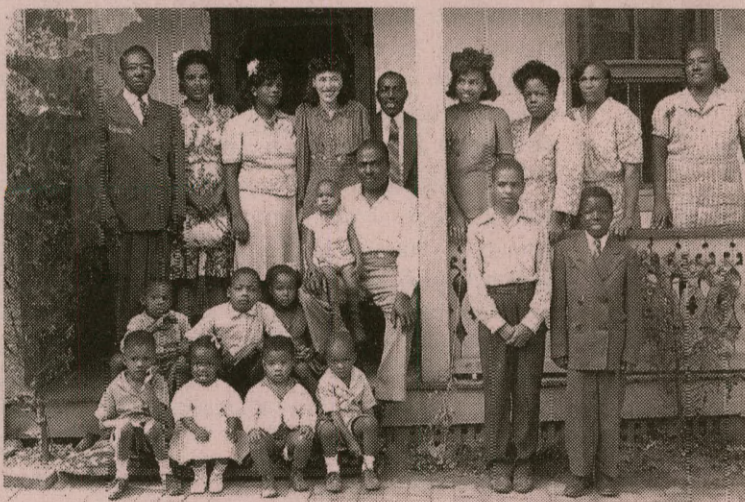
Homeward Bound

John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

Genealogy is a very personal journey. It can resolve a myriad of questions about one's genetic and cultural identity. However, a serious challenge awaits African-Americans on the hunt for their enslaved ancestors. Documents can be erroneous, memories can be faulty, ages are often guessed, surnames changed with regularity and physical descriptions such as mulatto or creole were given arbitrarily. African-American owned land actually appears and disappears on the map.

Considering what an appalling business slavery was, it is remarkable to consider the number of records accessible to the public today. The idea of confronting a past shrouded in mystery and misfortune can seem daunting. But not talking about ancestors does not make them anonymous - it merely leaves our memories full of anonymous people and blank spaces.

If you are of African-American ancestry, you should know that most of your ancestors arrived in the United States before there was a United States, as the



An Introduction to African-American Genealogy

initial year of African-American slaves arriving in the American Colonies is generally recorded as 1619. African-American ancestry runs deep.

This article seeks to direct focus on the significant amount of material to be found in areas that are most common, such as:

- Family oral histories and traditions
- Family Bible records
- Letters
- Obituaries
- Old newspapers

More advanced research requires exploring records that often go underutilized. Some useful places to begin one's search are:

- Census records
- American Civil War

- enlistment records
- Freedmen's Bureau records
- Genealogical records in national, state and local libraries
- Genealogical and historical societies
- Current genealogical research books
- Genealogy websites

Contact information to begin your research can be found below.

Census records

Of monumental importance are census records. From 1790 to 1860, the federal census contained only the names of free heads of households; slaves and others were enumerated only in brackets by age. The 1870 census is crucial, as it is

Homeward Bound
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Keeping it cool: Travis Ware

Former WSD student starts successful business

Travis Ware preaches the most important thing he learned from his time in prison: "Anything can be accomplished if you have a want to. The know-how will come later, all you need is the want-to."

Growing up in Angleton, Texas, Ware had little to no desire to do anything with his life. He got involved in drugs, alcohol and other activities that led to his arrest at age 18.

Going into the system at such a young age, Ware didn't have a lot of work or life experience.

"I spent five years down there with absolutely no motivation," Ware explained. "I asked myself 'How do people get up in the morning and go to work?'"

While inside, Ware enrolled in the Windham School District's Changing Habits and Achieving New Goals to Empower Success (CHANGES) program in the Robertson Unit. His teacher, Frank Rose, helped Ware choose a Windham trade program to join: Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVAC).

"When I read the first couple of chapters of the (HVAC) book, it just opened my eyes to so much more and I wanted to learn more about it," Ware said.

While earning six industry certifications in HVAC and related skills, Ware discovered he had natural talent as well as his passion for the work. Two weeks after his

release, he got a job on an install crew where he gained more experience and knowledge.

After 10 months of working on an install crew, Ware decided to start his own business, Integrity Rough-In Service.

"My first year, the end of 2016, I worked three months on my own and I had already made just as much working for a company for eight months out of that year," Ware explained. "This last year was really my first full year of being self-employed and employing other people."

Ware's employees are often former offenders who want to remove the stigma some people associate with former offenders in the workplace and promote the increase of second chance employment opportunities.

"I have anywhere from two to five people working with me depending on the workload," he said. "Everybody that works for me is a rescue situation. I give people opportunities. The majority of the people that I hire, I saw them walking down the road and I said 'Hey, you want something more? You want to work? Will you show up every morning?'"

Ware's employees often spend a short time working for him, gaining experience, and moving on to a new job, giving Ware the opportunity to continue helping more and more people.

Travis Ware
continued on pg.3 >

Outside Looking In

LIFE IS DISTRACTING

Jennifer Toon, ECHO Contributor — Released

There's a lot of distraction out here. Social media, Netflix, Doritos, rows of ice cream at the grocery store, not to mention petty complications at work and in relationships. It is easy to lose focus. You look for one thing while you are researching for an article and end up watching funny cat videos for three hours. You went into your boss's office to ask one question and somehow you ended up reorganizing her entire office, despite her insistence it wasn't necessary.

Well, I know our situations are different now, but I bet you understand what I mean. There are plenty of distractions in there, too. Daytime soap operas and talk shows, football, unit drama, gossip and hours vegging out to the radio. Of course, most of that is harmless. I like to unwind to a Netflix documentary after a long day. (Yes, documentaries are fun for me.) The problem is when I consistently begin to neglect the things that are important, that need my focus and attention.

Every week I interview formerly incarcerated friends about life on the outside, and when I ask them to share what they believe has helped them transition well, almost every one of them says, "I stay focused." As we discuss this,

we discover that we learned that skill in prison. When everything felt meaningless or empty, we found something that was important to us and laser focused our attention on it. For me, it was my writing for the paper. I set aside time and energy for it. I kept clear of trouble because I knew if I was a disciplinary problem, I would lose my column. I mean, why would they want me dispensing advice if I was acting like a fool? I had goals for my writing after prison, and despite set off after set off, I stayed focused on the outcome that I wanted, an outcome that is slowly manifesting in my life now.

We all need a break sometimes. We must rest, chill out and reclaim our energy, but I want you to understand that the distractions in there are minor compared to those out here. If you can't hone that skill now, it will be impossible later. Staying focused is a huge factor in successful living out here. How do you know you are on the right track? Well, you finished reading this and didn't skip to the recipes. Baby steps are still steps. Start somewhere, practice meditation, prayer or simply reading a book with the intent to learn and not just be distracted.

Now, I'm off to the kitchen for Doritos and Blue Bell. ★

A WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

EVEN INSIDE THE WALLS, HEALTHY HABITS PROMOTE HEALTHY LIFE

Lauren Aycock, Contributing Writer — Crain Unit

Just because we are incarcerated doesn't mean that we can't maintain a healthy lifestyle! Sure, it's easy to let yourself go, but it's also as easy to develop a healthy routine in here that can carry over to the world. Meditate on this: it takes only 21 days to develop a habit, so you could be on your way to a new and better life in just three weeks.

I exercise religiously. I run five miles, do high-intensity interval training (HIIT) and use a new training method called Tabata. Exercising releases endorphins, increases blood flow throughout the body, builds muscle and burns fat. It is also good for your mental health and an excellent way to release tension, which can build quite easily. No matter what fitness level you are on, or what sort of workout you prefer, exercise is good for your mind, your body and your overall health.

I strongly encourage everyone to find an exercise regimen and build on it. It doesn't matter if you work out by yourself, have a workout partner to help support you, or workout in a group, if it works for you. I have a motto that I use to motivate those who work out with me: "You may hate me today, but you'll love me tomorrow." True,

you know your body better than anyone, but the more you push your body, the greater results you will see. Remember, "No pain, no gain."

The human body is amazing; once you set your mind to something, your body will

follow. If you were a smoker in the world, your body craved nicotine. The same principle applies with fitness; once your body grows accustomed to your workout plan and habits, it will start craving exercise. Also, eating a nutritious diet and avoiding certain foods will improve your health. How you eat affects your workouts because food is the fuel that energizes your body.

I am a former smoker but, by committing myself to exercise, I have replaced that nasty habit with one that gives life instead of taking it. The body just lasts much longer if you take care of it. I am now addicted to something healthy and beneficial! Just know we all start somewhere, no matter our fitness level or degree of athleticism, so don't get discouraged. Hard work pays off and there is no better time to get started than now. Get up off that thang, and I promise you'll feel better! ★

Meditate on this: it takes only 21 days to develop a habit, so you could be on your way to a new and better life in just three weeks.



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor,

In most editions of *The ECHO*, many people write letters to the editor or to Darby and refer to the many ways we become institutionalized through our behaviors. It is all too often that we forget who we actually hurt and who are also true victims of our actions: our children. They have no father to raise them and no daddy to hold them and make them feel loved. Our parents, the very mother and father who gave us life, have had to sit by and watch their children grow up in a prison. How very sad is that? Our brothers and sisters, who were robbed of the only real gift we could have truly given them, our presence, have not enjoyed a life with us.

It is too easy with incarceration to get caught up in the routine of day-to-day life. It's also too easy to go negative and become a predator, a gangster or whatever — to just become very dependent on the

society of prison life. Our incarceration just shouldn't be like this. Let's be totally honest: How will you truly face these victims and people you hurt in your wake? Will you show patience, companionship and sincere understanding? Will you seek to sincerely redeem yourself? I'm here to tell you that society will demand this from each of us. There is a better and greater chance I will be rejected, mistrusted and looked dimly upon by the people I love.

Recently I have taken the CHANGES class. My instructor was not just instrumental in teaching our class, she was devoted to us and our learning; assisting us in identifying who our other true victims are. She taught us the difference between making honest amends and seeking forgiveness.

None of us are perfect. We don't have to be; we only need to apply ourselves. Change doesn't happen until you start trying. As much as you might want something to be true, it's not going to be until you apply yourself sincerely. Success and failure are two things I can honestly say I am really good at doing. My biggest problem with that statement is

that I am successful inside of prison, and I have been a failure outside of it. I am about 10 days away from going home. I am scared and I fear what I will now face. I am determined to be successful where I previously failed. I am devoted to getting my life back, and I am going out with the right tools to succeed. I am blessed with the education I have received during my stay. I'm also blessed to have now learned the value of freedom and what it takes to keep it: hard work — every day.

An Avid and Changed Fan, Chase Field Work Camp

To the Reader,

Thanks for your encouragement, challenge and testimony. Your examination of the status quo is quite honest and your comments about Windham School District's CHANGES prerelease program bring valuable insight to the table. Hopefully, the lessons you have learned while incarcerated will carry over to your life in society and you will never return to this place. Thank you for your letter to the editor.

DEAR DARBY LETTERS TO THE DARBSTER

Dear Darby,

You can say what you want about those pinto beans Cabbage and rice and other things Even the burritos and chili and such Ain't too bad if you ain't asking for much But one thing's for certain, that's gotta be said Ya' just can't beat TDCJ cornbread!

Big Jim Immicke Hughes Unit

Dear Big Jim,

I don't know where your mind has gone Prison cornbread does not amaze Perhaps you'd better to check the lawn For grass would serve for you to graze But if you like this food, you're in luck Some places outside the razor wire Serve a similar kind of muck Good luck!

(Apologies to the kitchen for word play with the food; I'm more of a French Fry kind of guy!)

Dear Darby,

In a past issue I wrote a letter about my time in Texas, compared it to my time done in another state, and said how in Texas you never know if or when you might make parole. It really makes for a hopeless situation for us inmates who are doing heavy time and are depending on parole to get us out while we are still young enough to make

a life for ourselves.

Anyways, I appreciated your response not to give up and have hope. You encouraged me to use my time to change and correct the things that got me in here in the first place.

Also, I did not miss what you said about writing letters full of slang and misspelled words — to take time to try and educate myself. You were right! Instead of that case of soups, I bought a dictionary this last store day. Maybe I can get an "E" for Effort.

Your response to my letter was encouraging and you were right. I've got nine years done on a 20-year aggravated sentence. Maybe it is long overdue for me to try to make some changes so, if I can manage to break these chains, I can get out and stay out! Thanks a lot, Darby, for your kind words. They didn't fall on deaf ears!

With Respect, Anonymous Clements Unit High Security

Dear Hopeful,

It's about time someone takes heed to the priceless wisdom that the Darbster imparts. You're aware that I have been doing this for a long time and, lately, y'all have been harder to reach than usual for some strange reason. I was beginning to think I had lost my Mojo! It's never too late to shake off the mental chains of incarceration, get focused and take advantage of the programs and activities available to us, even in high security. Good luck with parole, and when you're out and successful, drop Ol' Darb a note to tell us how you're doin'!

Dear Darby,

Once again, you have screwed up the "DoSucko" puzzles. The ones in the September/October issue cannot be solved! Either you formatted it in the wrong way, or you are using a faulty key. In either case, you are getting it wrong and you need to stop! It is very frustrating.

Frustrated, Anonymous

Dear Anon,

Congratulations! How does it feel to be

the only person who could not solve the puzzles in the September/October issue? You probably need to brush up on your game! If I were you, I would just stick to the easy puzzles found in other papers for a while — this way your frustration level will drop. Okay, okay, maybe I am being a tad testy!

I'll admit this: When we had our server meltdown a few months ago and had to completely rebuild and reboot *The ECHO*, there was a little problem introduced called a "stacking error" in the data files, and we didn't see it before we sent the issue to the printer. Having gone through that problem, we're even more vigilant when proofing the issue before the boss sends it off. And by the way, the correct name for the puzzle is Sudoku, and if you looked at the solutions, enough clues were provided to solve them! Some folks even said they were the BEST *ECHO* Sudoku EVER — which really puzzles me! Go figure!

Dear Darby,

I'm new to this whole prison thing. As such, I tend to get a lot of advice from ... just about everyone. One thing I've heard several times is that if you make parole without getting any cases, they accuse you of manipulating the system. Personally, my plan is to stay out of trouble and keep a squeaky-clean record for as long as I'm here. What do you think? Do I need to get a couple of cases and manipulate the system so that I don't get accused later of "manipulating the system?"

Sincerely, Goody New Shoes Pack Unit

Dear Goody,

You can't be serious. Manipulating the system to make them think that you're NOT manipulating the system isn't the way to go. Be yourself, go to school, participate in programs and make the most of your time here. You'll do the amount of time they want you to do, no manipulation required. Act a fool, though, and it gives them a reason to say "NO!"



Damon West

THE COFFEE BEAN

Taking it to the Pros

Knowing how big sports are in prison, I'll start this article off with two sports stories.

During the NFL playoffs, I received a text from a friend in the sports department at Houston television station KHOU. My friend said Deshaun Watson was asked in a press conference, "Are there any books you've read in your life that inspired you?"

His answer: "The Coffee Bean."

I was humbled and floored. It's not every day that one of your favorite NFL QBs tells the country that a book you wrote gives him inspiration. After I posted the clip of the press conference with Deshaun on Twitter, Deshaun retweeted it onto his page and it soon went viral. Later that night, Deshaun messaged me and said, "Thank you for The Coffee Bean book. It's powerful!"

Fast forward a few weeks later. I received an email from the general manager of the Indianapolis Colts, Chris Ballard. He told me he just finished reading *The Change Agent* and would like to speak with me. He told me he wanted me to share with his team my story of overcoming extreme odds and being a coffee bean. This, of course, was amazing, as I have been trying to take my message from the world of college sports to the pros. Yet, this was not the best part of our call.

Chris told me he was from Texas City originally and that he did some research on me, discovering that I was from nearby Port Arthur. He also said he was both impressed and intrigued with my commitment to going back into prisons to look for coffee beans. He knew all about my Coffee Bean Prison Tour to visit all 104 TDCJ facilities. In fact, that commitment to giving back – servant leadership – is one of the things that compelled him to contact me.

I told him I felt like going back into prisons was God's best use for me. Going to speak to teams, companies and schools was great, and it allows me to spread my message, positively impacting society and earning a living, but I felt prisons offered me the best opportunity to bring a message of hope and a formula for turning lives around. My "unique currency" to spend with the incarcerated, I told him, was turning my life-sentence into a life-purpose.

Moreover, sobriety is one of the added benefits of going back into prisons for me, personally, because giving back is part of my recovery program.

This seemed like the natural opening to ask Chris for some-

Each club establishes their rules of membership. For example, Rule #1 in many coffee bean clubs is "Practice Positive Body Language by Smiling." Because smiling can change the energy in every room, it is the

first thing you must do to make your environment a pot of coffee instead of a pot of boiling water. And, in a room full of smiling, positive people, most of the negative people will

get with the program, become positive and smile back because humans have an inherent need to want to belong and be loved. The truly negative people – the hardest of the eggs – almost always leave a room full of positive, smiling people. Either is fine, when you are trying to make your environment into a pot of coffee.

The motivation of these young people got me to thinking. If coffee bean clubs are being started in elementary, middle and high schools all over the country, why can't they also be started in prisons? Then I thought, "Hey, I have the perfect platform to pitch this idea. I write a column called *The Coffee Bean* for *The ECHO*. I can talk to every resident in TDCJ directly."

So, I ask you, my brothers and sisters in white: Would you all be interested in starting the first Prison Coffee Bean Clubs in America?

Think about the impact this could have on prison life if it being a coffee bean became the norm. Think about how much better the quality of life would be on each pod if we went around smiling – especially on the days when we don't feel like it – and practiced servant leadership with each other. Think about a world in prison where coffee beans outnumbered the carrots and the eggs.

The possibilities for positivity are endless.

So many teams, companies, schools and other organizations are picking up the coffee bean message and making it a part of their culture. We can all benefit by learning how to bring about positive change not only in ourselves but also in our environment. I hope you will take me up on my challenge to start a Coffee Bean Club on your unit. ★

thing more. "Hey, Chris, when I go speak to the Colts in May, can you get me into a prison in Indianapolis, so I can bring hope and the coffee bean message to the inmates there?"

He said, "Damon, I'll do you one better. I'm going to set up a prison for you to visit and I'm going to send some of our football team into the prison with you. I want our guys in there practicing that servant leadership with you."

My unique currency to spend with the incarcerated ... was turning my life-sentence into a life-purpose.

Damon West

Can you imagine what it will be like in that Indianapolis prison when I go in there with a bunch of NFL players? Sports play such an outsized role in prison life; we are sure to turn some carrots and eggs into coffee beans. I cannot wait to spread the coffee bean message in Indiana and put a coffee bean mural on the wall of at least one prison there.

Coffee Bean Clubs

Abe, the main character in my book *The Coffee Bean*, starts a coffee bean club in his high school. The purpose of the club is to go around being positive, performing random acts of kindness and sharing the coffee bean message with everyone they care. Little did I know kids all over the country would be inspired to start coffee bean clubs in their schools. The interest in starting these clubs has been overwhelming, as many of these students and teachers contact me to tell me about their clubs and their positive impact on many people. It is truly amazing to witness the effects of the coffee bean message.

ages positive lifestyle changes that help promote a long, healthy life," Wynne Unit HWP Coordinator R. Gipson said. "The most important thing incarcerated individuals need to remember is that they are not going to be incarcerated forever, so they need to start taking care of themselves now by becoming more health conscious."

Emotional struggles

Perhaps a person does not have a problem with the physical component but struggles with the emotional aspect of prison life. If that resident feels emotionally unsafe and wants to learn about the emotional component of good health, they can put in a request to talk to the HWP unit coordinator who will counsel them and can provide them with written materials.

The reality of the situation is that one coordinator is not going to solve the health and wellness issues of every resident and staff member on the unit. There simply are not enough hours in the day for one person to be able to do

that, but that coordinator might train 10 unit residents in health and wellness and techniques, who can convey that information in a peer-counseling situation. This would increase the effectiveness of the program 10-fold. All activities will be directed through the coordinator's office, but trained peer

The HWP is an important new program because it encourages the positive lifestyle changes that help promote a long, healthy life

educators will have the opportunity to have conversations about health and wellness with the people who need them.

Game on!

In addition to the eight di-

Hats off continued from pg.1▶

CTE Small Engine Repair certificates were presented to L. Brinkley, J. Flores, W. Little, B. Means, A. Mengel, E. Meredith, E. Ortiz, C. Sims, T. Stephenson and W. Upchurch. CTE Welding certificates were bestowed on J. Moncado, C. Bennet, M. Craford, J. Hatfield, J. Brooks, G. Hoover, W. Kimbell, R. Smith, J. Broussard and G. Fernandez.

The graduates with the highest honors were appointed to address the crowd, delivering speeches that expressed their educational journey.

"The students before you today have embraced change. They have made wiser choices in their lives and practice behaviors that have led them to the path to success," CTE Welding graduate W. Kimbell said. "Now, we all stand here today as overcomers; as graduates of not only Windham, but of our own adversities and self-defeats."

Family members championed the triumphs of their incarcerated loved one, traveling from far and wide to show active support for pursuit of personal growth. They also enjoyed refreshments during a family visit following graduation. Graduates and guests rejoiced over goals reached and challenges overcome. Live music was provided by the Rockwell Chapel Band throughout the ceremony and reception, and its soulful sounds stirred the crowd with positivity.

"You make me so proud!" said a mother of one of the graduates, with tears of joy streaming from her eyes.

"Daddy, you finally did it!" said a graduate's child, beaming with pride as the family posed for a photo.

In a show of camaraderie and exultation, the WSD students made their way to the stage. And

Travis Ware cont. from pg.1▶

Along with trying to improve the lives of others, Ware continually evaluates his own goals to improve himself.

With his continuing business success, expansion seems to be the next step. Currently, Ware receives contract jobs from other companies, but one day he hopes to have his own contractor license.

"I'm working towards getting my own contractor license," Ware detailed. "I'm doing this with a bigger intent than to just work and make money. I'm going to be a contractor one day. I'll be able to run my own subcontract crews with people just like me."

Ware talked about the things he's already achieved with his business and life, saying he replaced his old beat-up utility bed truck with a brand-new Ford F-150 loaded with all the tools he could possibly need for work.

Ware said he enjoys the fact that he has the freedom, downtime and resources to live a full life.

"When I do get downtime, I'm making enough money to take my wife and go to Galveston for a weekend," he said. "We can go to the beach and rent golf carts and ride around. I can do whatever I want."

Another goal Ware hopes to

in a final act of tradition and triumph, they tossed their caps into the air, smiling, bold and full of promise.

"This graduation is such a wonderful day; it makes our work in correctional education meaningful and fulfilling," Pickett said. "Windham is opening doors for its students and leading them to success. Their accomplishments, education and skill sets will extend beyond these walls."

Editor's Note: The HSE certificate is awarded through the Texas Education Agency (TEA) HSE Program. ★

WSD School Year 2018-2019

Educational highlights for released students:

- TDCJ released 64,446 individuals between Sept. 1, 2018 and Aug. 31, 2019 (School Year 2019).
- Of those released, 72 percent participated in one or more educational programs during the history of their incarceration.
- Of those released, 11, 803 attained and HSE certificate through WSD, and 96 attained a High School Diploma (HSD) through partnerships with independent school districts.
- Of those released, 18, 969 completed one or more CTE courses.
- Of those released, 21, 563 completed Life Skills programming.
- Of those released, 59 percent of the students who participated in any Windham program and had at least two educational achievement tests demonstrated a significant gain in educational achievement level or attained an HSE certificate or HSD.

Information from "Windham School District Annual Performance Report School Year 2018-2019."

achieve involves him going back into the prisons to share his story and inspire current offenders.

"Most of the guys in there are stuck on this idea 'I can't do anything because I'm a felon. It's going to be harder for me because I'm a felon,'" Ware began. "Yeah, you're going to have to prove yourself twice as hard, but there is nothing holding me back."

Ware said one of the myths commonly spread in prison is that people won't give former offenders a chance out in the free world.

"It's not real," Ware said. "I've never had anybody say, 'I don't want him doing this job because he's a felon.' I would like to go back into prison once I'm a contractor, maybe sooner, and let these guys know firsthand."

The biggest thing Ware wants offenders to know is it's all about attitude.

"There is nothing holding you back when you get out," he explained. "There's a high demand out here for anybody who knows a skilled trade and has a want-to. The know-how will come once you start doing it, but the main thing was having a want to ... all you have to do is find the want-to." ★

Fit for Life continued from pg.1▶

Mission and structure

The mission of the HWP is to provide quality training programs, relevant services and a healthy lifestyle education campaign for both incarcerated residents and unit staff members. To accomplish this goal, each of the six TDCJ regions will have an assigned Health and Wellness Specialist responsible for supervising trained coordinators on 12 to 19 units. Unit coordinators manage the day-to-day tasks of organizing, promoting and administering scheduled activities, such as various recreational or sports tournaments for their unit's incarcerated population. Monthly events are regulated by program leadership to ensure every TDCJ resident has an opportunity to participate, but every coordinator is permitted to provide more than the prescribed events and is encouraged to do so.

"The HWP is an important new program because it encour-

nancial dimensions.

Staff health and wellness

A secondary but related objective relates to providing health and wellness information to members of the WSD/TDCJ staff. The program aims to improve the employees' wellness through education and workplace activities that promote a healthy lifestyle.

The immediate goal of the HWP is to challenge staff and incarcerated residents to create healthy goals for themselves and establish positive habits that lead to a better quality of life. Residents interested in participating in the program should send an I-60 request form to the Health and Wellness coordinator on their unit and request more information.

Positive lifestyle change is possible through diligent self-examination of one's physical, emotional and spiritual health. Fitness becomes more than a walk back to the cell block with heavy commissary bags – or a scheduled visit to the gym. Increased awareness can make personal wellness an intentional, multi-dimensional choice. ★

Leave me behind

Submitted by Terry Watson, Middleton Unit

Does the clock ever stop to think
to take a little breather?
I guess if I controlled it all,
I wouldn't slow down either.

Does it ever catch a second wind,
and race straight through the night?
Wondering if anyone will notice,
if their sleep is a little light.

Time, I would ask you,
could you do me a favor?
Will you keep me out of your way,
for tonight, tomorrow and later?

It can be our little secret,
I'll make sure no one else knows.
As soon as I stop watching you,
is the moment that you go.

Leave me behind,
Let your wheels turn around without me.

Leave me behind,
I don't need you around me.

With all the hours in your hands,
let it be in your plans.
Leave me behind.

A better hot pot

Submitted by Russel McEivain, Ellis Unit

I wish WESTBEND
would make you stronger,
So you would last
a whole lot longer.

I am tired of turning you
into the Property Room,
Your fuse seems to go out
far too soon.

Now I have to wait
for commissary day,
And I hope other hot pots
are on display.

So take care of your hot pot,
if you please,
Or you will be
terribly sorry, indeed!

A rose for Genesis

Submitted by Dan "Big Homie" Hernandez, McConnell Unit

This morning as I walked through
an imaginary garden in my mind,
a place I go to see
God's beautiful creations
and leave this ugly place behind.

I wish you could see
all these beautiful things,
the sun, the flowers and even hear
the beautiful song the birds sing.

The colors are such
a wonderful sight,
the blues, reds, purples
and the honey delights.

This morning as I walked
among my beautiful flowers,
I realized that I was not here
for the usual few minutes,
but a full two hours.

As the sun began to set
in a garden of mine,
I remembered what it was
I came here to find.

For the most beautiful girl in the world
only the best will do,
and yes, Genesis, my darling
I do mean you.

It stuck out like a sore thumb,
especially as I walked nearer
and the air around you
began to hum.

It called out to me
and tickled my nose,
I knew without a doubt
that this was the perfect rose.

Keep it close
and near to your heart,
for whenever you do,
we are never far apart.

This is my place I go
to escape,
a place to be alone;
it is my imaginary
home away from home.

Inspirational nightmare

Submitted by Joshua Garrison, Powlledge Unit

An open page
from folklore's creed,
of rainsters and serpents
and men with their greed.

The world on its axis
prowettes the dance
while we travel through life
like persons entranced.

The eye cannot speak
of the horrors beheld,
challenges met,
opponents felled.

Who's to explain
the madness we breed
the curse and a plague
an all of our seed?

We cloak our emotions
in mantles of pride,
for unfulfilled redemption
to questions of why.

Turning the page,
the future I see,
ashes and dust
coating family trees.

The sky carries sadness,
the wind carries need,
the ocean carries magic
in the comfort
of dreams.

My pen travels lightly
across the words which you read,
for change constantly
hunts all veracity.

Still I ask you to go
and then beg that you stay,
just to share in the turmoil
of pain and dismay.

Because life's never simple
and path's never plain,
and yet we keep plotting our course
on the winds of change.

Closing the book,
I lie on the floor,
to trace patters on the concrete
as my mind yearns for more.

Mysteries unfolding
as they turn in my hand,
my hands turn to fists
as I begin
to understand,
the story, won't hold
if you are not ready to see,
all along I was blind
it was the story of me.

Out of the furnace

Submitted by Rodney Witherspoon, Stiles Unit

Forged in the fiery furnace of affliction in the shadow of the Master's wing,
A tool forged by divine hand, all a part of the master scheme.

A new era, a new battle, soldiers rise from the ashes of the old.
As the mythical Phoenix rises from fire, soldiers born of this furnace are bold.

Weary eyes look to the sky wondering when the trials will cease.
Afflictions are the hammer that forges the masterpiece.

Raise your eyes to the sky from there your help shall come.
For none come forth of the furnace until the Master's work is done.

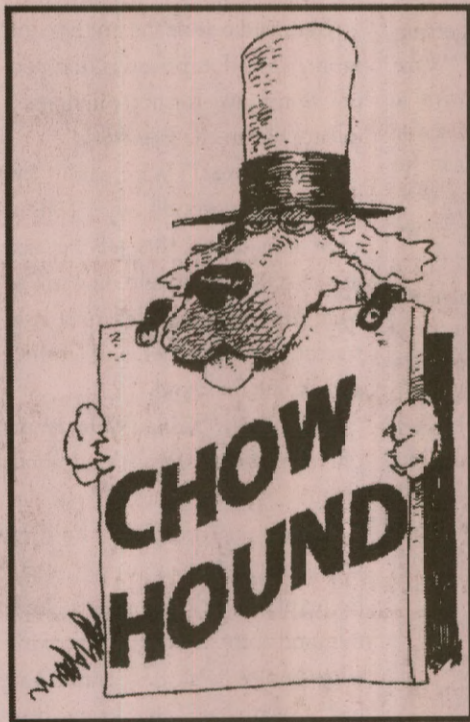
There has been an uptick in "hot pot" poetry the last few months, and we at the ECHO hear you and sense your enthusiasm. Don't let the thread end; let's keep it alive. Send us your hot pot poetry and pay homage to the friend from WESTBEND...does anyone smell something burning?



POETS

Hot Pot Owners

Keep the Thread Alive



Pearl's turkey balls

(Innocuous*)

Ingredients:
1 bag turkey bites
1/2 bag potatoes, prepared trick
Squeeze cheese
Potato chips of choice, crushed

Directions:
Using an empty soup bag as a holder, place a small amount of potatoes in your hand and flatten center with a spoon. Place a turkey bite in center, cover it with potato and shape into a ball. Place squeeze cheese in one empty bowl and crushed chips in a separate bowl. Roll turkey/potato ball in cheese, then roll in crushed chips. Place turkey balls in an empty chip bag and cook in a hotpot for 35 to 40 minutes.

*Delicious recipe submitted by unverifiable author.

Hawaiian kua feast

Submitted by Bryton Gishi, Torres Unit

Ingredients:
2 soups, seasoning packets reserved
1 bag rice
1 pouch tuna
2 pouches Spam
1 packet sweetener
Ketchup and salad dressing (optional)

Directions:
Cook soups, without seasoning

packets, with rice in a bowl. Cover and let stand for about ten minutes. Heat tuna pouch and Spam pouches in hot pot. Chop the Spam into little squares and combine with tuna pouch. Add the tuna/Spam mixture to the soup/rice mixture and stir well. Mix the soup seasoning packets and the sweetener in a cup and add hot water till the cup is two-thirds filled. Stir well and pour over the soup/Spam mixture. Mix thoroughly. If desired, add ketchup and salad dressing to taste. Makes one Hawaiian serving. Kua kua (Hawaiian for eat)!

Strawberry cheesecake

Jag Vanstorg, Wynne Unit

Ingredients:
1/2 pack vanilla cookies
2 heaping spoonful hot chocolate mix
4 powdered milks
1 Sprite
1 lime sports drink mix
1 strawberry preserves

Directions:
Separate cookies and remove filling. Crush cookies and add cocoa; add enough liquid milk and mix until a dough forms; press dough into an empty spread bowl and create a crust.

In a separate bowl, empty three packets of powdered milk. In a cup, mix Sprite and sports drink mix, stir until dissolved. Blend Sprite mix with powdered milk and stir in half of the

strawberry preserves. The mixture should be thick enough to stick to the sides of the bowl. If too runny, add the last powdered milk until thick. Pour mix over the crust. Shake remaining strawberry preserves until thinned, spread evenly over cheesecake. Let cheesecake set up for approximately four hours, then enjoy!

Chipotle chicken and ranch burritos

Cygnia Bina, Mountain View Unit

Ingredients:
1 pouch chunk chicken
5 - 6 heaping spoons crushed jalapeno potato chips
1 jalapeno seeded and diced
1 chili soup seasoning packet
1 pouch ranch dressing
Several dashes of hot sauce
6 flour tortillas
1 bottle squeeze cheese

Directions:
Pour chicken into a bowl and separate the chunks with a spoon. Add the crushed chips, jalapeno, chili seasoning packet, ranch dressing and hot sauce. Mix well. Add squeeze cheese to the tortillas and top with the chicken mixture. Roll into burritos and place into a chip bag. Cook in hot pot for 45 minutes, then serve. Makes six burritos.

Orange chicken

William Terrill, Coffield Unit

Ingredients:
1 pouch chunk chicken
1 cup of rice
1 packet orange sports drink
1 chili soup seasoning packet
5 jalapenos, diced

Directions:
Place a handful of rice, chicken, some of the seasoning packet, a few of the peppers and the orange sports drink into a chip bag. Let sit for one hour. Place in hot pot and cook for two hours. Cook the remaining rice. Mix the chicken mixture with the rice and let stand for five minutes. Top with remaining peppers. Serve.

Skinny noodles

Lily Archuleta, Murray Unit

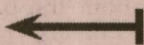
Ingredients:
1 chicken soup
1/2 spoonful dry milk
1/2 spoonful sandwich spread
1 cup pork skins
2 spoonful peanuts
4 spoonful ketchup
1 rice cake, crushed

Directions:
Cook soup with 1/4 of the seasoning packet, drain. Add remaining ingredients and stir well. Sprinkle crushed rice cake on top as a garnish, if desired.

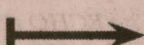
Sudoku

3	4		6					
5	1	8		9				
	8	6						1
		1	2	4		8	5	
	4					1		
8	9		3	5	6			
7					5	3		
		8		3	9	7		
			6		2	8		

Easy



Hard



				3				
	6	9		1				2
	7	2		9				
				5	2			1
8	4	5						
			4	8				3
7			6	2				
		4		3	8			
5								

The Lace Up — TDCJ Unit News



BOYD

The Boyd Unit is doing its part to deal with the issue of suicide. The unit recently held a Suicide Prevention Awareness Session. A higher than expected number of residents was in attendance to hear several speakers provide eye-opening information about suicide prevention.

For example, it is not common knowledge that in some states there are laws requiring you to report a person who is considering committing suicide. Failure to report that a person is suicidal can result in being held legally liable for that person's death should they actually kill themselves. The speakers also brought relevant statistics: 65 percent of Americans have at least entertained the thought of suicide. Depression, bullying, and feeling overwhelmed by the problems of life were cited as a few of the major reasons why people contemplate or attempt suicide. The audience was encouraged to reach out to someone if they are feeling depressed or suicidal.

Another program at the Boyd Unit is the Patriot Paws program, which was introduced in 2014, making Boyd the only male facility involved in training dogs to be service K-9s. The goal of training is to have dogs capable of providing four-legged emotional support to help veterans cope with the psychological trauma brought on by combat. Dedicated resident trainers rise early to put the dogs through their paces. A full day of training usually lasts well over eight hours and even requires the trainers to provide clean-up after their animals.

Trainers C. Roberts, R. Sanchez, R. Falcon, M. Sanders, F. Gonzales and R. Barron said they are gratified by the fact that what they do serves those who provide our country's peacekeeping efforts.

Reported by Michael Master

FERGUSON

Residents on the Ferguson Unit took full advantage of Windham School District (WSD) Elective Personal Enrichment Classes (EPEC) for Winter Break 2019. EPEC consists of a variety of classes that are offered to residents on a voluntary basis. The courses available include Open to Venture, which is an entrepreneurship class; Financial Literacy; Family Health; Career Planning; and Workplace Skills.

EPEC classes are an opportunity for residents who have not previously been served by WSD to receive valuable training and certificates. Residents were pleased to participate in the classes.

"The financial literacy class informed me on how to make money work for me, how to start a saving account and how to get a loan," student A. Price said.

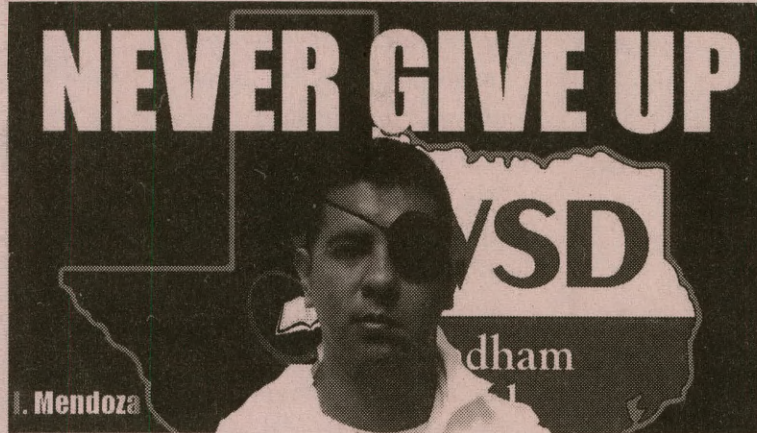
"The family health class taught me about monitoring my blood pressure and developing healthy eating habits," student Q. Wesley said.

"I learned how to have a good job interview and make my first impression my best impression when seeking employment thanks to the career planning class," student T. Howell said.

Reported by Steven Thomas

LYNAUGH

The Never Give Up Award goes to I. Mendoza, recent High School Equivalency (HSE) graduate and Wind-



ham profile in courage. Mendoza did not allow a major medical crisis to derail his pursuit of an education. He suffered a stroke and a seizure before enduring surgery for a brain tumor. After surgery, Mendoza suffered paralysis on his left-side, which affected not only his arm and hand, but also his vision and hearing. This tragic event occurred during Mendoza's preparations for the HSE exam. Several months later, with the aid of a walking cane and an eyepatch, Mendoza resumed his efforts to prepare for the exam. Mendoza went on to triumph over adversity by passing the HSE and receiving his diploma.

Reported by Larry A. Harris.

WYNNE

The unit's weekly Celebrate Recovery Inside (CRI) program continues to be a force of positive change in the lives of its participants. The program, which is based on Alcoholics Anonymous 12-Step Program, was created in 1993 by John Baker and Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church. Together, the two formulated a recovery curriculum with an emphasis on Biblical principles.

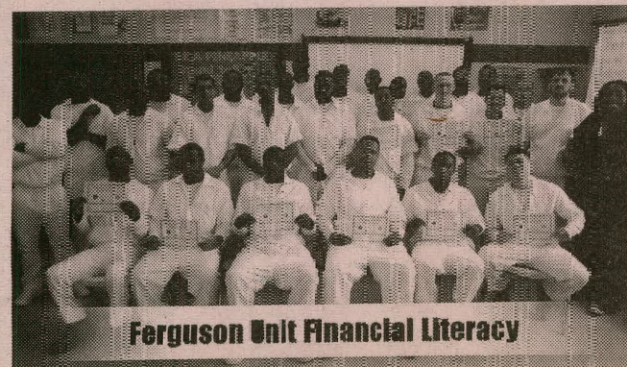
"I keep doing this because I know God changes lives. I enjoy seeing the changes this program makes in the lives of the participants. And besides, volunteering with this program is a part of my own recovery," said S. McInley, head volunteer for the program.

R. Ramone, a former TDCJ resident and current CRI volunteer, has an insider's perspective on the program.

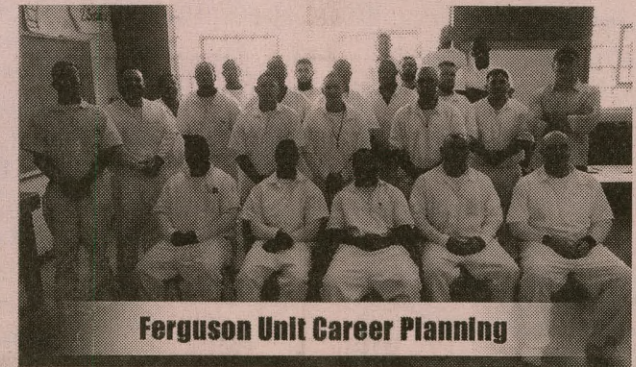
"Celebrate Recovery helped me see that my third trip to prison was where God really made the difference. My participation in CRI helped me to deal with hurts, habits and hang-ups that weren't all related to substance abuse," Ramone said.

CRI is an approved part of the Individual Treatment Program. CRI certificates of completion are legitimate documents recognized by the parole board and CRI is a nationwide entity. ★

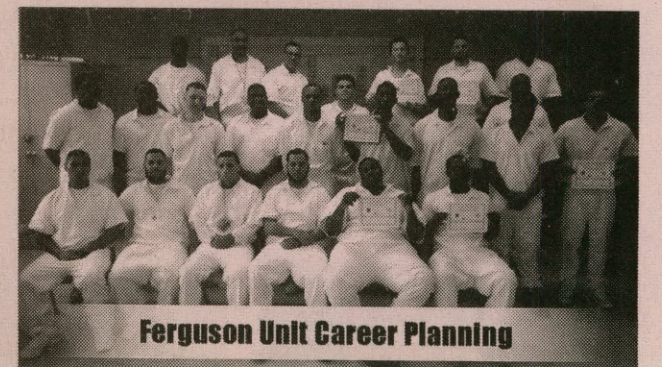
Reported by Michael Johnson



Ferguson Unit Financial Literacy



Ferguson Unit Career Planning



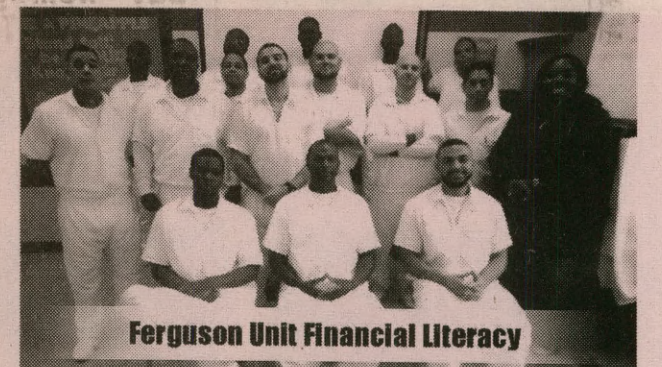
Ferguson Unit Career Planning



Ferguson Unit Family Health



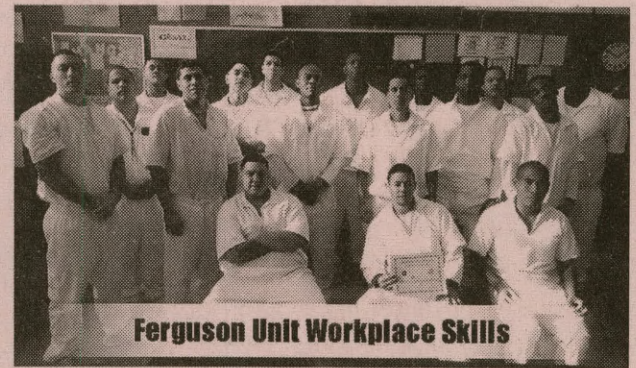
Ferguson Unit Family Health



Ferguson Unit Financial Literacy



Ferguson Unit Open to Venture



Ferguson Unit Workplace Skills



Ferguson Unit Workplace Skills

The ECHO requests submissions

The ECHO attempts to reflect positive values to fulfill the expectations you have placed on our newspaper. We request that YOU consider writing quality articles, commentaries, etc., to be published. All submitted articles will be appreciated and considered. We currently need recipes, letters to the editor and letters to Darby.

Please do not send anything more than 1,000 words (five pages handwritten, or three pages typed double-spaced). Publication is not guaranteed, and it may take a few issues for an article to appear.

Suggestions:

Submissions	Description
Article	An article is an objective discussion in an informative manner on any number of topics, such as health, history or legal issues. New and detailed facts need to have cited sources.
Commentary	A commentary is a discussion of any number of topics, but it is based upon the opinions or experiences of the writer.
Book Review	A book review details the subject, style and key plot elements of the book and generally concerns relevant topics of the day. Opinions about the book are welcomed.
Extras	Extras refer to letters to the editor, letters to Darby, puzzles, Chow Hound recipes and short stories.
Poetry	Poetry is a piece of writing chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and/or rhythm. (The ECHO already has an abundance of poetry submitted, but if you have a really great poem, go ahead and send it.)
Unit Report	A unit report discusses activities performed on a particular unit and is submitted by unit reporters only. The report must be submitted on the "Article for The ECHO form" with the proper signatures.

Your submission can be mailed using either truck mail or regular mail to:

The ECHO
c/o Windham Admin. Bldg.
P.O. Box 40
Huntsville, TX 77342/0040

Don't hesitate to send us your work — even if you are not a professional writer. We will edit your submissions for clarity and effectiveness. Thank you for your continued support of The ECHO! ★

CRIME STOPPERS

Unsolved Homicide

Elizabeth Lynne Barclay

In October 1979, seven-year-old Elizabeth Lynne Barclay was walking near 2900 West Northwest Highway in Dallas. Witnesses say she was abducted and struck multiple times by a black male driving a dark-colored vehicle, possibly a two-door Buick. In December 1979, Elizabeth's body was found on the side of a county road in the Hiram Road - Wills Point area in Van Zandt County. The investigation stalled, and the Texas Rangers are looking for information.

If you know anything about this crime, please contact the TDCJ Crime Stoppers office at P.O. Box 1855, Huntsville, Texas 77342. Crime Stoppers will pay from \$50 to \$1000 for information leading to the arrest, filing of charges or indictment of a person or persons who committed a felony crime or is a wanted fugitive. Crime Stoppers guarantees your anonymity.

Earning their wings:

STRIVE graduates unite with Southwest Airlines to improve work, life skills

John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

Southwest Airlines is sharing its nationally recognized service communications training with women in the STRIVE program in Gatesville. STRIVE (Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment) is a unique program born of a partnership between the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and the Windham School District (WSD), and it is helping prepare female offenders across the state for post-release employment. STRIVE participants are taught cutting-edge interpersonal skills, thanks to the Southwest Airlines Professional and Communication Certification course from iCEV, a career and technical education provider.

The first recipients of the Southwest Airlines certificate for successfully demonstrating competency in written, verbal, interpersonal and workplace communication skills were Mountain View residents A. Bieker, D. Garrard, B. Buckingham, A. Gann, C. Jordan, E. Tyre, S. Johnson, S. Rice, C. Turrubiarres, C. Warden and M. Galindo.

These performance benchmarks provided by Southwest Airlines enable STRIVE graduates to exhib-

it proficiencies in the following industry standards:

- English language proficiencies
- Workplace communication techniques
- Communication theory
- Interpersonal communication techniques
- Written communication procedures
- Verbal communication procedures

Southwest Airlines is committed to delivering premier customer service with sincerity, friendliness and pride. This organization has enjoyed more than four decades of experience is recognized as a leader in the airline industry and known internationally for exceptional performance, as well as dedication to efficiency and social responsibility initiatives.

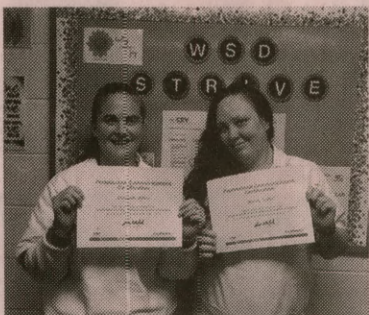
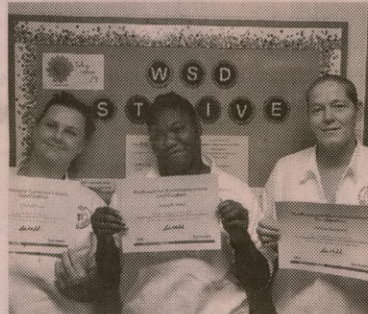
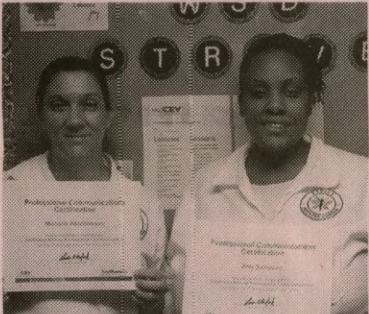
Superintendent Kristina Hartman described the decision to implement the Professional Communication course: "During the planning phase for the STRIVE program, Windham was tasked with identifying an appropriate industry certification that would be of benefit to the par-

ticipants and recognized by employers prior to reentering the Texas workforce. Based on ongoing employer feedback, the team identified the need for a course that emphasized communication and customer service. As we discussed our options, we thought about businesses that had left a positive impression on us as consumers. Southwest Airlines was at the top of the list, and we were thrilled to learn of the online course offering and willingness by iCEV to make it accessible for our STRIVE participants."

In a letter to STRIVE participants, Linda Rutherford, senior vice president and chief communications officer for Southwest Airlines, acknowledged the students' achievements and devotion to customer service excellence, and encouraged their future success.

"We [Southwest Airlines] hope you utilize this certification as a starting point for a successful career. Be sure to promote your accomplishments by listing this certification on scholarships, applications, resumes and LinkedIn profiles," Rutherford wrote. "We wish you the best in all of your academic and professional endeavors!"

Armed with this certification, STRIVE participants will have increased their professional communications skills and be better prepared to enter any work environment, regardless of industry or interest. While this training does not necessarily prepare participants for a career in the travel industry, it allows them to develop the same highly regarded communications and polished service skills that help make Southwest Airlines a successful business enterprise. ★



HELP WANTED

Freight transportation drivers needed

Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Freight Transportation is looking for qualified commercial motor vehicle operators to drive at freight terminals located in Snyder, Beeville, Rosharon and Huntsville.

This position offers an opportunity to gain marketable job skills. There is a nationwide shortage of truck drivers and this position offers documented driving time and work experience.

Applicants must meet the following requirements:

- Be classified as an Outside Trustee (G1 status)
- Have no medical restrictions that limit physical activity
- Have or have had a valid Class A Commercial Driver's License
- Have or be able to obtain a Medical Examiner's Certificate
- Successful completion of the Freight Transportation Road Test
- Provide consent to be registered and consent to a full query in the Federal Motor Carrier Clearinghouse

Interested applicants should send an I-60 listing their qualifications to:

Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Huntsville, Texas

Looking homeward:

A reflection on gratitude

Matthew Topete, Hamilton Unit

Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart for giving me this opportunity at life and to demonstrate that I really have taken responsibility and acknowledged accountability. I look forward to using the skills and knowledge I have acquired to become successful, make amends and become a productive member of society.

I want you to know that this time has been a blessing for me because it forced me to sit down and analyze myself, feel remorse for the things I have done and look where I was headed. Not only that - it also caused me to think about where I wanted to go in life and how I could best utilize the opportunities offered by TDCJ. It has been a humbling experience as well as a hard one, but this was exactly what I needed.

I hope to give back to TDCJ in a way that will inspire and encourage others to get on the right path and do something positive with their time; to show them, with my story, that change is possible. I know what change is, and I know that it must first start within me. The programs that TDCJ offer are the seeds of change. They give men and women who are withered and dying a chance to grow and blossom into their full potential. I do not consider this time as "wasted" - not at all. It has been a time for me to learn from my mistakes and grow to become the best person I can be.

The opportunity of freedom you have given me is truly a gift of life in many forms. I thank you with every ounce of strength I have in my body and soul. I hope that one day you will see my success and know in your heart you made the right decision. I will repay you with my actions and hopefully encourage the next man to take the first step in the right direction.

Thank you so much. ★

The world ends

2019 Writing Contest Finalist

Eva Shelton, Contributing Writer, Crain Unit

Today the world ended. Wait...that's not right.

The world ended long ago, seemingly ages ago, but truly only a month ago. It's my world that ended today. There are worlds within worlds that spin around this planet. We are a galaxy and each of us has a solar system and now I have a black hole in my galaxy, in my system, on this planet — my world ended today.

My son died.

Funeral pyres burn across the city, the nation and the world. If you look from outer space you would see them — fiery, twinkling stars burning on a planet. I tossed his body in the flames. We burn the dead; the living are too weak to bury them. There's no room anyway. You grow used to the sound, the wailing, the horrid stench of decay, but the emptiness is unnerving. Empty streets, empty houses, market shelves stripped bare. The looters have been looted. The specter of death has been cloned; people see him standing everywhere.

There's no ice for the burn on my hand, the skin is red and puckered. Infection may set in, but what does it matter? Yes, I tossed his body in, but I didn't tell you I reached for him. I tried to pull him back. He was too far in, too far gone. They say his spirit had already caught the wind, but that's something inside. Something you're told but can't see. What I could see

was my son gone, being taken away from me. Someone pulled me back. "Let it be," they said. And the song played in my head.

I told him how to stay safe. I drilled it into him.

I told him, told him, told him!

"Do not never ever, not even for a second, go outside the door without wearing your netting!" Your superhero suit we called it. He was "Goalie," I was "Three Point." It was the netting. We were champions, companions, sidekicks. Oh, God, I can't fight alone! He'd looked at me with those big brown shiny doe eyes. He'd nod his head.

He understood. Of course he did, he was smarter than any kid I knew. Always listening, watching and paying attention. He nodded and went right back to playing with his cars. I forgot kids do not listen. They know, but they forget, can't be bothered and let the information slip. I fell asleep. If only I stayed awake or woke up sooner. Hindsight's 20/20. I killed my son in my sleep. There's a sign across the street that used to blaze, but now it sits cold and covered in soot. "This is an act of god," it reads in black ash letters. "Sinners will be punished!" another reads in words spray painted in red heavy paint that's dripped.

He went outside just for a second. He wanted his ball. I heard the screen door slam. I jumped out of bed, ran down the hall, tripped over his interlock blocks and screamed

his name. I was up again running. I opened the door, and he darted back in, smiling, ball in hand.

"Morning mommy!" he said. I quickly shut the door and bolted it back. I scanned the air. Nothing. I listened. Only silence. The sound of his breath, my heart, and the blood rushing through my body. He continued and I saw it on his back: a tiny black dot. Without thinking, I slapped it. I slapped him and a little red bloodied dot on his shoulder — the bull's eye that was readied for the blow-dart of fate.

I fell down and cried; great sobbing heaves that shuddered violently through my body. I pinned him to the floor, sucked at the invisible spot on his back. You could suck out rattle snake venom, so surely this would work too. How many had tried? And then I cried, because still like my boy, they died. There were two to 14 days for the symptoms to appear. I watched him like a hawk stalking prey. I knew it was too late to be watching him like that now. I should've done it before.

I prayed, I bled, I fasted, I begged, I suffered, but God had already answered my neglect. It was as if He refused to give me one thing in exchange for everything I could think of. I promised it all, laid my life down for the sacrifice — but no. At night by precious candlelight I'd check him; I'd touch him and wake up to see if my hero was okay.

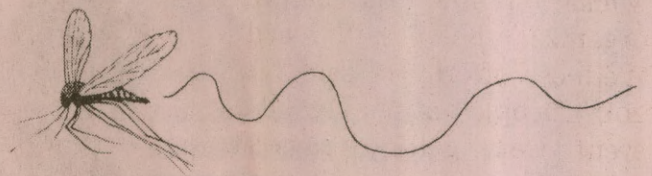
"Two to 14 days" they said, and I

couldn't even get the full 14. I got to three and the fever hit. It was followed by the headache, and then a rash covered his body on the fourth day. By the seventh day, when he rested, his breath became dry and raspy. On Day 13, the day of reckoning, evil and mourning, on that fated day of recollection, I bundled up a lifeless body, slipped into my superhero suit, and spirited my "goalie" into the flames.

There were no prayers to be said because the world had ended. A plague swept the planet and sought to obliterate everyone. It was a man-made act of God.

They released the mosquitos and told us they were sterile. The man in the white coat explained how diseases mutate.

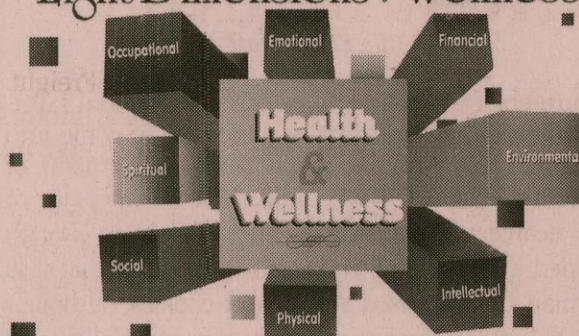
"We can't kill it" he said, "but we can try to stop it." He didn't know that it wasn't the disease that mutated. It was the insects themselves. Scientists released them; we picked up the disease, the insects bred, and their ladies fed. These tiny black dots sought to wipe the world clean. It's not the Ice Age. This is their age, and soon we will either die from infection, starvation or some other man-made act of God. Tomorrow, I will return to the pyre, scoop a handful of ashes and carry them back home. I will not wear my netting. I'm no superhero, not even a side kick, now that my hero was gone. ★



Introducing new DIMENSIONS of health awareness for all TDCJ residents and staff

Bryan J. Moore, ECHO Staff

Eight Dimensions of Wellness



The meaning of health in the state's institutional environment has taken on a fresh focus. The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and Windham School District (WSD) have embraced a progressive strategy to enable resident rehabilitation through a conceptual framework called The Eight Dimensions of Wellness Program.

As the name Eight Dimensions implies, the path to wellness entails addressing an individual's needs in the eight aspects of a healthy life:

- **Emotional:** Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships.
- **Financial:** Satisfaction with current and future financial situations.
- **Social:** Developing a sense of connection, belonging and a well-developed support system.
- **Spiritual:** Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life.
- **Occupational:** Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work.
- **Physical:** Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep and nutrition.
- **Intellectual:** Recognizing creative abilities; finding ways to expand knowledge and skills.
- **Environmental:** Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.

The program concentrates on conveying information and awareness of how residents and staff can

attain wellness by concentrating on these eight areas of their lives. Mere information, though, is not the only thing the program is designed to do.

Every month there is a dimensional focus chosen from one of the eight dimensions, as well as a scheduled activity implemented statewide by unit Health and Wellness coordinators. These events include domino, chess, checkers and Scrabble tournaments, along with more physically-challenging events such as handball, basketball, and volleyball tournaments, and other fitness activities. In addition, unit coordinators are permitted and encouraged to be creative and implement other events besides the ones required by the program, allowing them to develop a continuously changing series of activities.

Staff involvement

The Health and Wellness agenda has a broader aim than just the incarcerated; the unit Health and Wellness coordinator is also responsible for planning and implementing activities for staff. The objective is to promote good health for everyone in TDCJ with the objective of fostering a healthy environment which encourages rehabilitation and personal productivity (see William Hill's "Fit for Life" feature in this issue).

New 'Dimensions'

In future issues, this section of The ECHO will be called "Dimensions" and will feature unit Health and Wellness reports from across the system and information about that month's specific dimensional focus.

The purpose of dimensional focal points is to help residents contemplate how a specific dimension applies to their lives and their well-being. To illustrate this point, consider that the dimensional focal point for the month of February is the spiritual dimension. The ECHO reports that The Chopra Center cites the following as five benefits of spirituality:

1. Stronger immune system
2. Lower risk of depression
3. Reduced stress
4. Lower blood pressure
5. Better sleep

While these are definitely benefits anyone could use, especially those in prison, they do not explain

what spirituality is. Reverend Jonathan Scott, chaplain at Day Kimball Hospital explains it like this: "The word 'spirituality' is used to describe the way people relate to something or someone bigger than themselves, how they relate to their neighbors and *how they relate to themselves* (emphasis mine). Out of these webs of relationships, people find meaning in their lives." Rev. Scott also lists three simple goals for a healthy spiritual life:

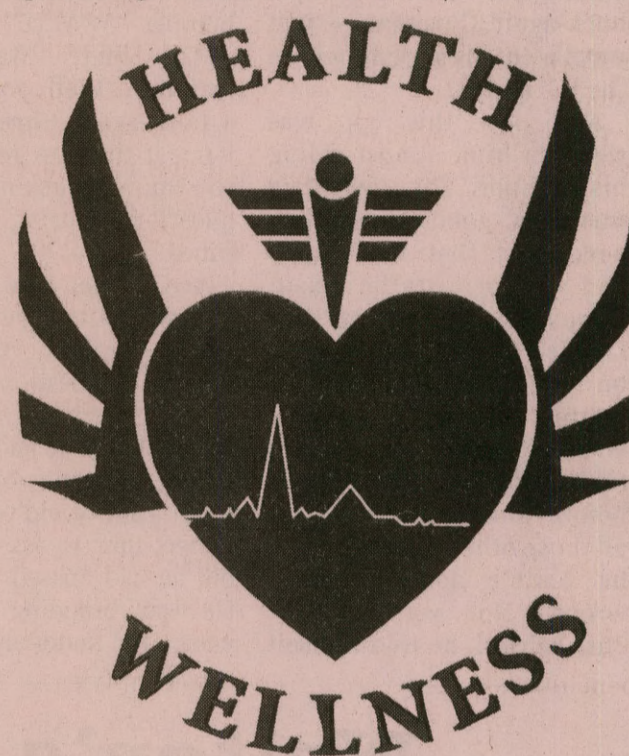
1. Live with gratitude
2. Live with integrity
3. Be forgiving.

The Eight Dimensions of Health and Wellness concept is not a gimmick. Through careful meditation on the monthly dimensional focus and participation in the Health and Wellness activities on your unit, this game plan benefits anyone who chooses to use it as a road to a healthier and happier life. ★

Sources:

<https://chopra.com/articles/5-physical-health-benefits-of-spirituality>

<https://www.daykimball.org/the-role-of-spirituality-in-health-and-wellness/>



Rebounds and Rehabilitation

Wynne Unit hosts first Man Up Basketball Tournament

Bryan J. Moore, ECHO Staff

The Wynne Unit recently held its inaugural Man Up Basketball Tournament and, for the first time on the unit, residents could participate as both players and spectators. They also served as referees, coaches and timekeepers. The spectacle of soaring bodies and constructive sports entertainment had an immediate positive impact on the residents.

"The atmosphere at the basketball game was absolutely exactly what we want," said WSD's Michael White, who helped organize the Health and Wellness effort. He said the 200 people attending the event were getting physical, spiritual, emotional and social interaction. "This is a very healthy atmosphere," he said.

The tournament was carried out under the direction of R. Gipson, Wynne Unit Health and Wellness coordinator. The tournament was held in the context of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) and Windham School District's (WSD) Health and Wellness agenda, a system-wide initiative which emphasizes eight dimensions of health and wellness. The eight dimensions are: social health, financial health, emotional health, physical health, intellectual health, environmental health, occupational health and spiritual health.

"These types of events teach self-respect and sportsmanship. They build character in a family-gathering atmosphere," Gipson said.

"It was a wonderful turnout and I hope there's more to come," J. Gilbert, resident and coach of team Squad Up, said.

"I give the administration two thumbs up for being so progressive," J. Clemons, resident and tournament referee said.

The positive energy was also felt by staff.

"I have never seen anything like this on this unit in my life," Officer D. Bookman said.

Basketball is a very simple sport. All that is required to play is a ball, a hoop and a level surface. What elevates basketball beyond

being merely a game to something greater are the stakes, the underlying reasons that motivate people to play. For professional players, basketball is a means of attaining athletic fame and fortune. For the men of the Wynne Unit, basketball has become a vehicle for rehabilitation and social well-being.

"Tournament style basketball introduces many players to structure and discipline. It forces them to practice conflict resolution and learn adherence to rules and regulations," said resident and coach of The Great Eight, J. McClendon.

A vital aspect of basketball is the rebound. To get a rebound is to regain possession of the ball after a failed shot attempt. The essential dynamics of rehabilitation are very similar. To rehabilitate means undertaking the task of restoring one's life after having failed. It also means developing the skills and attitudes that must be acquired to make good on the next shot.

"Through participating in this kind of activity, residents learn how to lead by example, whether as a coach, a referee, a player or a member of the audience," Gipson said.

"Playing in front of a crowd makes it fun," resident and audience participant B. Edwards said.

Playing in front of spectators was apparently a lot of fun for McClendon's team, The Great Eight, who emerged as first-place winners.

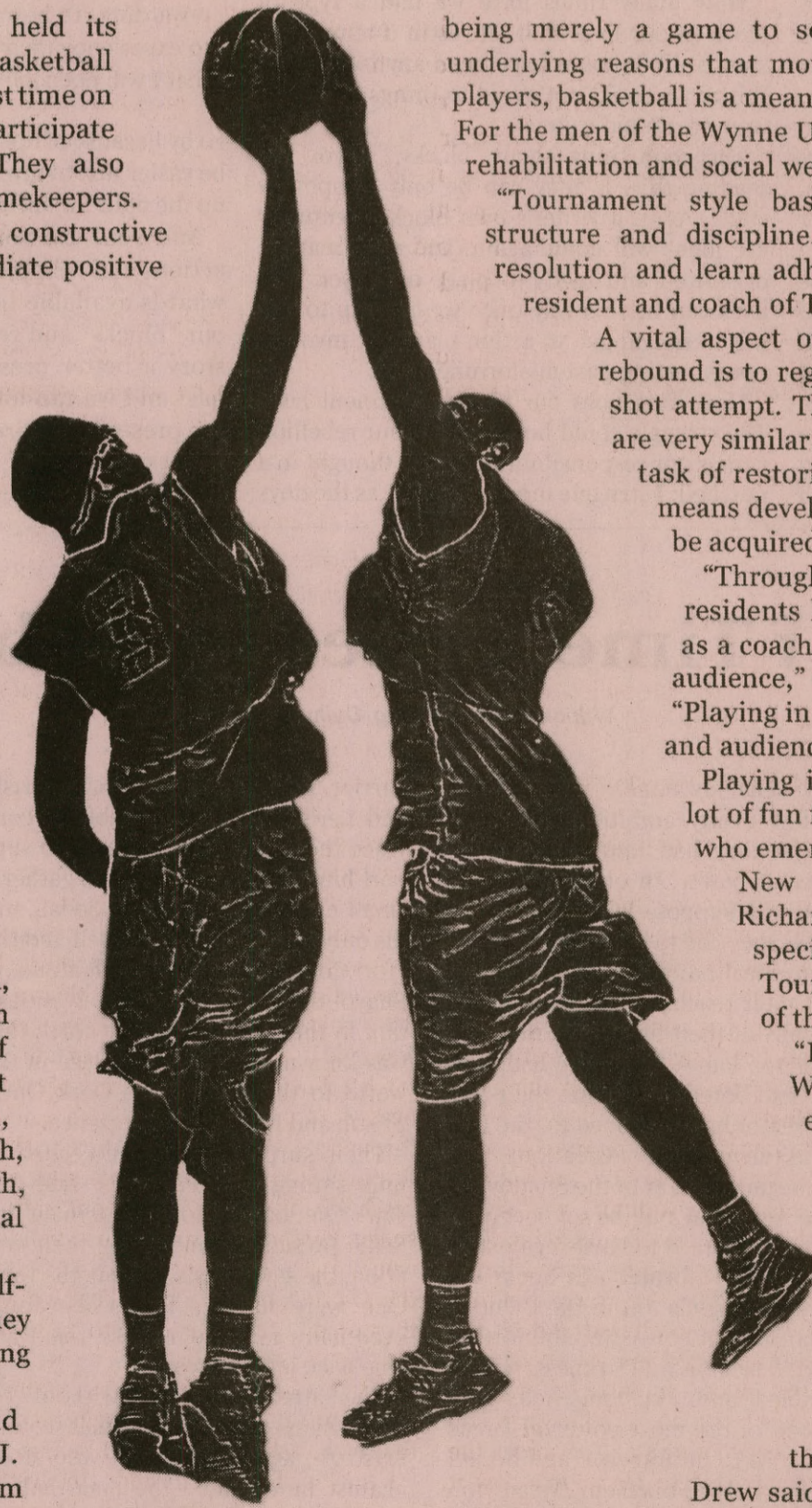
New Health and Wellness Administrator Richard Drew Jr. emphasizes that more special events such as the Man Up Basketball Tournament will take place in TDCJ as part of the initiative.

"I'm really excited to lead the Health and Wellness initiative being implemented at each unit. It is a prime chance to impact our resident population – not only from an education standpoint, but also from a health and well-being standpoint.

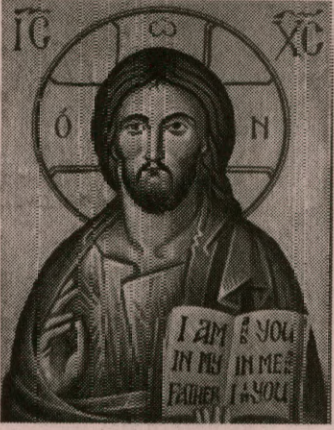
"Through the education and activities of the eight dimensions of wellness, I know that each and every resident will have the opportunity to focus on aspects of their life through a different set of lenses,"

Drew said. "I encourage residents to please get involved with their respective unit activities being offered by our unit coordinators and always ask questions to extend their participation."

True team basketball is not possible without assists, a critical component where one player sets up another to succeed. An officially recognized assist occurs when one player passes the ball to a teammate and that teammate makes the shot. Health and Wellness activities, such as the Man Up Basketball Tournament, are giving TDCJ residents a rehabilitative assist. ★



WWJD



The police lights were flashing in his rearview mirror – déjà vu on a nightmarish scale. Mario Sanchez had only been out of prison for a month, and he was already driving around with a brand-new set of burglary tools. His search for legitimate work had been futile, if not a joke. He had filled out applications all over Houston, but no one had bothered to call him back for an interview. Mario had come to the sad realization that an ex-convict – even if he was a born-again Christian – just wasn't in high demand on the job market.

And now this cop was right on him, almost riding his bumper. This definitely wasn't a good sign. They never did that when they had you for a traffic ticket; it was always because they smelled a felony and were on the hunt. Mario's first instinct was to hit the gas and make a run for it, just as he had done so many times before. But this wasn't like all those other times because he hadn't done anything wrong. Not yet, anyway. Just be cool, he told himself

as he pulled over to the side of the road.

Mario's car didn't have a functioning AC system to help fight off the relentless Texas summer heat, so he sat there sweating as he watched the biggest cop he'd ever seen walk toward his car. If things went wrong and it came to a showdown, Mario knew he was a goner for sure. The cop looked like he ate bricks and nails for snacks. And suddenly that instinct to hit the gas came back to Mario like a long-lost friend.

"What would Jesus do?" the cop deadpanned when he got to the car window.

This was the last thing that Mario had expected to hear. He had been expecting something more along the line of "Get out of the car with your hands up!" or "Freeze, don't move!" Things like that – stuff he was used to hearing.

The monolithic cop saw the perplexed look on Mario's face and said, "The sticker on your bumper – WWJD?"

"Oh, that," Mario said, relieved. "Well, you see, I'm a born-again Christian, and I put it there to remind me, you know, to ask myself that question during difficult times."

And it was only then that Mario realized he had not asked himself that very important question when he became frustrated with his job search, when he had spent the last of his money on burglary tools. That would've been the perfect time to ask "WWJD?" but he had missed it entirely. He was brooding over this when he suddenly realized

that the cop was crying.

Mario was really confused now. There he was; an ex-convict with burglary tools in his possession and an oversized cop crying next to his car.

"Are you okay?" he asked, as he got out of his car to see what he could do to help.

The cop wiped the tears from his face and looked at Mario.

"What would Jesus do if the wife He loved was about to leave Him and take His kids with her so she could be with another man?" he asked solemnly. "I really need an answer on this because I'm thinking about ending it all if she leaves."

Mario no longer saw a cop standing in front of him. He saw a fellow Christian brother going through a difficult time.

And without even thinking about it, Mario already knew the answer to his question.

Traffic on the road slowed to a crawl as people were taking in a very peculiar sight: a cop the size of a professional wrestler and another man on their knees praying on the side of the road. Many of them were taking pictures and getting videos with their cell phones, immediately posting them on the Internet.

One of the videos of this unusual sight quickly went off and made the evening news. A woman who was almost finished packing her suitcases happened to look at the TV and saw her husband, her gentle giant, on the screen. Tears streamed down her face as she got on her knees and started praying. ★

Kairos steward reaps rewards by serving others

William Hill, ECHO Staff

Volunteers from Kairos, a nondenominational faith-based organization, sacrifice their time to come into various units throughout the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) to proclaim the message of God's love to incarcerated individuals. Those fortunate enough to have attended a Kairos weekend in the past know that it is much more than home-cooked meals and cookies (although there are a lot of both); it is a lesson in the value of humility and service to others.

Like most individuals incarcerated within TDCJ, I did not get in here due to my philanthropic proclivities. In fact, for the vast majority of my life, I never stopped to consider how my actions could benefit another human being. Instead, I focused only on how I could use that person for my own personal gains. An attitude of selfishness and greed reigned supreme in my egocentric frame of mind and ruled almost all my interactions with others. Sadly, through my inconsiderate and uncharitable exploits I burned many bridges with people who, for some unfathomable reason, actually cared about me. Yet, in November 2015, the unit chaplain selected me, along with 41 others, to attend a four-day event that would change my life in ways I could never have foreseen.

After spending more years in prison than I care to think about, I am acutely aware that people in here will say anything you want to hear if it helps them get what they want. The adage that "No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care" is one of the most prevalent mindsets among members of the incarcerated population. The opportunity to spend significant amounts of time with a group of men who did not know or care about my past but only wanted to tell me that God had not forgotten or given up on me was a message I desperately wanted to believe was true, but I was skeptical.

In the end, it was not the volunteers' flowery speeches or touching presentations that convinced me of their sincerity – it was their conduct. I witnessed the acts of people actively putting the creeds of their faith into action and, after all, we all know actions speak louder than words.

Since that time, I have been active in Kairos' weekly prayer-and-share meetings and the monthly reunions where I am continually amazed at the number of people who willingly and joyfully come into prison to spend time with a bunch of convicted felons. Almost four years after attending my Kairos walk, I was honored to serve for the first time as a steward during the latest Kairos weekend on the Wynne Unit.

Waking up hours before dawn and going to sleep well past sundown with almost nonstop activity in between was not what I had imagined stewardship would be, but through this I learned that the real mission of Kairos lies in giving back. Preparing the tables before the participants arrived every morning, pouring beaucoup cups of coffee and lemonade and, of course, handing out cookies was a lot of work, but also very rewarding. To be a small part of an event that allowed others to experience their own encounter with God was something that I will not soon forget. ★

go by because of the dyslexia, but I will not let it stop me. It can be easier just to give up, yet it is more profitable for us to keep up the fight for success and victory.

And you? Do you leave the realm of "stuck on stupid" actions and rebellion and move into responsibility by using what is available to us to better ourselves? Let's get rid of our "blocks" and rewrite our story. Let us work to give our story a better present and future. We cannot change the past and we cannot control the future, yet we can work on the present, our present, a gift, a second chance that WILL affect our future.

How are you going to write your story? ★

Writer's block

Robert Fridell, Contributing Writer — Telford Unit

As the darkness begins to fall on another day, my mind begins to churn with ideas. For the past few months, as I've had little time to sit and write, I've run into what we writers deem "writer's block." This is a very harsh place to be for anyone wishing to put their thoughts to paper.

It seems like it should be easy enough to just write them down. Sometimes, the ideas are good and you begin to place them down, only to have way too many thoughts. At other times, you just go blank.

As for myself, I've struggled with these things lately, as well as a rough touch of dyslexia. Family history says that I had it most of my life, but I really did not feel like I started having problems with it until a car accident in 1994. I suffered head trauma from a telephone pole to the left side of my brain. What followed included attitude changes and actions, as well

as seizures and, yes, a touch of dyslexia. So, this stuff comes and goes. The dyslexia is more prominent when I am typing or playing the piano at chapel.

How many times have we had a type of block in our lives that left us in a temporary standstill? It could have been anything, from things we could not avoid to things on which we were stupidly stuck.

The good thing about "blocks," if you are reading this, is they can be only temporary stalls. As in a writer's own block, eventually the ideas will come again, and they may be organized and ready to place on paper. Our lives can be this way once we own up to our mistakes and get an action plan that involves not repeating past misfortunes.

How long does our blocked moment last? The struggle could boil down to our rebellion versus our responsibilities. Just a thought in a nutshell: I struggle more and more as the days

Book series review:

'The Wheel of Time' series by Robert Jordan

William "Shaun" Young, Dalhart Unit

Saidin and Saidar are the male and female halves of the True Source, the power that has driven the Wheel of Time since it was first set to turning out the pattern of the universe by the Creator. A few blessed – or cursed – people can be taught to sense and channel the One Power, and even fewer are born with the spark; the ability is inborn, and they will eventually channel, whether they wish to or not.

Three thousand years ago, during the Age of Legends, those who could channel were the governors of the nations of the world and were called "Aes Sedai," which meant "servants of all" in the old tongue. They routinely used their ability to heal the sick and injured while developing methods to feed any who were hungry. The higher sciences flourished, and praise was given to the Creator for the abundances of life. It was a utopian society, and everyone was happy.

Not everyone was satisfied with happiness, however. Some Aes Sedai hungered for more than sustenance; they craved power and had no desire to share it. The greatest wonders of the world were created by men and women blending the two halves of the True Source in order to achieve what they were unable to do separately. Yet some thought there must be a way to accom-

plish such feats alone.

A few overly ambitious Aes Sedai thought they had found just such a source of power. In order to gain access to this supposedly superior power source, they had to bore a hole through the mystical barrier which kept it beyond their reach. With the new power finally at their fingertips, they realized – too late – what they had done. They had bored a hole into the prison the Creator had fashioned for the Dark One at the moment of Creation.

So began the War of the Shadow.

The Aes Sedai and the soldiers of the Light were forced to battle against the Dreadlords – former Aes Sedai who swore their souls to the Dark One for the promise of power and immortality – and the legions of Darkness. Nations crumbled and kingdoms fell, while thirteen of the most powerful Dreadlords rose to prominence and became known as "The Forsaken." Meanwhile, heroes rose amongst the armies of the Light to oppose to the Forsaken.

Lews Therin Telamon was the greatest of these heroes, and he devised a plan to defeat the Forsaken and the armies of the Night by sealing the hole in the Dark One's prison and containing the power of the Dark One inside for all eternity using seven seals fashioned with the True Source as a new

barrier. The plan was not without risk, and Lews Therin was unable to convince the Hall of the Servants to support him. He was only able to gather a small number of male Aes Sedai, and his only choice was for himself and the "100 Companions" to march alone on Shayol Ghul. This was a lonely mountain in the blight of the far north that was known as the closest place in the world to the hole in the Dark One's prison and his physical presence.

Their surprise attack succeeded in imprisoning the Forsaken and the Dark One but without the female Aes Sedai present to lend aid in their creation, the seven seals holding the Dark One were flawed. The seals would eventually fail and release the Dark One back into the world.

The attack was not without repercussions. The Dark One's counter stroke against the men who stood against him tainted the male half of the True Source, and instantly drove Lews Therin and his 100 Companions completely insane. From that day forward, any man who could channel the One Power was doomed to the fate of insanity and a wasting death due to the taint of the Dark One.

The end of the War of the Shadow also ended the Age of Legends and began the Time of Madness and the

Breaking of the World. The most powerful male Aes Sedai were now insane, and their destruction of the world was complete as more and more men who could channel were also driven mad.

During the Age of Legends and the War of the Shadow, Lews Therin Telamon was considered the greatest Aes Sedai of all, and held the Tamyrlin Seat in the Hall of the Servants for many years. He had many titles but was most known throughout the world as "The Dragon." After he was driven insane by the Dark One's counter stroke, he killed everyone in the world who he loved or carried even a drop of his blood. He became known for all time by a different name: Lews Therin Kinslayer.

But prophecy says he will be reborn. In the time of our greatest need, the Dragon will, once again, bring about our destruction – and our salvation. The Dark One means to destroy the Wheel of Time itself and with it all of existence, but a boy is born who can channel. Doomed from birth to go mad and destroy everything around him, he must grow from a simple shepherd, to a king, to the savior of all mankind. Prophecy says that he is our only hope and that "His blood on the rocks of Shayol Ghul" is the only thing that can save us.

Let the Dragon ride again on the Winds of Time! ★



'Texas Flood' New Stevie Ray Vaughan bio pays homage to guitar great

John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

The rock n' roll universe is constellated with an abundance of shining stars. Chuck Berry, Elvis Presley, Jimi Hendrix, Carlos Santana, Eric Clapton, Tom Petty and all of the Beatles are a few of the notable luminaries. Such musicians have the uncanny ability to pierce the heart of the listener, lift us during a downhearted time or infuse us with renewed energy. Stevie Ray Vaughan's music also embodies this power.

Fresh off the press is a riveting Vaughan biography called "Texas Flood: The Inside Story of Stevie Ray Vaughan" by authors Alan Paul and Andy Aledort. The authors, both veteran music journalists, paint an intimate portrait of the guitar hero.

Through a series of exclusive interviews, the authors depict Vaughan's passage from an adolescent music aficionado in Dallas to universal guitar god. Family, friends and fellow musicians extol Vaughan's talent via quote and epilogue, and a clear picture of his dynamic and hyper-industrious character emerges from the pages. "Texas Flood" is also interspersed with many historical photographs of Vaughan that create a scintillating effect akin to watching an interview-based television documentary.

Stephen Ray Vaughan (Stevie) was born in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas in 1954, to working-class parents. Musical talent pervaded his household: his older brother, Jimmie, and a pair of uncles were avid guitarists, and some of Bob Wills' Texas Playboys frequented their Dallas home. This early exposure to musicianship deeply influenced Vaughan and his older brother, shaping a competitive rivalry between the brothers that lasted, literally, a lifetime.

"I got my first guitar when I was seven," Stevie said. "It was one of those Roy Rogers guitars; it had pictures of cowboys and cows on it."

His brother Jimmie thrived first as a guitar virtuoso

and went on to form the Fabulous Thunderbirds. Stevie, on the other hand, proved more open to experimentation, embracing various influences such as Jimi Hendrix and the pulse and rhythm of rock-infused blues.

"The blues always sounded more like the 'real thing' than anything else," Stevie said.

Vaughan attended an arts program at Southern Methodist University for gifted students, but he dropped out in order to play music full time. A move to Austin at the age of 17 precipitated his entrée into the music scene. Soon, obsession transformed

him into a wraithlike figure: Vaughan began to haunt blues clubs, leading an itinerant lifestyle that led to spending nights on floors of abandoned buildings. He earned money for guitar strings and other accessories by collecting and recycling empty bottles. However, his persistence paid off in the end: Vaughan was picked up by various local Austin bands, such as Cobra and Nightcrawlers.

Yet, recognition outside of Austin continued to elude him, and it was not until the formation of bands Triple Threat and Double Trouble that Vaughan established himself as a musician of significance. Renowned

musicians like Mick Jagger, David Bowie and Jackson Browne took note of Vaughan's growing talent. In fact, Bowie invited Vaughan to play lead guitar on his album Let's Dance and asked him to join his 1983 world tour. Vaughan's fame immediately soared. Later that year, he signed with CBS/Epic Records and recorded his debut album, Texas Flood.

Rave reviews rained down on Vaughan, and his songs raced up the charts riding a tidal wave of positive critical response and massive radio airplay. Numerous awards came his way, such as the North American Rock Radio Awards Favorite Debut Album and Guitar Player Magazine Reader's Polls voted him Best New Talent and Best Electric Blues Guitarist for 1983. Vaughan and his band became consistent nominees and winners of the Austin Chronicle Music Awards. At the National Blues Foundation Awards in 1984, Vaughan became the first white man to win Entertainer of the Year and Blues Instrumentalist of the Year. All of Vaughan's albums went gold, winning four

Grammy Awards.

Prestige and success came with the highest price: a lifestyle glutted with excess and depravity. The authors do not shy away from Vaughan's penchant for drugs and alcohol, which was just as ravenous as his passion for music. Vaughan's abuse of amphetamines and cocaine would threaten to destroy him, rendering him incoherent and listless for days, all the while fiercely gripping his favorite guitar, Number One.

In 1986, his addictions culminated into a near-death experience during a tour in Germany, and Vaughan resolved to get clean and sober. He checked himself into a rehab center and left the hospital committed to a twelve-step program of wellness and sobriety.

"I know that everything is better now," Stevie said, after getting sober.

His renewed sense of purpose, coupled with his determination to remain sober, inspired a heightened level of musical ability. Soaring, knife-sharp leads and muted, introspected riffs imbue Vaughan's final albums, Family Style and In Step. And according to musical experts, this phase in Vaughan's career is considered his most brilliant.

Vaughan died in a helicopter crash traveling to Chicago after a concert in Wisconsin in 1990. More than 1,500 people attended his memorial service in Dallas, where his body now rests. The city of Austin erected a statue in his honor, located on Town Lake (now Lady Bird Lake), near the site of his last Austin concert.

"I'm still amazed at the impact Stevie had and still has to this day," said Jimmie, Stevie's brother. "I believe it's because of the purity and simplicity of his message: find out what you love and do it. That's the message he was sending out into the world."

At the heart of "Texas Flood" is Stevie's near 30-year absence from the world. We as readers feel the crushing weight of his loss. Thus, the book is its own kind of blues: poignant, therapeutic and real. ★

Prestige and success came with the highest price: a lifestyle glutted with excess and depravity.

Sources:

Texas Flood: The Inside Story of Stevie Ray Vaughan by Alan Paul and Andy Aledort

Texas Observer, Aug. 10, 2019: <https://www.texasobserver.org>

The New Handbook of Texas; vol. 6; Sp to Z; 2016

Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking System

**House Bill 281
Government Code 420.034**

On Sept. 1, 2019, the Texas Department of Public Safety implemented a statewide electronic tracking system to track the status of forensic medical kits at a health care facility, a law enforcement agency or at an accredited crime laboratory.

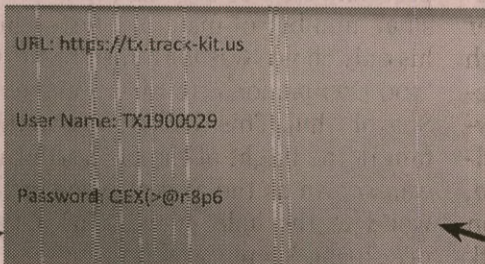
This tracking system will:

- Track the status and location of each item of forensic evidence collected during a Sexual Assault investigation through various stages of the criminal justice process.
- Allow entities involved in the handling of the evidence update and track the status and location of evidence.
- Allow survivors to anonymously track or receive updates on the status of evidence.

How it works:

The health care facility/local hospital that conducts the forensic medical exam will provide the survivor with a Survivor Card containing the web address, a generic user ID and temporary password to access the status of the kit. The Survivor Card:

- Is plain and discreet.
- Contains no identifying information.
- Is the size of a business card.
- Requires the password to be changed at first login.



Survivor information:

- Track-Kit (<https://tx.track-kit.us>) is a web-based system you can access at any time using any internet connection.
- Seek the help of a trusted friend or family member to anonymously access the status of the kit and provide you with updates.
- If you have not received information pertaining to the forensic evidence and **do not** have family or friends to help, contact the **PREA Ombudsman Office** confidentially, in writing, to request a status check of the evidence collected.

Requesting status checks through PREA Ombudsman Office:

- Requests **will not** be accepted from anyone other than the victim of the alleged sexual assault.
- Requests must include your name, the date, time and location of the incident, along with the username and password from the Survivor Card received after the forensic exam.
- Responses from the PREA Ombudsman Office will **ONLY** be provided to the victim and no one else, including family and friends. ★

**PREA OMBUDSMAN OFFICE
P.O. BOX 99
HUNTSVILLE, TX 77342-0099**

Sistema de Rastreo de Evidencia de Asalto Sexual

**Proyecto de Ley 281
Código de Gobierno 420.034**

En Sept. 1, 2019, el Departamento de Seguridad Pública implementó en todo el estado, un sistema de seguimiento electrónico para rastrear el estatus de los equipos médicos forenses en un centro de atención médica, agencia de aplicación de la ley, o en un laboratorio acreditado de la delincuencia.

Este sistema de seguimiento:

- Rastrear el estatus y ubicación de cada artículo de evidencia forense recogida durante una investigación por Asalto Sexual a través de las diversas etapas del proceso de justicia penal,
- Permitirá a las entidades involucradas en el manejo de la evidencia actualizar y dar seguimiento al estatus y a la ubicación de evidencia, y
- Permitirá a los sobrevivientes para que anónimamente den seguimiento o reciban actualizaciones del estatus de evidencia.

Aquí es cómo:

El centro de atención médica/hospital local que efectúa el examen médico forense proporcionará al sobreviviente con una tarjeta conteniendo la dirección electrónica, una ID de usuario genérica-user name y una contraseña temporal-password para tener acceso al estatus del kit. La información en la tarjeta es:

- Sencilla y discreta.
- No contiene información de identificación.
- Es del tamaño de una tarjeta de negocios.
- Requiere que la contraseña sea cambiada al iniciar la primera sesión.

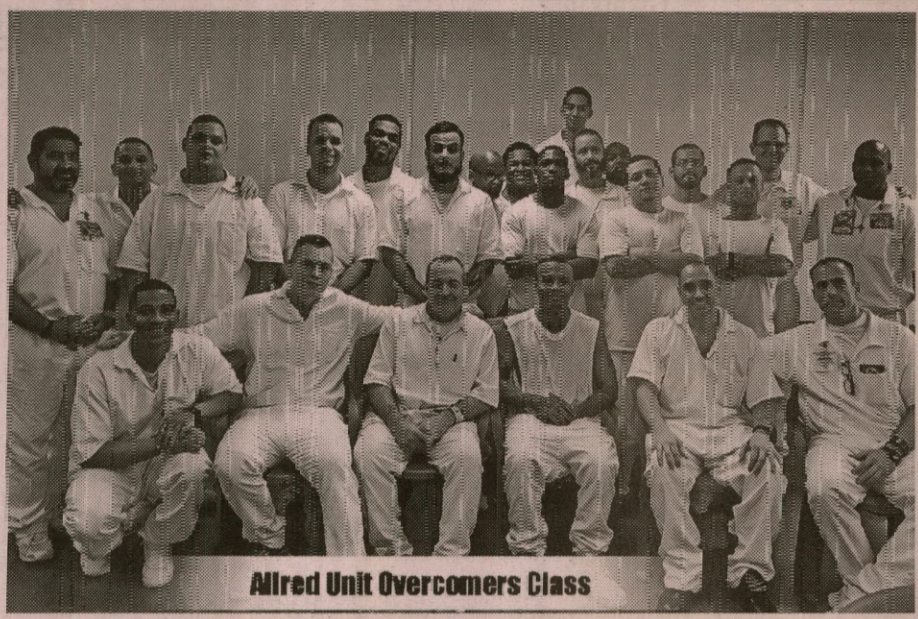
Información de Sobreviviente:

- El Rastreo de Kit es un sistema basado en internet al que se puede acceder desde cualquier lugar con una conexión 24/7 de internet en <https://tx.track-kit.us>.
- Buscar el apoyo de un amigo confiable o familiar para acceder de forma anónima al estatus del kit y le proporcione con las actualizaciones.
- Si usted no ha recibido información pertinente a la evidencia forense **Y no** tiene familia o amigos para ayudarlo, usted puede contactar confidencialmente la **Oficina Ombudsman PREA** por escrito, para solicitar una revisión del estatus de la evidencia recogida.

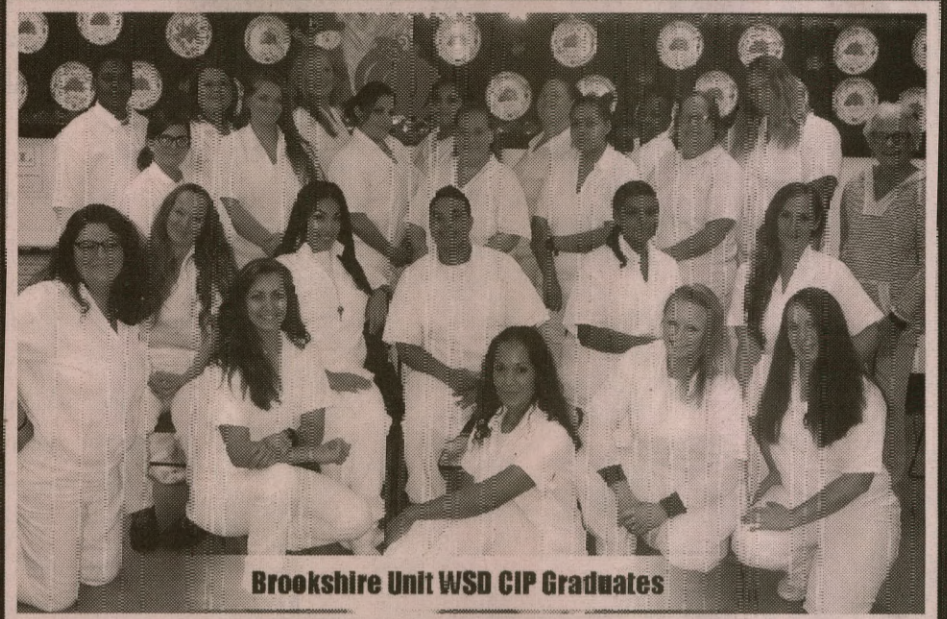
Solicitando revisión del estatus a través de la Oficina Ombudsman PERA:

- Solicitudes **no serán** aceptadas de alguien que no sea la víctima del presunto asalto sexual.
 - Las solicitudes deben incluir su nombre; fecha, hora y lugar del incidente; y el nombre del usuario-user name y la contraseña-password en la Tarjeta de Sobreviviente recibida después del examen forense.
 - Las respuestas de la Oficina Ombudsman PREA serán **ÚNICAMENTE** proporcionadas a la víctima y a nadie más, incluyendo familiares y amigos. ★

TDCJ & Windham Bulletin Board



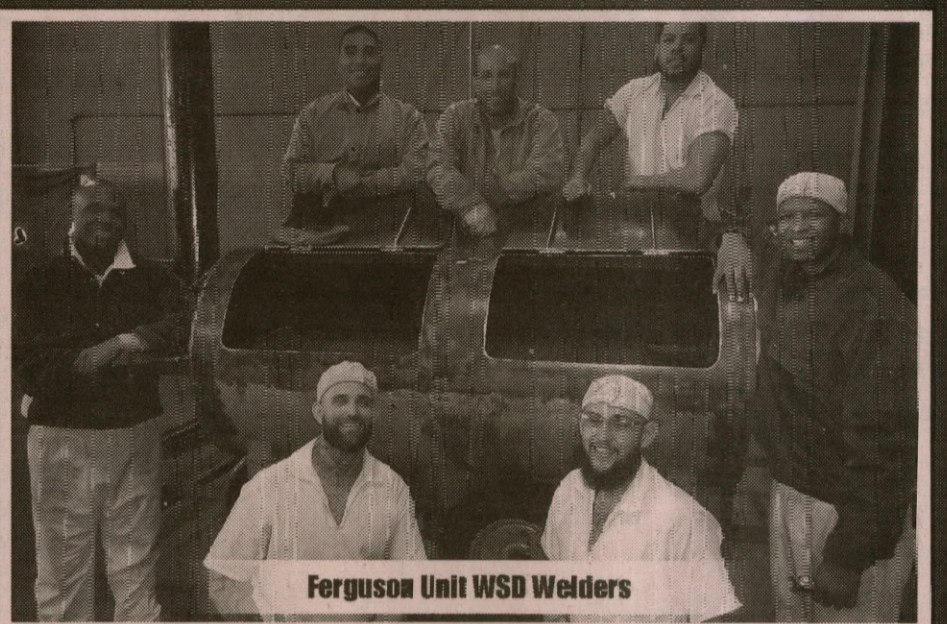
Allred Unit Overcomers Class



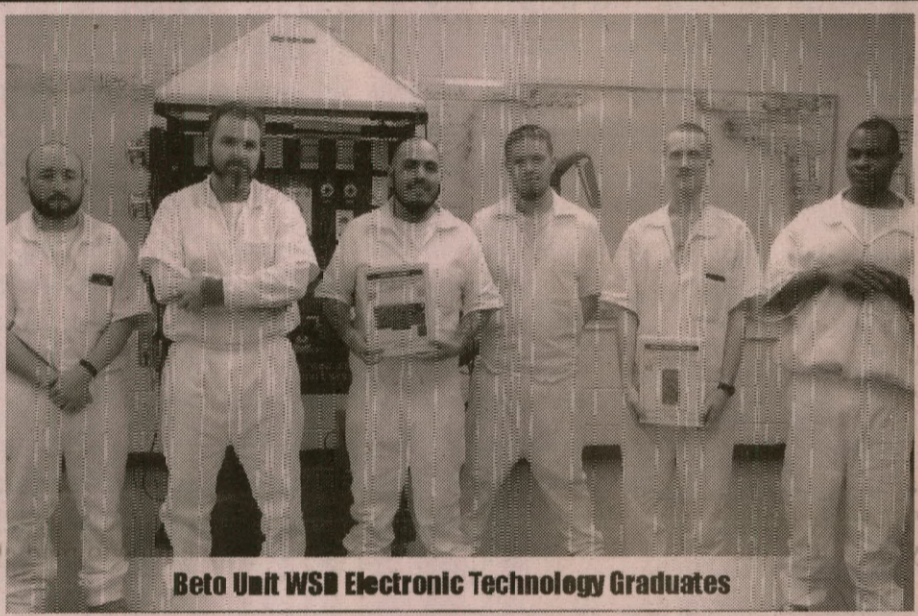
Brookshire Unit WSD CIP Graduates



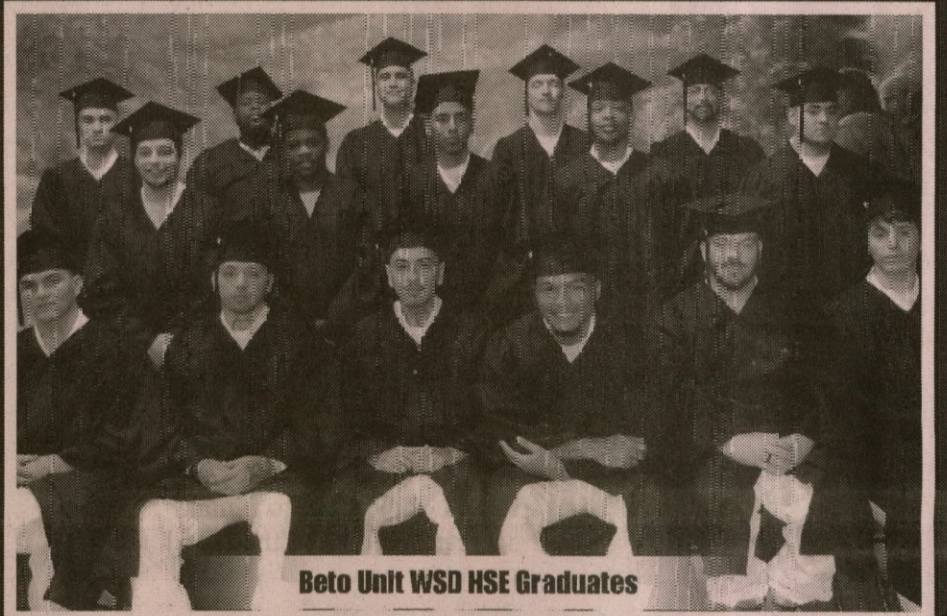
McConnell Unit WSD Graduates



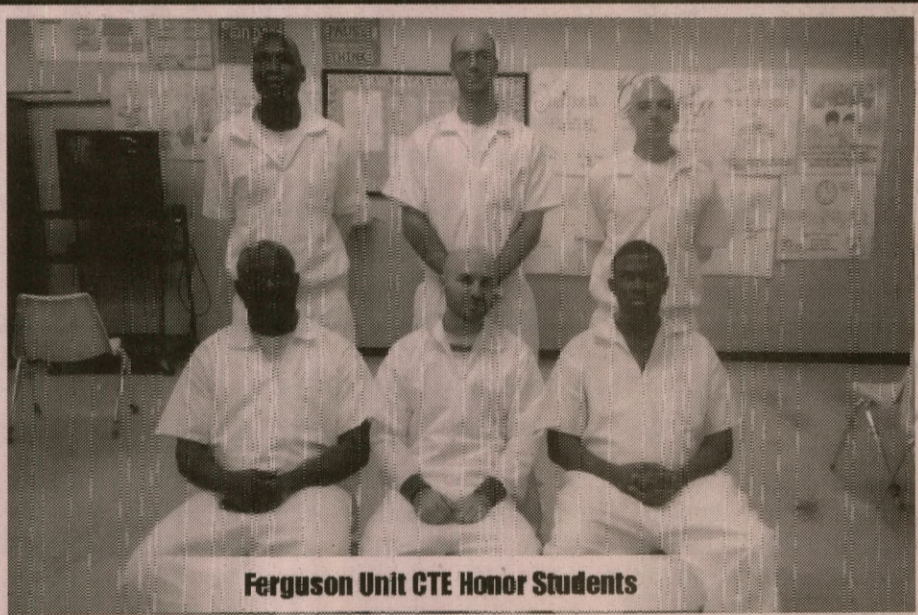
Ferguson Unit WSD Welders



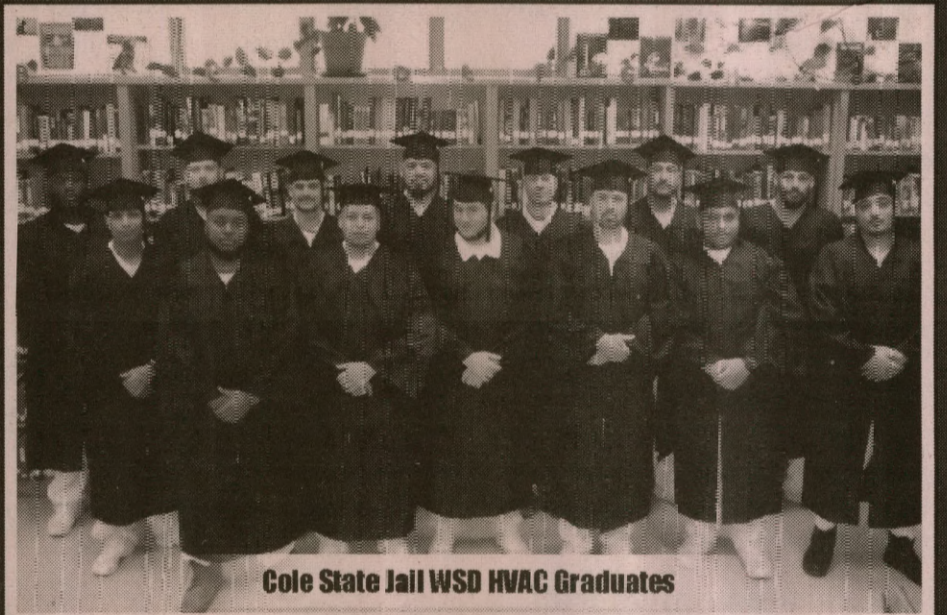
Beto Unit WSD Electronic Technology Graduates



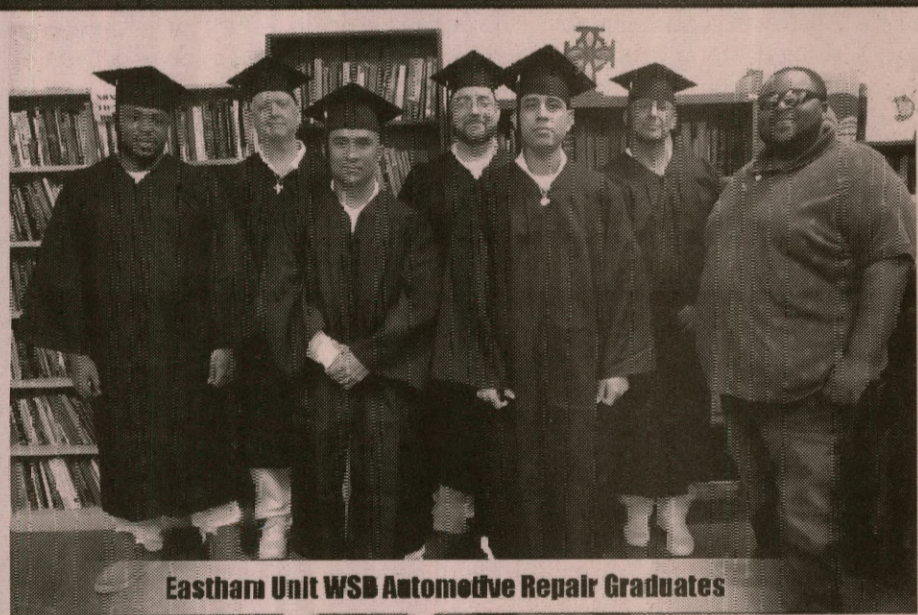
Beto Unit WSD HSE Graduates



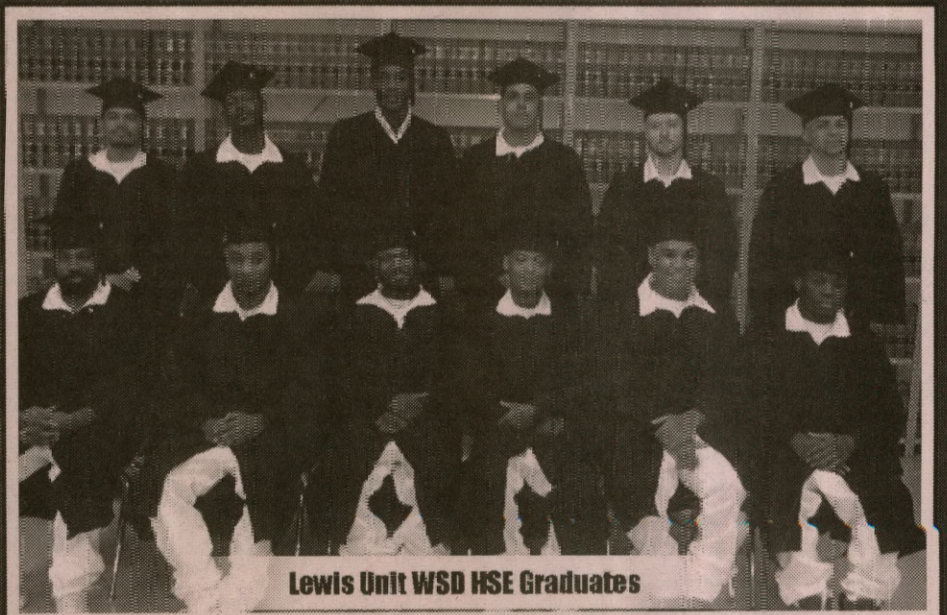
Ferguson Unit CTE Honor Students



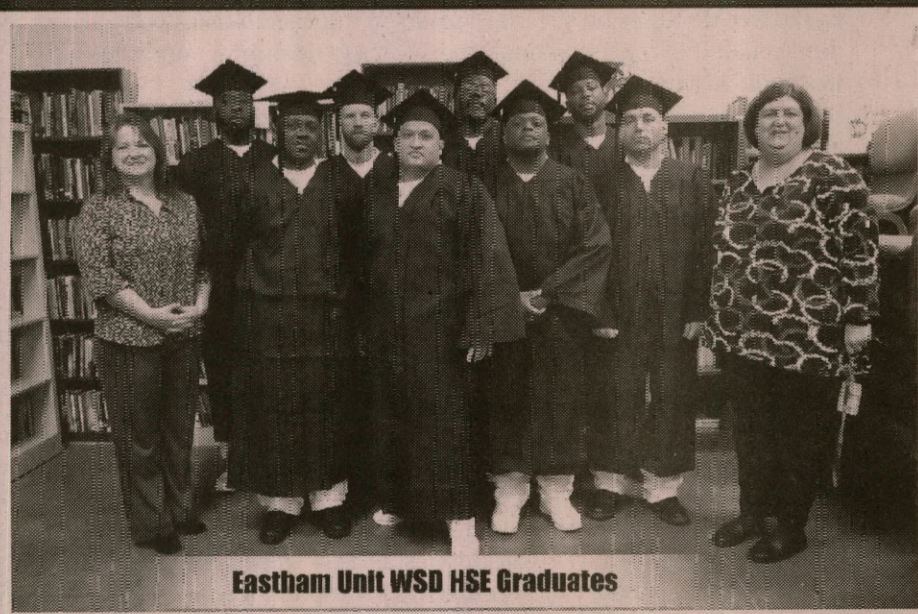
Cole State Jail WSD HVAC Graduates



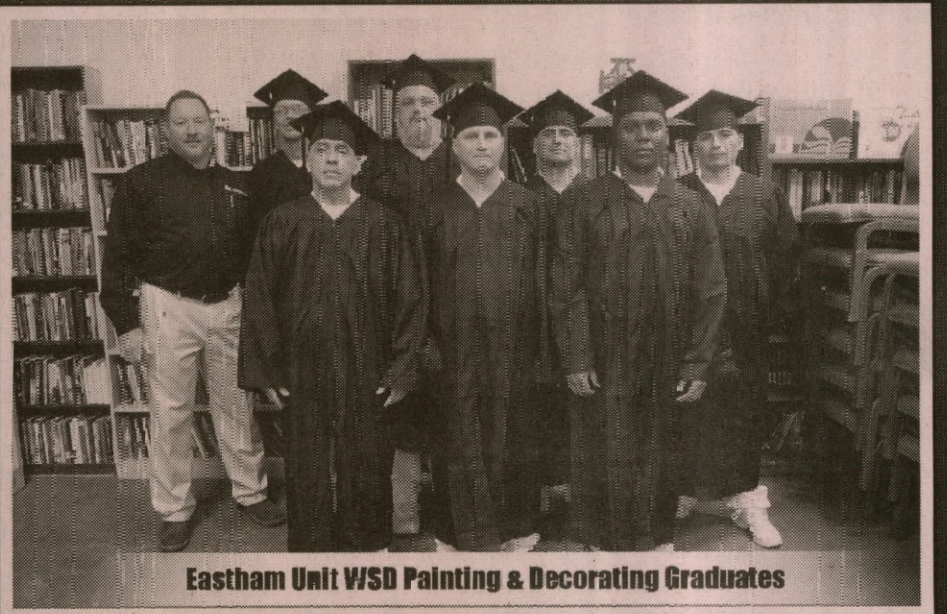
Eastham Unit WSD Automotive Repair Graduates



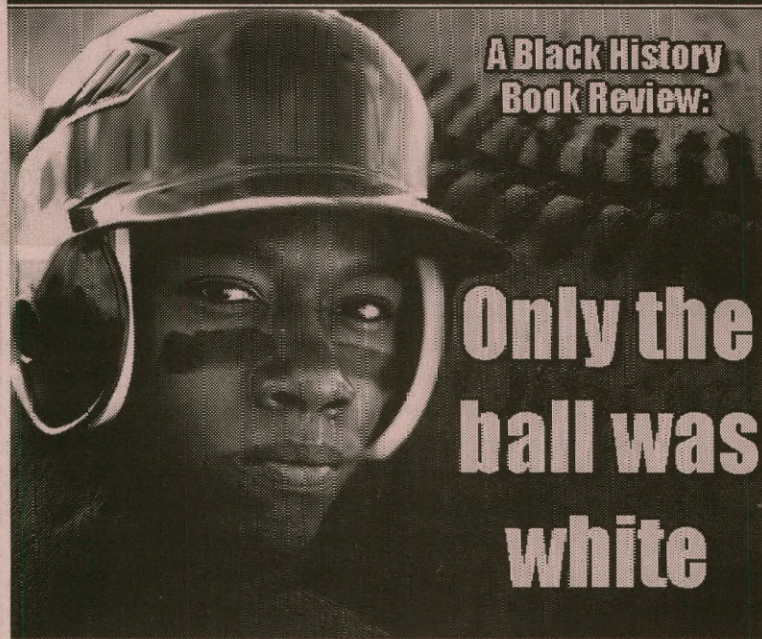
Lewis Unit WSD HSE Graduates



Eastham Unit WSD HSE Graduates



Eastham Unit WSD Painting & Decorating Graduates



Bryan J. Moore, ECHO Staff

My father has quite a sense of humor. Growing up, I thought he was Eddie Murphy's soul twin. I called him a few weeks ago to talk and he happened to mention something about the Negro Leagues. I said, "C'mon, Dad, what do you know about the Negro Leagues?" I asked him this question jokingly but under the very sincere assumption that he knew as much or less than I did about the subject, which is to say not much. Boy, did I underestimate my Pops.

He put on this old-timer's voice and went on a comical historical fiction rant about how he actually played in the Negro Leagues as a pitcher for number of different teams during his travels: the Atlanta Black Crackers, the Indianapolis Clowns, the Cuban Giants and the Kansas City Monarchs. Still in character, he bragged of having teammates named Josh Gibson and Cool Papa Bell. After he schooled me, I had a newfound respect not only for my father's historical knowledge in general, but for the history of the Negro Leagues in particular. So much so that I asked my father to order a book for me on the subject. He was happy to recommend his personal favorite, "Only the Ball was White," by Robert Peterson.

I pounced on the book as soon as it arrived and began my education on the history of the Negro Leagues. The more I read, the more I was baffled as to why up until that conversation with my father I had been satisfied with a grossly incomplete knowledge of this very important and significant facet of American history. Sports, race, politics and the great American pastime of baseball all converge in the unique nexus

called the Negro Leagues.

The harsh reality of the failure of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow cast an ugly, misshapen shadow over America. Every aspect of life was impacted, including the sport of baseball. Things such as finding lodging when playing on the road to being subjected to brutality while on the diamond were examples of how race-hatred impeded the cultural flow of the game. Jim Crow also brought on calculated bouts of identity crisis. Many felt it better to play in the guise of a Cuban or a Spaniard than as a run-of-the-mill African-American, which could subject you to all manner of abuse. Not that there weren't actual Cuban teams taking the field.

Cuba was ahead of the U.S., having established its version of the Major Leagues in 1879. The Havana Stars and the Cuban Stars were teams composed of actual Cubans of all shades. Two white-skinned Cubans from these teams did go on to play in major leagues, which is also to say, on white teams. This development caused many African-American players to nurture the vain hope that this could be the wedge that would push the door open for truly integrated major league teams. But it was not meant to happen — yet. Black baseball players would have to remain incarcerated behind the color line until a young ex-Army lieutenant named Jackie Robinson would hit a home run for integration.

And by the way, what exactly was the "color line?" Like state and national borders, the color line was a limit or boundary that was the product of an agreement among powerful people in order to uphold a certain condition. In this case, the condition was to deny African-Americans the opportunity to

play professional baseball.

Genesis and genius

A young preacher's kid hailing from the great state of Texas was pitching for Philadelphia's Cuban X Giants. His strong arm defeated Rube Waddell, ace pitcher for the Philadelphia Athletics. He walked away with the victory and something much more personal. Changing identity like some great biblical patriarch, Andrew Foster was known forever after this encounter as "Rube" Foster. "Only the Ball Was White" names Foster as the "most impressive figure in black baseball history." Over and above solid pitching, Rube Foster's true genius lay in strategy, managing the men who played for him and being the architect of the overarching league structure in which they played. In other words, he was what we would call a Boss.

Foster, who became the undisputed Chicago king of Negro baseball, cranked up a campaign that lasted for all of 1919 through his column in the Chicago Defender titled "Pitfalls of Baseball." In this column, Foster preached about all that ailed the league structure as it existed and stressed the need for a new and better league system. In 1920, with the cooperation of other team owners, he fathered the Negro Leagues, an enterprise Foster operated virtually single-handedly until his unforeseen bout with crippling mental illness. The first game of the National Negro Baseball League was played on May 2, 1920. This historic contest pitted the Indianapolis ABC's against the Chicago Giants, with the ABCs coming out on top. Most Negro League games were highly entertaining for the audience if for no other reason than because of the colorful, outsized nature of the players. There were men in the Negro Leagues whose outstanding ability caused them to grow beyond being mere ballplayers into the realm of myth and folklore.

Myths unfold on the diamond

• John Henry Lloyd: In his book, Peterson describes Lloyd as "a tall, gangling man with a protruding jaw" and as having gigantic hands like "twin shovels." That's why in Cuba they called him "El Cuchara" — The Shovel — because he dug so deep in the outfield, scooping up

earth, grass and everything else between him and a ground ball.

- **Smoky Joe Williams:** He was a pitcher for the Lincoln Giants and, in 1917, he struck out 20 New York Giants in ten innings. At the end of the game one of the NY Giants complimented Williams on his pitching by referring to him as "Smoky" because he put so much heat on the ball.
- **Oscar Charleston:** An ex-soldier from the Army, Charleston was known for playing with speed, power and fearlessness. So fearless that the account on Historynet.com discloses that it was said he could "snatch the hood off the head of a Klansman" while running for the bases.
- **Cool Papa Bell:** Before DC Comics, there was Cool Papa Bell, the original Flash. One of his teammates, none other than the great Satchel Paige, said Bell ran the bases so fast that he could "turn off a light and be in bed fast asleep before the room got dark." (Historynet.com).
- **LeRoy "Satchel" Paige:** He of the infamous hesitation pitch was so named because of the sack he carried while working for the railroad at the age of seven. Men like Paige, big-time talents in a small-time operation, played out of pride and love of the game. It certainly wasn't for money. Even with his vicious throwing arm, star-power and charisma, Paige could not earn more than \$250 per week as a player. His biggest paydays came from playing limited engagements in foreign countries. Paige was gifted with a powerful and perhaps even mysterious pitching ability. He had a fastball that, at least according to one account, could reach supernatural speeds.

Biz Mackey, a noted Negro League catcher, claimed Paige's fastball tended to "... disappear. Yes disappear. I've heard about Satchel throwing pitches that wasn't hit but that never showed up in the catcher's mitt. The catcher, the umpire and the bat boys looked all over for that ball, but it was gone. How do you account for that?" (Peterson).

What can be accounted for is age and declining arm strength being Paige's reason for developing his dreaded hesitation pitch.

Paige would make an obvious pause in his pitching motion right before releasing the ball, utterly destroying the batter's timing and concentration. The hesitation pitch was so debilitating that it was banned after Paige's first season as an ancient rookie in the major leagues. Joe DiMaggio called Satchel Paige the best he ever saw.

Jack Roosevelt "Jackie" Robinson

Jackie Robinson's shattering of the color line in 1947 wasn't so much the product of any blow he struck, but of all the decades of blows that preceded it. The men who played in obscurity for the 60 years of Jim Crow's reign over baseball were the wind at Robinson's back, propelling him into historic immortality. There's a popular proverb in my neck of the woods that says, "In order for something to live, something's got to die." Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball had the unfortunate consequence of summoning the night for the Negro Leagues. It was Jim Crow that forced African-Americans to form their own league and, like Siamese twins, one could not endure without the other. Having lost its reason for being, the Negro Leagues succumbed to neglect at the end of the 1960 season.

I am very grateful for that random but meaningful conversation I had with my father about his fictitious career as a pitcher in the Negro Leagues. Without it, I would possess only the scant knowledge I picked up by osmosis back in the late 1990s. At that time, the Negro Leagues came into brief vogue as a kind of trivia status symbol, a way for people to demonstrate the range of their information on African-American history. Folks like Spike Lee began appearing in interviews wearing a Clowns or a Grays jersey. The best way to study the history of anything is to take the time to read about it for yourself. For that reason, I advise the serious student of African-American history to dig into Robert Peterson's book. Because of it, I was able to get a behind-home-plate view of a time when only the ball was white. ★

Sources: "Only the Ball Was White," by Robert Peterson; <https://www.historynet.com/negro-league/>; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baseball_color_line.

NEW YORK CUBANS KANSAS CITY MONARCHS JACKSONVILLE RED CAPS ATLANTA BLACK CRACKERS MONTGOMERY GREY SOX HOUSTON EAGLES HOMESTEAD GRAYS Chicago American Giants INDIANAPOLIS CLOWNS

Homeward Bound

continued from pg 1 ▶

the first federal census taken after the Civil War — the first to list African-Americans by name, and the first to list them as "free." It records names, ages, birthplaces, occupations, value of real estate and personal property, household literacy, marital status, birthplace of parents and so much more. This census is fundamental in establishing an ancestor's identity — one can point to a map and say with pride and certainty, "This is where my ancestors lived." The extended African-American family is finally before us, telling us more of its genealogy and heritage.

Civil War enlistment records

One may balk at the suggestion to search out Civil War enlistment records, but several hundred thousand African-Americans enlisted in the Union Army as either slaves or free men. Meticulous records were kept during this period that may shed light on an ancestor or two, such as pension files and mustering sites. Things that one will learn include how the Civil War affected African-Americans, the different policies of recruitment practiced by the Union and Confederate armies and war developments in one's home state.

Freedmen's Bureau

The Bureau of Freedmen, Refugees and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen's Bureau) was formed in 1865 to supervise the period after the Civil War known as the Reconstruction. Under the direction of the War Department, the Freedmen's Bureau became the primary structure through which former slaves sought assistance to purchase and develop land, to coordinate efforts to establish schools and to act much like a modern-day staffing firm. Freedmen's Bureau records are a source of valuable information and contain slaveholder's wills, plantation and probate records, daybooks, letters, tax digests, deeds, newspaper notices for runaways and estate auctions. Much of this information is stored on microfilm for the public to access at the National Archives.

Where records are kept

For more information on Census Records, Civil War enlistment records and Freedmen's Bureau records, one can request a guidebook from the National Archives for a small fee (\$12 plus shipping and handling). The address is:

Reference Services Branch, National Archives and Records Administration 700 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, D.C. 20408

Guidebooks are extremely helpful, as they summarize the contents of major record groups and offer the researcher a broader historical view on how the records are organized. Keep in mind that stringent protocols are in place at the National Archives, so be sure to ask about rules of enquiry and information gathering to simplify the process for the archivists.

Genealogical records in national, state and local libraries

The vast collections found in library archives tend to have genealogical and historical sections available to the public. They may include county histories, newspaper articles, indexed obituaries, deed ledgers, maps and more. Address information can be acquired quite easily from basic resource material.

Genealogical and historical societies

These societies can be an immense help in one's search, and many are dedicated to assisting

those in pursuit of their African-American roots. These groups include the following:

African-American Genealogy Group, P.O. Box 1798 Philadelphia, PA 19105

Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society, Inc. P.O. Box 73067 Washington, D.C. 20056

Books on genealogical research

Several books currently available on the market are extremely helpful and can guide researchers on their genealogical quests. Some readings to help one delve deeper are:

- Finding a Place Called Home: A Guide to African-American Genealogy and Historical Identity, by Dr. Dee Parmer Woodtor
- Black Roots: A Beginners Guide to Tracing the African-American Family Tree, by Tony Burroughs
- How to Trace Your African-American Roots: Discovering Your Unique

History, by Barbara Thompson Howell

Genealogy websites

If the researcher can engage family or friends to help on the outside, this could bring the internet and its vast possibilities into the equation. Some useful websites include the following:

The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture: www.nypl.org/research/scsl/html

AfriGeneas: www.afrigeneas.com

African-American Military History: www.lwfaam.net

Free African-Americans North Carolina North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Virginia: www.freeafricanamericans.com

Finding out about one's African-American ancestors requires creativity, a critical eye and a detective's determination. But do not be discouraged — this type of work can be like trying to find very small needles in a very large haystack. However, the discoveries waiting are invaluable. Good luck on your search! ★

THE SPORTS VIEW

KOBE BEAN BRYANT: LESSONS FROM LIFE, LOSS OF A BASKETBALL LEGEND

William Hill, ECHO Staff

Originally, this month's article was to be an examination of the groundbreaking California law allowing student-athletes in the state's colleges to profit from the use of their images, likenesses and names. The law is a game changer for athletes competing in the state's universities and is already having an impact on the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the governing body of college sports. This legislation will result in a complete overhaul of the NCAA business model and revolutionize collegiate sports. I intend to revisit the issue of compensation for college athletes in an upcoming article, but sometimes life has a way of intervening in even the best-laid plans.

While organizing my research material for that article, news broke that Kobe Bryant and his 13-year-old daughter Gianna – affectionately known as “Gigi” – had died in a tragic helicopter crash in California.

Bryant's career

In the immediate aftermath of a crash that claimed the lives of nine people, it feels tawdry and indecorous to rehash something as trivial and insignificant as basketball statistics while five families grieve the loss of their loved ones. It certainly is not my intention to elevate one person's life over that of another. Every life matters and everyone has a story that deserves to be told, but this is a sports column and Bryant was a global sports icon.

In 1996, a brash 17-year-old high school basketball phenom full of confidence, bordering on arrogance, named Kobe Bryant announced to the world that he was bypassing college

and instead “taking his talents to the NBA.” He was drafted with the 13th pick by the Charlotte Hornets and immediately sent to the Los Angeles Lakers in exchange for Vlade Divac in a draft night trade. When he took the court for his first game as a member of the Lakers, he became the youngest player ever to play in the NBA.

For the next 20 seasons Bryant displayed an impressive array of rim-rattling dunks and silky-smooth fadeaway jumpers that left fans, teammates and defenders alike gasping in awe. Even a cursory list of Bryant's career accomplishments prove that he is among the greatest to play the game. Among his most noteworthy achievements are five NBA championships, gold medals from the 2008 Beijing and 2012 London Summer Olympics, a two-time NBA Finals Most Valuable Player (MVP) award and league MVP for the 2009-10 season. He once scored 81 points in a game against the Toronto Raptors, the second most points ever scored by a player in a single game in league history trailing only Wilt Chamberlain's unbreakable record of 100. In the final game of his legendary career, at age 37, he scored 60 points against the Utah Jazz in the 2015-16

season finale.

Bryant published four children's books, hosted a show on ESPN+ and won an Academy Award for the animated short film “Dear Basketball,” based on one of his original poems. He had stepped away from basketball following his retirement until his daughter Gianna expressed an interest in the game. He began to coach her Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) team at the Mamba Sports Academy that he created and named after his on-court alter ego “The Black Mamba.” Father and daughter began watching games together, coach pointing out the finer points of the game garnered from playing the game at its highest level for 20 seasons. Only one month before the tragic accident in California, the two were photographed while watching a game at the famed Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Life lessons

Kobe's career teaches each of us, especially as incarcerated individuals, important lessons that we can apply to the rest of our lives. In the aftermath of his death, the one word that former teammates, coaches and competitors used to describe the NBA superstar is

“determined.” He was determined to be a great player, to be successful. Bryant was famous for breaking down game film on his laptop while teammates were sleeping or watching movies on the team flight home after games. Success is never an accident; it requires a lot of hard work and determination.

Another attribute of highly successful people is toughness, and Bryant possessed that in abundance. This was never more evident than in a 2013 game against the Golden State Warriors when he ruptured his Achilles tendon on a play where he was fouled. By rule, since Bryant was the one fouled, he had to be the one to take the foul shot. Doing anything with an Achilles injury is next to impossible for most mortals, but apparently not for the Black Mamba. Not only did Bryant take the shots, he made them and then hobbled off the court to the bench area.

In the end, the most important lesson came not from Bryant's life, but instead from his death. Every day that you wake up – even in prison – is a precious gift that should never be taken for granted. Everyone, whether free or incarcerated, should take the time to ensure that those they regard as most important know exactly how much you love and appreciate them.

Whenever a disaster rocks the sports world, one of the talking heads (usually employed by ESPN) in the media spouts the same tired cliché that the new tragedy “puts everything into perspective.” Why does it take the tragedy of nine people, three of them young girls still in the dawn of life, to make us understand how fragile and priceless life is? Have you been putting off writing or phoning a loved one? Don't put it off one second longer. Pick up the pen and paper or dial that phone and let them know you love them. ★

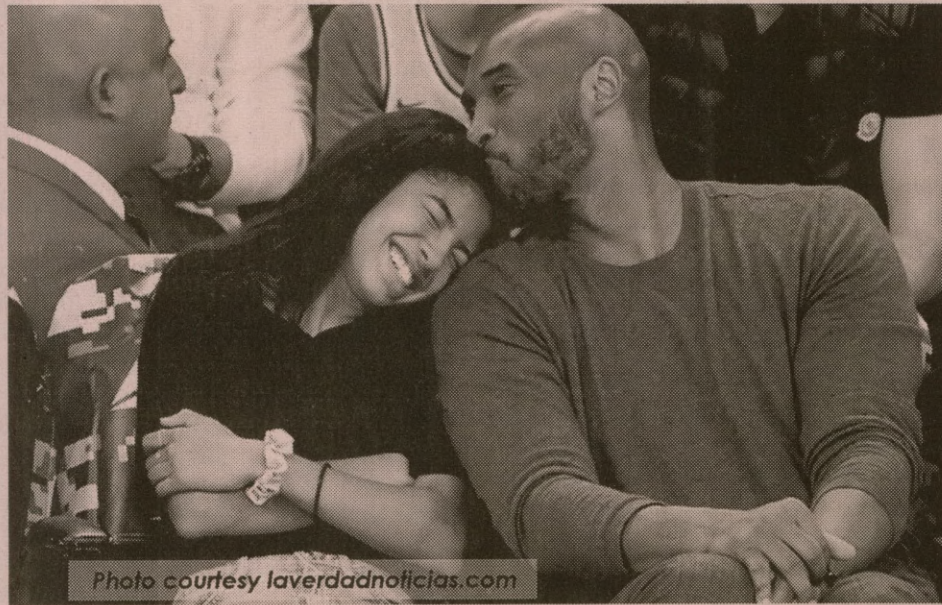


Photo courtesy laverdadnoticias.com

Making A DENT

A brilliant legacy: REMEMBERING KOBE BRYANT

Jim Dent, Contributing Writer — Polunsky Unit

To an Athlete Dying Young

by A. E. Housman

*The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the market-place;
Man and boy stood cheering by,
And home we brought you shoulder-high.*

*Today, the road all runners come,
Shoulder-high we bring you home,
And set you at your threshold down,
Townsmen of a stiller town.*

*Smart lad, to slip betimes away
From fields where glory does not stay,
And early though the laurel grows
It withers quicker than the rose.*

*Eyes the shady night has shut
Cannot see the record cut,
And silence sounds no worse than cheers
After earth has stopped the ears.*

*Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out,
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.*

*So set, before its echoes fade,
The fleet foot on the sill of shade,
And hold to the low lintel up
The still-defended challenge-cup.*

*And round that early-laurelled head
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,
And find unwithered on its curls
The garland briefer than a girl's.*

The basketball legacy left behind by Kobe Bryant is like a bolt of lightning shooting across the night sky that ignites a million spider legs.

It was a light show we will never forget: Five NBA championships, the 2008 MVP, 81 points in one game, and 60 on the night the curtain fell on his career. He finished third in NBA scoring and first in overall moxie. He was the bridge between Michael Jordan and LeBron James, and perhaps the greatest star in the history of the Los Angeles Lakers. Little wonder that two Kobe jerseys hang in the Staples Center.

What we will never know is just how far he might have flown in his life after basketball.

When he fell to earth on Jan. 26, the man was riding a trajectory that would have taken him to heights we'd never imagined. Tragically, he died in a helicopter crash that claimed the lives of eight others. It should have never happened. The pilot had chosen to fly in a dense morning fog without a device that would have told him about the hill he was about to hit head-on. Flying 30 feet higher, he would have cleared the crest.

Before the chopper fell into the Calabasas Canyon northwest of L.A., Kobe Bryant was prepared to make even more meaningful changes to our world. He had already won an Oscar for his animated short film titled “Dear Basketball.” He was in the process of publishing an endless line of books combining the elements of fantasy and sports. In just two years, he'd already launched a publishing company that employed 12 full-time story tellers. The group was churning out more books than James Patterson and his legion of writers. One of his titles had already made the *New York Times* best-seller list.

“I have an idea for an entire universe that centers on fantasy and magic,” Bryant said at the time. “It's as if the Olympics and Harry Potter had a baby.”

His plan was to turn books into films and animated series. It was the kind of thinking that had inspired men like Walt Disney 100 years ago.

Straight out of basketball, Kobe plunged himself so deeply into his new life that he had stopped watching the NBA on TV. In time, there was a tug on his sleeve from a hand belonging to his daughter, Gianna. An aspiring hoopster, she wanted to watch the games on the NBA Network

TV. Kobe relented and, before long, they were heading off together to the Staples Center to meet players like LeBron James, Anthony Davis, Luka Doncic and Trae Young.

The basketball itch was returning to Kobe's life. He was already tutoring Gianna at the court inside their home. He was soon coaching her AAU team at the Mamba Sports Academy in nearby Thousand Oaks that had been constructed by Kobe and his partner, Chad Faulkner. One thing led to another and Kobe was struck with the idea that he needed a helicopter to beat the L.A. traffic on a daily basis so he would have time to accomplish all the goals in his life. Thousand Oaks was more than 50 miles from the Bryant home.

On any given day, it was impossible to tell where Bryant would be coaching basketball. Two weeks before his death, he put together a summit of WNBA players to work on fundamentals and some tactics he had developed. Previously, he had worked with a number of college stars.

Bryant was trying to give something back to community while repairing his own image which had been tarnished by a sexual assault charge in Colorado back in 2003. Even though the charges were dropped after a civil suit was settled, the entire matter remained a scar on his reputation.

His first star player was Gianna, who was dribbling and shooting a basketball not long after she had started to walk. Gianna had the genes and the drive to go far. Her goal was to play college ball at the University of Connecticut.

“Kobe was so proud of Gianna,” LeBron James remembered. “She was all he talked about every time I saw him.”

It was Gianna, age 13, who sitting next to her dad when the Sikorsky S-76 crashed en route to a game scheduled for her AAU team. The day had been promised to a joyous group of young girls who loved the game, the camaraderie, and the chance to be around one of the greatest players of all time. To the families of the ones who were killed, the despair after the crash was almost unspeakable.

How could the perfect life vanish so quickly? As you watch the TV footage of Kobe and Gianna knocking around the court in the years to come, you will realize how much was lost. It was a story that Kobe was writing, but also living. At age 41, he was too young to go. ★