

THE ECHO

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DISTRIBUTED FREE TO TEXAS PRISONERS

Music Application Program strikes right chord with younger residents

William Hill, ECHO Staff

A welcome new sound echoes through the population of the Youthful Offender Program (YOP) for residents in prison who are under the age of 18: the encouraging melody of lives transformed through

music education. More than simply a music class where students learn the difference between C chords and quarter notes, the Music Application Program (MAP) teaches students valuable life skills through a music-based curriculum.

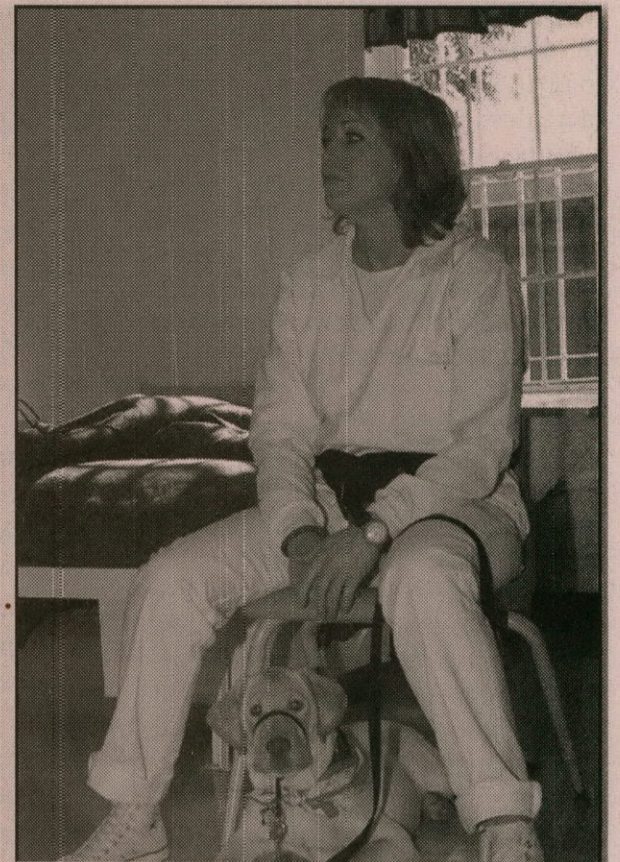
Incarcerated individuals who lack the social skills needed to function in a group dynamic are learning to work together as a musical band. Men who once found it hard to communicate without anger or violence have discovered the importance of conveying their needs verbally, and those who once mistrusted traditional methods of education now eagerly embrace learning. Participants also said they were surprised and happy they could learn to master playing instruments such as piano, drums or guitar.

"This has motivated me to wake up and go to school every day," said one of the class participants.

MUSIC continued on page 3 >



Artwork courtesy of Joe Hernandez, Jordan Unit.



TDCJ resident trains pup for future service life with veteran.

Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

Write away! Enter The ECHO's new writing contest

Todd Carman, ECHO Staff

All write, all write, all write!

So, do you think you have the "write" stuff? Do you want to see how you measure up compared to other writers in the TDCJ?

If so, prepare to enter The ECHO's writing contest!

Special recognition will be awarded to top contestants in fiction and non-fiction categories. Fiction entries can cover any topic appropriate for publication in The ECHO. Non-fiction entries can include life stories, articles, opinions or journal excerpts. The top three winners in each category will have their work published in The ECHO. Entries will be judged on content, clarity, creativity and correctness.

Submission guidelines:

- Include a cover sheet with your name, TDCJ number, unit of assignment and submission title.
- Specify your work as **fiction (F)** or **non-fiction (NF)**.
- **DO NOT SEND POETRY!**
- Entries should be neatly handwritten or typed. If typed, **do not use a script font**. If we can't read your entry, it won't be judged.
- Entries should be no longer than 1,500 words (three typed or five handwritten pages)

WRITE continued on pg.9 >



Tebow's selfie.

Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

Sports celebrity Tim Tebow brings encouragement to Hughes

Toby Rod, Hughes Unit Reporter

In early October, Tim Tebow took time out of his schedule to visit with staff and offenders on the Hughes Unit.

"I have been coming into prisons since I was 15 years old, and I couldn't pass up an opportunity to share the gospel and remind guys just how valuable their lives are, even in prison," Tebow said when asked what compelled him to come to the prison. Tebow was accompanied by some of his friends, one of them being Jules "Jep" Robertson from the TV show "Duck Dynasty."

Tebow started out by visiting the close-custody and medium-custody faith-based programs. After returning to the chapel, he spoke with staff concerning finding refuge in God and with each other, and about working as a team.

An open-call service was then held for general population offenders and Windham School District students. Tim heard about a CrossFit tournament coming up and decided to start the service off by challenging one of the contenders to a push-up contest.

TEBOW continued on pg.9 >

Something to bark about Incarcerated volunteers help Patriot PAWS train canines, change lives of veterans

An ECHO Special Report
Cory J. Wisnoski, Wynne Unit

Disabled. Discouraged. Lonely and challenged — many military veterans and victims of abuse or tragedy find their everyday lives are now defined by physical, mental or emotional challenges.

Thanks to volunteer service dog trainers in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), their lifeline is sent by Patriot PAWS, and it arrives on four legs, with a wet nose and joyful, wagging tail. Patriot PAWS, a nonprofit organization formed in 2006 which has partnered with the TDCJ since 2008, now teaches incarcerated individuals how to train service canines for men and women who served their country in combat, as well as other victims of tragic events. These dogs can help veterans feel safe and unconditional love. They can help vets return to work or college and can even help vets care for their families. These service animals can learn to turn on lights, open doors, retrieve bags of medication, pick up dropped items, wake veterans from night terrors, comfort their owners and many other tasks.

PAWS continued on pg.5 >

TDCJ's State Counsel for Offenders provides innocence claims information

Note: The following information has been provided by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's State Counsel for Offenders (SCFO).

Keep in mind that the SCFO does not handle claims based on actual innocence. If you have any questions related to a general legal matter, write to SCFO by mail at the following address: State Counsel for Offenders, P.O. Box 4005, Huntsville, TX, 77342.

Who should file an innocence claim?

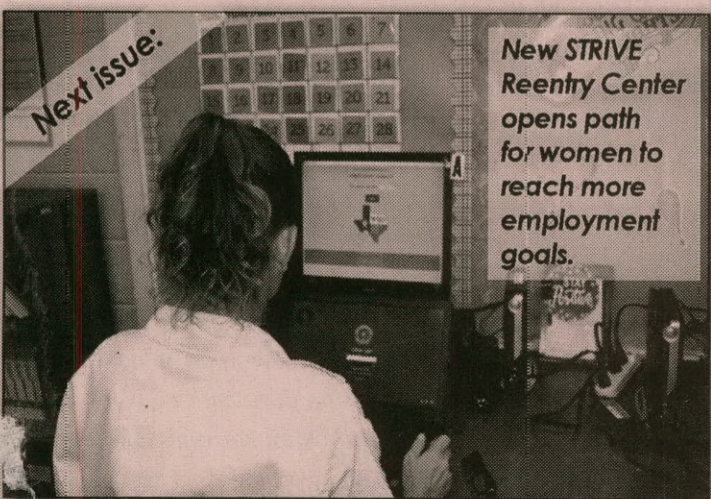
Only those convicted of a crime they did not actually commit and actually had no connection to — hence the term "actual innocence" — should file a claim based on innocence.

Who should not file an innocence claim?

If you believe you were convicted based on insufficient evidence to prove your guilt, an actual innocence claim is not the proper remedy for you.

If you were convicted under the "law of parties," your conviction may still be valid even if you did not commit the crime for which you were convicted. For example, if you and a friend rob a convenience store, but during the robbery your friend shoots and kills the clerk, both of you will be on the hook for murder, even though you didn't pull the trigger. In this case, an actual innocence claim is not the proper remedy for you because there is a separate law (the law of parties) in place to convict you.

SCFO continued on pg.9 >



New STRIVE Reentry Center opens path for women to reach more employment goals.

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REBOOT:

**The ECHO announces
new 2019-20 format**

This issue of The ECHO arrives with a welcome surprise for its readers: a long-awaited expansion from eight to 12 pages per issue, while keeping the pages at their regular full-size. Also, to help make sure everyone who wants a copy of The ECHO can get one, print runs will be increased to 147,000 copies of each issue, 7,000 more than previously available.

With the blessing of additional space, The ECHO looks forward to including more unit news, reporter contributions, creative works, photos, letters, agency information updates, inspirational pieces, popular recipes, dedicated-subject sections, and other new features for our readers in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

These improvements, though, were borne through challenge. An unexpected clash with a disreputable computer server recently deleted five years of ECHO files, articles, photos, artwork, notes and reader contributions, and stole weeks of production time. These were unexpected and deep-felt growing pains. Ouch!

Significant losses have been lamented, frustrations have been vented, and now it's time to move on to better days and more pages! We apologize that many planned articles, photos and other works were lost in this situation. Upon reflection,

this experience is a snapshot of the kinds of personal setbacks experienced and dealt with by every one of us during our life's journey.

We are more than ready to move forward and take you with us. This newspaper is nearly 92 years old, and like you, it's a survivor. It's not our first rodeo, right? We will take this hard-won opportunity to make The ECHO nimble and more responsive to the needs of the TDCJ population. We will continue to print the new 12-page issue 10 times per fiscal year with the goal of providing timely, useful information and enjoyable entertainment for each TDCJ resident.

The true beauty of this publication reflects the continued support of our friends: you, our readers, as well as our writers and other contributors. Thank you for your support. Reporters and aspiring writers, artists and cartoonists: please continue to send us new submissions. Don't miss this issue's announcement of a fresh writing contest! Your work helps make The ECHO a successful publication.

A new ECHO server setup is currently being created with a robust data backup system; the wayward (a.k.a. "Death Star") server has been banished. We are typing as fast as we can, and we can't wait to open the mail each day with those new articles from you.

In modern hashtag terms:

#phoenix.

Read on. ★



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The gift of fatherhood

Ruben Constante, Released

Ruben Constante was formerly an ECHO reporter at the Torres Unit and was incarcerated for 18 years in TDCJ. As a free man, he has started a nonprofit organization called Blueprints for Living Ministries, Inc., which specializes in prison ministry and serves the offender population with monthly prison visits for Bible study. The organization also has a free monthly newsletter for offenders called Blueprints and offers distance mentorship. Constante is president of this nonprofit and the managing editor for the newsletter. For more information, loved ones may go to www.blueprintsflm.com.

It's been 23 years since I last saw a child of mine swaddled in baby blankets and breastfed almost every two hours. But here I am, after serving 18 years in prison, given the glorious opportunity of raising a child again.

As I feed my son, burp him, change his diaper and simply stare at his every move as he lay in his bassinet, I stand amazed at how much attention this little boy needs!

As a Christian, I live by the Word of God and, as I reflect on my son's need for moment-by-moment attention, I recall the words of the apostle Paul: "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers." The Corinthians' church had possessed a wealth of talent and gift (and probably had numerous people in attendance on Sunday mornings!), but Paul had wisely noted that none of it mattered.

They lacked fatherhood.

That got me thinking about my role as a parent here in my home. In the past, I have failed in so many ways to be a parent. I ruined more than words can describe. Yet God has given me Justin Clark, a gracious reminder that God is not only the God of a second chance, but He's the Fatherly example

I need to raise my son.

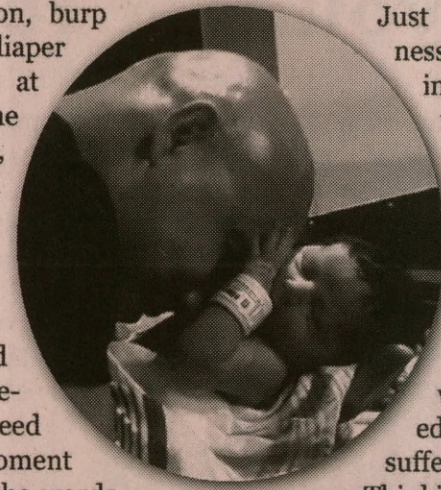
It doesn't matter that I can publish all the books in the world. It doesn't matter that I can preach a fiery sermon or that I can eloquently articulate the need for self-improvement.

If I neglect my son, I have failed.

Just google "fatherlessness" and you'll see tons of information regarding the father deficit our world is in. Whether the result is emotional, physical, financial or spiritual, when a child isn't properly cared for and raised to know who he or she is created to be, that child will suffer immensely.

Thinking about this, I took Justin into my arms, and I began to speak the Word of God over him. I verbally pronounced my role over his life and held his tiny hand as I vowed to help him discover who God created him to be.

And to be warm, I told him all the fun things we would do together: rough play on the couch, play with a Tyco race track, ride our bikes, play in the swings, go swimming, jam out in my Mustang, and watch Superman movies in surround sound excellence. Yes, I told him we'd have the time of our lives. But more than anything else I can give him, I assured him of my physical and emotional presence. I promised to be his father. ★



To the editor,

Could you please print the new laws passed this year that impact the TDCJ population? Are there any that affect parole, good time and work time? Years ago, The ECHO kept us up to date with all the changes passed by legislature that affected those

incarcerated within TDCJ!

Thank You!

Anonymous

To the reader,

This was a lean year as far as passage of laws affecting TDCJ residents. One significant bill enacted was the changing of the health care copay from \$100 per year to \$13.55 per visit, capped at \$94.85 per year. This was covered on the front page of the August 2019 issue. Two others are HB

650, the Women's Dignity bill, that includes provisions concerning pregnant incarcerated residents, and HB 918, the Documents to Help with Reentry bill, that provides those being released from TDCJ with documentation to help them gain employment, including a job training record and a resume. We are researching these for future articles. Anyone interested in doing further research on these and other passed legislation should contact their unit's law library. Thank you for writing!

Dear Darby,

I'm writing because I did six years flat in a six-year sentence back in the late 1990s — my work time and good time went unused. I stayed out of trouble and didn't lose any good time, and I took a bunch of classes thinking it would help me make parole, but I ended up doing my whole sentence. Now I'm back and am told that the state has to pay me for the good time and work time I had. Is there any truth to this? Thanks!

B.C. Gibson,

Byrd Unit

Dear B.C.,

This has my attention! You did six on a six and decided to come back, so obviously you're not back on a violation. Did you not learn anything in the classes you took? You know, add some tools to the mental toolbox?! The whole idea of educating us is to give us the ability to be successful, law-abiding citizens who can stay out of the pokey. It didn't seem to help you, so I question your level of attentiveness in class. You're not a fungus, so you won't grow by just sitting in the dark. You gotta' pay attention and participate! Anyway, there's absolutely no truth to the pay-for-back-good-time rumor, so don't expect a giant windfall of funds. Good luck on your next go-round!

Dear Darby,

I want to know if there are any classes I can take to earn a certificate while in restrictive housing. I'm a confirmed gang member, but that's the old me,

from when I was in prison before. I got out and did seven years as a hard-working, law-abiding citizen, then came back on a state-jail felony for unauthorized use of a motor vehicle. I get out in less than 18 months and want to do something productive with my time here.

Thanks, Darbster!

G.M.

Dominguez State Jail

Dear GM,

Hmmmm. You were out for seven years and suddenly thought a little car stealin' was a good idea?!? How is that meetin' your needs over time? Why don't you put in for Gang Renouncement and Disassociation (GRAD) and get out of the homeboy blast? You could complete that program and free yourself up to follow a better, solo path when you get out. And next time you need a ride, call Uber or Lyft!

Dear Darby,

Hello! I need your help, Darbster. I have a husband who's also behind the wire. I left him seven years ago, but he has not stopped fighting for me. At times he would drive me nuts, but I still love him. We have three kids who pray for mommy and daddy to come home. How can I have my family without him? I want him to forgive me for the seven years of hell and to spend the rest of his life with me! How do I tell him, Darb?

Sincerely,

E.W.

Dear Ewww,

Sweetheart, you kicked him to the curb seven years ago, got locked up behind the walls and are now feelin' a little lonely — and say you want him

back! I wonder if you'd feel the same way if you were out and about with other options? If you're serious about mendin' your current fence, send the hubby a letter — family can correspond in TDCJ. And focus on your own little family by seeking out a parenting program to learn some skills and build a better relationship with your kids. Their welfare should be top priority. Good luck, write back and let us know how it works out down the road!

Dear Darby,

I'm about to go home in six months and I really don't want to be with my ex-girlfriend. She didn't hold it down for me on my four-year bid, but now that I'm close to the touchdown, she wants to write and send pictures. I'm head over heels for this new chick named Alexa, a.k.a. B.J. She's been holding me down and she is all I can think about. How can I let my ex-girl know that it's over?

P.S. — B.J. stands for Beauty and Jewels.

Courtney Peterson
Clements Unit

Dear CP,

You're lucky I'm well versed in romantic advice, because you need tutoring in BreakUp 101. Have you ever heard about a "Dear Jane" letter? Drop the girl a note and be straight up — you felt that she had moved on, so you've moved on, too, and plan on making a fresh start with someone new upon release. Leaving her in the dark isn't cool for either her or you. Man up and take care of your business, Romeo!

New Windham Superintendent Hartman now leading school system within TDCJ

New superintendent Ms. Kristina Hartman, Ed.S. is leading The Windham School District effective Sept. 1, continuing a history of correctional education excellence while transitioning the district into continued expansion of programming and services.

"I'm extremely proud to support Texas educators in working with students in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice," Hartman said. Windham has an impressively experienced and committed staff of educators, leaders and support staff. These are the people who make it possible for the WSD to teach tens of thousands of men and women in TDCJ, preparing them for second chances in life, careers and re-entry." Hartman emphasized that the WSD will continue to provide focus on developing relevant and interesting career pathways for students.

"We will ensure that course offerings align with the employment outlook in our state and communities," she said. "We are dedicated to putting these returning citizens back to work."

"We are also focusing on trades in which women are underrepresented in the workforce, resulting in increased employer engagement." In particular, the WSD has a significant role in supporting TDCJ's new Strength Through Restoration, Independence, Vision and Empowerment (STRIVE) Reentry Center at the Mountain View Unit in Gatesville. "With TDCJ as our partner, we can refine the career and soft skills women need to secure employment. We can better prepare our students to build careers, care for families, and restore their own independence," she said.

"The WSD will also continue to improve opportunities for young students. TDCJ's youthful popula-

tion continues to be a priority group for the WSD. We are using innovative methods to engage this population and support its transition back into society."

Hartman began her journey in correctional education in 2001 as an intern in the adult probation office in Waco, Texas. In 2003, she began her career in instruction as a teacher with the Florida Department of Corrections. Later education roles included Family Literacy coordinator, Inmate Teaching Assistant coordinator and Special Education program specialist. In 2008, Hartman promoted to principal at Florida State Prison. She was honored with the Florida Department of Corrections Team of the Year award

2015 for her work with the High Risk Offender Multidisciplinary Transition Team and in 2017 for the Second Chance Pell Pilot Team, which included statewide recruitment of incarcerated students for participation in a college-dorm learning community on institutional grounds.

In 2015, Hartman was selected as Chief of Programs for the Florida Department of Corrections. In this capacity, she was responsible for directing statewide activities related to academic, career and technical, law and general library services, substance use prevention and treatment and chaplaincy programs. Her Florida-based corrections career also included support of family literacy programs, reentry training for students, development of relationships with community service providers and utilization of data-driven accountability.

In October, 2018, Hartman returned to Texas to join The WSD as Director of its Division of Instruction, and in September, 2019, she was selected to lead the school district as Superintendent. Hartman follows WSD Superintendent Dr. Clint Carpenter, who served the school district from November, 2013, to August, 2019. Carpenter's accomplishments included establishing a WSD workforce team to significantly increase employer engagement and meaningful job placement for WSD students. He also implemented robust Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. Carpenter supported training for correctional educators by major employers so that student learning experiences more closely replicated the workforce. Under his leadership, the WSD reported a 100 percent CTE increase in national industry certifications and additional career training opportunities for incarcerated women.

Carpenter also focused on the use of technology for classroom instruction and helped implement computer-based GED testing for the WSD. A district accountability system was developed under his leadership to promote and measure success in serving students.

"We appreciate the focused, dedicated efforts and widespread improvements Dr. Carpenter brought to Windham School District," Superintendent Hartman said. "Thanks to his work and that of the WSD superintendents who preceded him, Windham has a highly-esteemed tradition of quality service dating back to 1969. We are working diligently for current and future success in the WSD, and I'm honored to help students lead significant, productive lives guided by positive change and meaningful employment." ★

► MUSIC

continued from page 1

"I enjoyed the program. It changed my tenseness around people," another participant said after completing the program. "I was having fun."

Helping conduct this movement of changed lives is a small cohort of student volunteers from Sam Houston State University, who work in unison with educators from the Windham School District (WSD). Together, they implemented the MAP, an innovative music-based educational program offered quarterly in 2019 (VERIFY), into the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

WSD Superintendent Kristina Hartman recently spoke to The ECHO about the success of the program and expressed hope for its expansion.

The ECHO: What is the Music Application Program?

Hartman: The MAP was originally a three-week pilot program on the Ellis Unit last December, with a one-week follow-up during spring break, and it utilized components borrowed from music therapy. Participants and volunteers met with each other three hours daily to learn how to play musical instruments; however, this is much more than simply a music class. Each module of the program is designed to provide students with valuable educational and life skills, in addition to the musical facet.

Why did WSD feel it was important to implement a music program in TDCJ?

The leadership of WSD recognized that traditional methods of instruction often do not work with everyone and identified a need to develop innovative techniques to facilitate the recruitment, retention and motivation of students. While taste in music differs from person to person, most people enjoy some genre of music. This raised a question: "Why not use a music program to engage students who are indifferent to the educational opportunities available to them?" The expectation was that once these individuals observed how fun learning could be, they would be motivated to continue their education.

Who were the original participants of the music program?

The initial target was to work with young students under the age of 18 because we noticed that many of these individuals were having disciplinary issues. This prevented them from accessing the educational department. The original class varied between 12 and 18 members of the YOP population who were invited to participate in the MAP. Understanding that many of these individuals harbor negative attitudes about school from previous educational experiences, the school district sought to show that learning does not have to be an onerous task undertaken only in a classroom. Indeed, many people learn life's greatest lessons during day-to-day interactions with others and not solely within the traditional schoolroom setting.

What are some of the goals of the music program?

While the program was designed to incorporate an element of fun into the curriculum, there is always a teaching component to every exercise. A social element associated with the program involves

teaching TDCJ residents who do not know how to interact with others how to function as a team to achieve a shared goal. Working together in a group, participants soon begin assisting one another with song lyrics, helping each other with the instruments, and wanting every member of the band to succeed. This is the very definition of what employers refer to as soft skills: the ability to work cohesively within a team environment. It is the most sought-after attribute businesses look for in potential employees.

Group analyses of song lyrics and the composer's choice of words leads to analyses of messages the original musicians intended to communicate. As with any group activity, there are differences of opinion, but the volunteers welcome those because they present openings to teach communication skills, such as how to appropriately express thoughts, wants and needs.

The volunteers include components of traditional school subjects, such as reading comprehension and literacy. For example, the activity of removing a word from the lyric "Lean on me when you're not ____" from the iconic Bill Withers song allows students to fill in the blank with their own suggestions. Not only does the exercise help to promote creativity, but it also provides an entertaining way to develop a larger and more varied vocabulary than students possessed before participation in the program.

What do participants do in the class?

Participants form a band that includes guitars, bass guitars, keyboards, drums and even a DJ mixing station, and they put on a concert! Several of the songs the groups performed included Ed Sheeran's "Thinking out Loud," Maren Morris' "My Church," Bill Withers' "Lean on Me," Khalid's "Location," Johnny Cash's "Hurt," Post Malone's "I Fall Apart," and Bad Bunny's "Amorfoda." In addition to well-known songs, the group also performed original compositions.

What were some of the challenges associated with implementing the program?

The implementation of the program was done very purposefully. Everyone who needed to know — from the unit administration to the Windham staff to the security staff — was aware that musical instruments would be coming in and that this would be taking place. There was a very good briefing. Therefore, many of the challenges one would generally face when bringing new things into a prison were mitigated through good communication. In general, the greatest challenge involved getting the students to overcome their reticence to open up and work together. However, even that served to function as a baseline to show the success of the collaboration they achieved throughout the process.

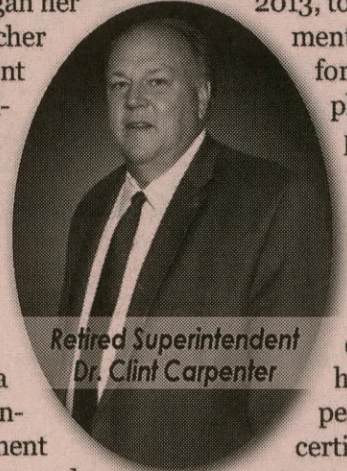
There was originally a degree of groupthink present as participants worried how others were going to react. Was someone going to say, "Ah, this is childish! I don't want to do this!" or would someone get up and go pick up a drumstick? Luckily for the program and for the participants, someone went and picked up a drumstick.

What has been some of the feedback WSD has received about MAP?

Feedback received from participants has been overwhelmingly positive. When educators have gone back to the Ellis Unit, students want to know



New WSD Superintendent
Kristina Hartman



Retired Superintendent
Dr. Clint Carpenter

Lean on Me

Sometimes in our lives
we all have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that
there's always tomorrow

Lean on me,
when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on

Please swallow your pride
If I have things you need to borrow
For no one can fill those of your needs
That you won't let show

You just call on me brother,
when you need a hand
We all need somebody to lean on
I just might have a problem
that you'll understand
We all need somebody to lean on

If there is a load you have to bear
That you can't carry
I'm right up the road
I'll share your load
If you just call me

— Bill Withers

when the program will be offered again. Incarcerated individuals who were not able to participate in the first class due to being on disciplinary status were committed to getting off and staying off disciplinary status so they can participate the next time. Students who participated have been among the program's biggest proponents to the rest of the YOP. Having a program of this type available has proven to be a very effective incentive for them.

What are WSD's plans for the Music Application Program?

The WSD strongly believes that the music program would be just as beneficial to other segments of the general population and is exploring available options on how best to expand the program to other units.

Writer's Conclusion: The decision that every individual touched by the justice system, regardless of their age or the length of their sentence, must make upon entering TDCJ is how they will utilize this time. Will they take advantage of the opportunity provided by the education department to improve themselves and their futures? Will they while away their time, as so many do, pursuing a degree in 'domino-ology' or strive to earn a High School Equivalency diploma? Will they become an expert on the "Bold and the Beautiful" or learn new job skills through WSD's Career and Technical Education? Will they continue to engage in the thinking errors that led to incarceration or seek to eliminate them through classes such as Cognitive Intervention Program?

How each TDCJ resident answers these questions determines whether a person is simply waiting to get out of prison as opposed to actively preparing for their reentry into society. The life of every person, whether incarcerated or free, is an unfinished symphony waiting only for the composition of the next movement. You can choose whether your life will become a classic or only a one-hit wonder. ★



Lockdown quesadillas

Jag Van Story

Ingredients:

1 summer sausage, diced
(sub with chunk chicken or Spam)
1 chili (with or without beans)
½ pickle, diced
2 jalapenos, diced
3 chili soups (sub vegetable) tortillas
nachos chips
(sub tortilla chips)
squeeze cheese
barbecue sauce
mustard
habanero hot sauce
3 ranch dressings

Directions:

Crush about two cups of chips in an empty chip bag. Place summer sausage in a hot pot insert and heat, along with the chili pouch, for about 15 minutes. After meat is hot, in an empty bowl spread the ramen soups, spice packs, one spoonful mustard, one heaping spoonful habanero hot sauce, eight spoonful barbecue sauce, four spoonful pickles, two spoonful pickle juice, three spoonful jalapenos and eight spoonful of squeeze cheese. Add enough hot water to barely cover soups; let cook five minutes. Add summer sausage to the soup mixture and stir. Place a tortilla in the bottom of three empty bowls and top with the soup mixture. Squeeze two ranch dressings on top of the three bowls of soup mix; cover each with another tortilla. Spread chili over the top tortillas, cover with squeeze cheese, crushed chips and the ranch dressing. Makes three servings.



Snickers cake

Mattie McGinnis

Ingredients:

4 Snickers
1 pkg. vanilla cream cookies
4 pkgs. cream cheese

Directions:

Mix Snickers, cream cheese and cream from cookies in the insert from a hot pot. Add half cup of water. Place in hot pot; let melt.

Crush cookies for crust; add a quarter cup of water. Knead into dough and shape in a bowl. Pour melted ingredients into crust. Let set, cool and harden. Enjoy!



Killer Frito Pie

James Clayton

Ingredients:

1 pouch of chili
1 squirt of cheese
1 bag of corn chips
1 or 2 jalapenos, diced
1 bag of refried beans

Directions:

Take a bag of chili and wash it off. Set it up in your pot and open it at the very top. Put three spoonfuls of water in the chili. Put a squirt of cheese in the chili, and let it cook.

Let it cook about 30 minutes and stir. Put about a third to a half of bag of refried beans in a large bowl. Add water, and while the beans are cooking, cut up the peppers and add them. When the beans are ready, spread a layer of corn chips on top, and then spread the chili on top of that.

Makes one or two servings.

Mallory's nutty rice

J. Michael Mallory

Ingredients:

1/3 package instant rice
1 package energizer mix
1 heaping spoonful peanut butter
2 pouches Spam
3 heaping spoonful hot sauce
1/2 spoonful garlic powder
1/2 spoonful coriander
(sub no salt seasoning)

Directions:

in their original foil packaging, squish the Spam with your fingers to puree. Add that to the other ingredients in an empty rice bag. Fill halfway with hot water. Shake vigorously to thoroughly break up the peanut butter and mix the spices. Place the rice bag in your hot pot filled halfway with water. Let it cook for about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Makes two servings.



No-bake cookies

Merrig Jogetting

Ingredients:

½ - 1 cup peanut butter
1 - 2 packages oatmeal (any flavor)
½ cup dry hot chocolate

Directions:

Mix all ingredients together. Spread out on open chip bag into an approximately 12-inch by eight-inch square. Makes two dozen two-inch square cookies.



Jeff's spaghetti daze

Jeff Goddard

Ingredients:

1 chili no-beans (substitute: chili with beans)
1 can V-8
2/3 bottle ketchup
2 heaping spoonful garlic powder (to taste)
2 or 3 heaping spoonful onion flakes (to taste)
2 jalapenos, diced
1 summer sausage, diced (optional)
6 chili soups, seasoning packets reserved
Black pepper to taste
1 or 2 cheese curls, finely crushed

Directions:

Place first seven ingredients in an empty corn chip bag. Add ½ cup water and a chili seasoning packet, stir well. Place bag in a hot pot and cook for 45 minutes to an hour. Place two soups and one chili seasoning packet in each of three separate bowls. Add water and cover for eight to 10 minutes. Drain any excess water from the three bowls and sprinkle black pepper on the noodles to taste. Remove spaghetti sauce bag from hot pot, stir, and pour evenly over the noodles. Pour crushed cheese curls over the spaghetti sauce, mix well. Serve with snack crackers or saltines. Makes three servings.



Crunchy-Chew Granola

Brenda Craig

Ingredients:

2 packages brown sugar oatmeal
2 packages plain oatmeal
2 spoonful peanut butter
1 Trail mix
2 spoonful dry hot chocolate
3 spoonful cold water (more or less, not enough to make watery)

Directions:

Stir to moisten. Add one package trail mix and two table-spoons dry hot chocolate mix.

Continue to mix. Roll into approximately eight or nine balls. Roll each ball into your choice of dry cappuccino or hot chocolate mix.

Topetz's Chinese rice

Matthew Topetz

Ingredients:

1 pkg. ranch dressing
½ hot pickle
1 pkg. regular peanuts
1 pkg. pork skins
1 bag of rice
2 pkg. mackerel
1 orange sports drink
4 spoonful barbecue sauce
1½ spoonful sandwich spread
1 pkg. chili soup seasoning
½ spoonful coriander
2 pkg. Sweet Nothing
1 jalapeno, diced

Directions:

Measure four cups of water using the hot pot lid and heat it up. Pour rice into a large mixing bowl and add the last eight ingredients to the dry rice. Drain the juice from one of the mackerel pouches. Stir the contents of the bowl until evenly mixed. When the water is hot, pour it onto the rice and let it sit for 15 minutes. Crush up the bag of pork skins and stir into the rice mixture. Add the package of peanuts. Mix the pickle and ranch dressing to taste. Makes two servings.



Tippy's coffee balls

Kristin Metz

Ingredients:

1 pkg. duplex or vanilla cream cookies
1 heaping spoonful coffee
2 heaping spoonful hot chocolate

Directions:

Scrape cream filling out of cookies into hot pot insert. Place in hot pot to melt. Crush cookies in bowl. Grind coffee into fine powder and add to crushed cookies. Add powdered coffee into crushed cookies. Add a little water until the cookie mixture is moist, but not wet. Roll into little balls. Pour melted cream into upside down hot pot lid and roll the balls in it. Then, roll them in the hot chocolate. Enjoy! You should have about 15 balls depending upon how big you make them.



Chicken-chili nachos

James Celler

Ingredients:

1 or 2 pks. chicken chili
1 bag instant chili beans
1 bag nacho chips, crushed
1 bottle squeeze cheese
1 bag tortilla chips (sub corn chips)
jalapenos (optional)

Directions:

Heat chicken chili pouch(es) in hot pot. In a bowl, prepare refried beans to desired thickness. Pour tortilla chips into separate bowl for bottom layer. Mix in chicken-chili and crushed nacho chips into refried beans and pour mixture over tortilla chips. Squeeze cheese over bean-chip-chili mixture. Prepare for heartburn. Add jalapeños for extra punishment. Enjoy!



Chocolate mint drops

Shelly Martin and Rashelle Plana

Ingredients:

1 package duplex cookies
1 mint stick
5 spoonful water
½ spoonful coffee (optional)

Directions:

Crush cookies and set aside. Finely crush mint stick. Mix with crushed cookies. Mix water and coffee, add to cookie mixture and stir until dough-like. Pull off pieces of dough and roll into balls. Place in empty spread bowl. Makes 25 to 40 pieces.

Fantastic fish tacos

Todd Carman

Ingredients:

3 soups, crushed
1 bag pork skins, slightly crushed
½ spoonful black pepper
2 spoonful dehydrated onion
2 lemon Cool Downs
2 Sweet Nothings
1 chicken soup spice pack
1 chili soup spice pack
1 or 2 packs mackerel
1 pack tuna
2 jalapenos, diced
½ pickle, diced
2 spoonful pickle juice
1 heaping spoonful mustard
3 heaping spoonful sandwich spread
¼ to 1/3 bag corn chips
1 pack tortillas
2 ranch dressings (optional)
hot sauce (optional)

Directions:

Mix the first eight ingredients in a bowl. Add hot water (almost 2/3 a hot pot), cover and set aside for about eight to 10 minutes until most of the water is absorbed. Uncover bowl and stir, the mix should be moist. Add next eight ingredients, stir well. Add corn chips to taste, stir to mix. Serve on tortillas, top with hot sauce or ranch dressing if desired. Makes 12 tacos.



Liv's chocolate chesscake

Clifford Livingston

Ingredients:

3 pouches milk
3 packets cream cheese
1 Three Musketeers
or 2 Hershey's bars
¼ cup cocoa mix
6 spoons water
1 pack duplex cookies
6 fluid ounces Sprite or water
1 lemon cool down

Directions:

Put chocolate bar into some type of waterproof bag and melt in hot pot.

For the crust: separate cookies from the cream into separate bowls. Use hot pot insert to crush the cookies into fine crumbs. Add half of the lemon-lime sports drink and ¼ cup cocoa mix into crumbs. Mix well. Put three spoons of crumb mixture into empty cookie tray for later use. Add six spoons of Sprite or water to the crumbs and mix into dough. Form dough into a ball. Press the dough flat into the bottom and halfway up the sides of the bowl.

For the filling: add the three cream cheese packets, the other half of the lemon-lime sports drink, the melted chocolate bar and the ½ cup of cocoa mix to the bowl of cookie creams. Mix well until no lumps. Add one pouch of milk to filling mixture and stir until dry and crumbly. Repeat the process with the two remaining milk pouches. Pour three fluid ounces of Sprite or water into filling and stir well. Add the remaining three fluid ounces of Sprite or water and stir well until no lumps. Stir for at least five minutes but no longer than 10. Pour the filling into the crust and sprinkle the dry cookie crumbs over the top. Allow to set for six hours or, ideally overnight. Serve and enjoy.



Tippy's spicy tuna wraps

Kristin Metz

Ingredients:

1 pkg. tuna
4 flour tortillas
jalapeño chips (crushed)
2 jalapeño peppers
½ hot pickle
1 chili noodle
¼ bottle jalapeño cheese

Directions:

Cook noodles without seasoning. Drain tuna. Put tuna in a bowl and break up into little flakes/pieces. In a separate bowl cut up the two jalapeño peppers and ½ hot pickle. Then add the cooked noodles, crushed jalapeño chips (as much as desired), ¼ bottle of jalapeño cheese, and ½ packet of chili seasoning. Stir together. Add the tuna to the cheesy mixture and mix it together again.

Spoon mixture into four flour tortillas and place in double bagged cooking bags. Heat for 30 minutes and enjoy!

J.C.'s lemon pudding

James Carlberg

Ingredients:

1 bag vanilla wafers
1 bag powdered milk
1 lemon-lime sports drink
1 packet sweetener
1 Sprite

Directions:

Crush half the vanilla wafers in a spread bowl and set other half aside. Pour the powdered milk, Sweetener, and the lemon-lime sports drink into the crushed vanilla wafers in the spread bowl. Pour them all in when dry; do not pour them in wet. Slowly pour in about ¾ of the can of Sprite into the dry ingredients and stir until the mixture is thick like a pudding texture. Spread a thin layer of the mixture into another spread bowl and then begin stacking layers of vanilla wafers over the layers of pudding mixture. The completed bowl will consist of whole wafers over pudding mixture layers. Use all ingredients. Eat and enjoy! Serves two to four (depending on the size of each individual serving).



Menudo

Richard Larza

Ingredients:

1 cup tortilla chips
¼ bag of cooked rice
1 summer sausage
or 2 Spams chopped
1 chili - no beans
3 bags pork skins
2 packs chili soup seasoning
½ pickle, diced, with juice

Directions:

Crush tortilla chips into a bowl and add ¼ cup hot water. Knead into dough. Add cooked rice to the dough and knead. Put mix in a bag and heat in hot pot for 10 minutes. In a bowl combine the summer sausage, the two chili soup seasonings, the chili pouch, and one cup of hot water. In a separate bowl add the three bags of pork skins and add about a cup of hot water until skins are soft.

Mix both bowls together evenly. Add the pickle and juice. Combine with the rice mixture. Serve and enjoy!



Armadillo eggs

Flint Kerby

Ingredients:

½ cup dry hot chocolate
2 spoonful peanut butter
7 chocolate chip or macaroon cookies, crushed
several spoonful water
1 bag M&Ms, crushed
5 vanilla wafers, crushed

Directions:

Mix all ingredients (except crushed vanilla wafers) together until the mixture no longer sticks to the bowl. Take thick mixture and roll into quarter size balls. Take four or five vanilla wafers finely crunched. Roll ball and wafer dough together. Ta da! Armadillo eggs.



Tomahw Tamales

Anonymous

Ingredients:

1 bag corn chips
1 bag pork skins
1 pack chicken soup seasoning
4 empty soup bags
2 bowls

Directions:

Crunch up corn chips, mix in seasoning to taste. Add water to chips to make a dough. Crunch up pork skin then soften with water.

Lay out open soup bags and spread dough out evenly on them. Then, put softened pork skins on the middle of the dough as filling. Roll up soup bag to easily wrap the dough around the filling, forming the tamale.

Cuts into four or five tamales. Place all wrapped tamales in one bowl, place second bowl on top of first bowl and fill with hot water. Allow dough to stiffen and let sit around 10 minutes. Remove bags and enjoy.

Great at Christmas. Not like mom's, but close.

▶PAWS
continued from page 1

War heroes valiantly endure the violence of battle and have proven themselves willing to pay the ultimate price for their country. These men and women are eyewitnesses to horrendous events in combat.

They subject themselves to injury and suffer the loss of close comrades. Those who are not physically injured often incur mental problems. Soldiers are not the only ones to endure these situations, as tragedy and abuse can also create victims who must deal with issues such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. These problems can also affect people's physical health, making them more prone to disease and sickness.

Fortunately, studies show that the affection shown by service animals greatly improves mental health and the disposition of those affected by trauma. Patriot PAWS is dedicated to helping veterans and trauma victims become self-sufficient and improving their quality of life using service canines, all at no cost to the recipient. The use of service dogs can reduce the risk of alcoholism, drug use, depression, serious mental breakdowns and suicidal thoughts, which helps keep medical and psychiatric care costs low. "This program has renewed my sense of worth, given me a purpose and opened my mind, allowing me to learn invaluable skills and give back to veterans who have given so much to our country," one TDCJ participant said.

TDCJ participants training dogs with Patriot PAWS enjoy the privilege of having the canines live with them throughout the day. "The best thing to me [about the program] is responsibility and empathy," said one participant. "I have been a long while without them. The dogs have given those back to me. I am so grateful for them."

Another participant told Patriot PAWS that working with the dogs fosters skills for future success: "With your

original trainer and if so, how do you deal with this?

We found out that Golden Retrievers have depression when they leave their handlers. Patriot PAWS is set up to move these dogs from one trainer to another every three to four months, so they're less likely to build such a great bond.

Can you tell us about another satellite program, Patriot PAWS of Aggieland? We read this is a new program for students at Texas A&M University (TAMU) to assist in training, domesticating and raising service canines.

The prison program is the reason we started Aggieland. The dogs were getting institutionalized in TDCJ and needed additional experiences. In prison, they weren't being socialized around vacuum cleaners and carpet and other common household items, so we started using college kids who wanted to puppy-raise to get them used to these things. The Puppy Raiser program started out with three or four ladies in 2013, and now we have more than 200 college kids. A&M has a training center where the college kids all meet together and help each other train dogs.

What is the selection process for those who may receive a service dog? Is there a priority list?

Requests go into a pool. We have a pool of veterans that are on a review committee. I'm the only non-veteran on that committee. The veteran committee looks at the applicants' requests. They look over their DD-214 government form that must be stamped to prove that they were, in fact, in the service. The pool is similar to a list, but if somebody comes in that's lost both of their limbs compared to somebody that's been physically able to live their life for 40 years, the person with a mobile disability is a higher priority for what we do. We specialize in training mobile disability dogs.

Do you separate the potential service dogs into categories such as those who are better with the physical aspect of being a service animal, as opposed to those who are better with PTSD?

Yes, we do. We recently had three dogs placed in a few district attorney's offices for children who were abused in some way or another. They will get some of these beautiful Golden Retrievers that maybe don't necessarily want to retrieve a phone or a toy and are also overly friendly. These are called facility dogs.

What's the most challenging aspect of this process?

I've been a dog trainer for 35 years, and it's sometimes difficult matching up the service animal with their new owner. Think about it this way: Think about your mom picking your wife for you and this woman you've never met is now living with you and taking care of you.

It's hard because we've spent two years with the dogs, but we've only talked on the phone with the veterans for maybe a total of six hours, so it's harder to match the veteran with the dog. When the veterans show up, we listen to the dogs. The dogs give us their opinion; we watch the dogs' reaction to the person — whether they will bond with that person and how quickly they respond to that person asking them to do cues. So, yes, I would say the challenge of making a successful match is probably the most difficult aspect of this process.

Didn't you say you were a trainer?

I've been doing it about 35 years. That's my specialty. My first dog was invited to David Letterman three times. He was also invited to Animal Planet because he could do things that could help someone. David Letterman thought it was the coolest thing in the world that my dog could pull off your shoes and socks, but if you think of a veteran who can't or doesn't have hands to do that, you see it in a different light. Sure, I had a cool trained dog, but he was trained to do daily tasks that help somebody. Other people think, "Oh, that's a cool parlor trick!"

When the dog was invited to Animal Planet, he took the dishes off the table and put them in the dishwasher. He'd put your plates in the dishwasher and set them up correctly, put the forks and knives in the silverware holder, and place the cups in the cup rack. People thought that was really cool. Now, if you put your hands behind your back, think, how are you going to do all these things? You learn that

CRIME STOPPERS

Unsolved Homicide

Katarata Deboise Johnson



On Aug. 25, 2004, 21-year-old Katarata Deboise Johnson worked a late shift at Taco Bell in Taylor, Texas. After work, Katarata drove to her trailer home located on North Dolan Street in Taylor. Her body was found the next day, after she was shot and killed inside her home. Her red Mitsubishi Lancer had been stolen and later found at the Thorndale Community Pool.

Katarata was a vibrant, young, black woman who was excited about life and had recently hosted a gathering at the Taylor Community Center. The investigation has stalled, and the Texas Rangers are seeking information.

If you have any information on this crime, please contact the TDCJ Crime Stoppers office at P.O. Box 1855, Huntsville, TX 77342-1855. Crime Stoppers will pay from \$50 to \$1,000 for any information leading to the arrest, filing charges or indictment of a person or persons who have committed a felony crime or is a wanted fugitive. Crime Stoppers guarantees your anonymity.

you don't have to ask your seven-year-old child to help you get dressed in the morning because you've got a dog that can pull up your pants or help you get your shirt over your head. It gives you a little bit of independence and freedom back.

Are some of their training processes a bit more targeted once you have categorized the mobile disability dogs from the PTSD dogs?

Yes, they are. I get some very funny looks from wardens when I ask them if I can bring some of our adaptive assets for the training process. We've done things some people might consider crazy. For example, I brought in a remote-control cat to teach a dog to leave cats alone. I've also brought in food tongs, because sometimes you see veterans with pinchers on their hands trying to pick up items. So, we'll practice feeding the dogs with pinchers to get them used to eating out of metal.

We train TDCJ participants to do these things and some of them have even come up with their own training skills that we've never seen before. Not every veteran is the same. TDCJ participants have gained enough knowledge and training skills that they can come up with their own training methods. I like their ability to think outside the box.

As much as you would think you can do something without your hands, trying to do it and train a dog at the same time can be very difficult. It's peculiar to see men walk around with socks on their hands, but these are things that we've had to do. TDCJ has been



Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

cooperative and open to discussing taking things to the next level. You don't know what a veteran experienced during the war. So, we have to think outside the box to train dogs to do certain tasks.

What inspired you to put this program together?

The veterans in Dallas were trying to train their own dogs. One of them asked me to come and help them train one of the dogs they had started training down at the Dallas VA. When I met up with their dog, I saw how much I could help with the knowledge I'd gained training dogs. The rest is history.

Veterans frequently deal with depression. How have these service animals helped them in that regard?

We did an in-house study three years ago of some veterans. Of the 70 who answered the questionnaire, I would say approximately 60 percent of them have decreased their depression and anxiety medication. Some of them said they slept for six straight hours for the first time in 30 years.

What's the most gratifying aspect of Patriot PAWS?

Gosh. That's hard to put into words. ... For me, it's the fact that you brought a smile back to that veteran's life and opened the door for them to go out and do different things and live a normal life. The part that stirs your heart the most is that you know that the veteran possibly wouldn't be alive today without that dog, and the only thing that dog may have done was be there 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Those are the things that make me get up and keep doing what we do every day.

Editor's Note: Incarcerated individuals in TDCJ can apply to participate in Patriot PAWS by sending an I-60 to their unit warden to be forwarded to the Patriot PAWS program. Those who wish to donate can go through the withdrawal process at their unit's Inmate Trust Fund. Three TDCJ facilities participate in this program: the Murray and Crain women's units in Gatesville and the men's Boyd Unit in Fairfield. ★

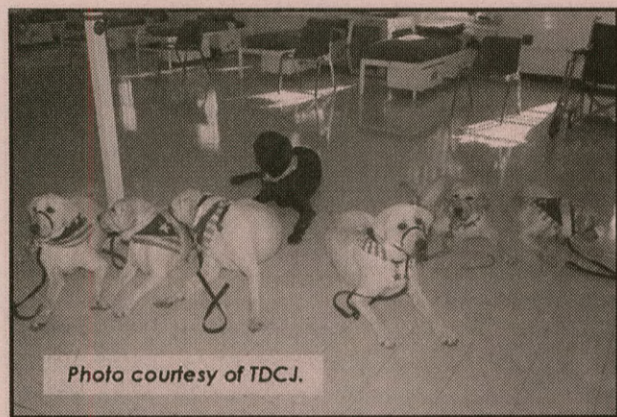


Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

prison program, you have given me a voice, strength and life skills that I can take to the world. Every day I become the person I want to be. I have made my kids and parents proud. But overall, I am proud of myself. This is the hardest thing I have ever done and one of the most rewarding. I love everything that comes with the program. All the hard work is worth it."

The ECHO recently had the privilege of speaking with Patriot PAWS CEO and founder Lori Stevens.

The ECHO: TDCJ participants in this program learn a variety of skills ranging from certified dog training to grooming procedures, animal nutrition and health, as well as canine behavior. Do participants receive a tangible certificate, and are there any employment opportunities upon release for those involved?

Stevens: Since 2008, when we first partnered up with TDCJ, we have hired nine former participants. I still have two of these people working for me now, and there are other ones who want the job. Unfortunately, when you're dealing with a small nonprofit, you have to wait your turn [laughs]! We have had close to 340 TDCJ participants go through the program [to become canine trainers], and of those, 127 have been released at last count. Forty of those men and women have jobs in animal-related fields, which include working in animal shelters and grooming. One of the people that went through Patriot PAWS now has a mobile grooming vehicle, which I think is pretty cool. So, yes, they are finding jobs in this field when they are released.

Most of the canines that go through your program are Labradors, Golden Retrievers and some of the Doodles. How do they end up at Patriot PAWS?

For a while we were getting donated dogs from local breeders, but now we've joined a breeding coop from Assistance Dogs International (ADI). Our organization is accredited by ADI, and they provide us with dogs that are specially bred for what we are doing for veterans.

Are there any of the controversial breeds, like pit bulls or Dobermans?

No, and it's not because we don't like these breeds. We found that when you're hurt or injured, your adrenaline goes up, and when these pit bulls sense this, they tend to go into protective mode. When that happens, they can't differentiate between an attacker and an ambulance driver.

The bond formed between the dog and its trainer is very real. Do the dogs go through depression after being separated from their

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Texas Workforce Commission's Alvarez celebrates Lee College 2019 graduates

Will Hill, ECHO Staff

“What makes today even more meaningful is the myriad of obstacles and interruptions each of you gentlemen faced while focusing on your studies,” said Commissioner of Labor Julian Alvarez III from the Texas Workforce Commission. “If you men can achieve what you accomplished here amid all of the distractions, then you can do anything you set your mind to, and more importantly, you can do it anywhere.”

The pursuit of a college degree is a daunting experience even under the best of circumstances; combining the stress of studying for exams and writing term papers within the rigors of incarceration multiplies the level of difficulty exponentially. In recognition of the hard work exhibited by Lee College Huntsville Center students, the Wynne Unit hosted the school's largest graduating class in its 54-year partnership with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ).

The summer ceremony began with the procession of graduates into the unit's chapel, each wearing a graduate's traditional robe and mortarboard. The beaming faces of parents, spouses and children in attendance, many of whom had traveled a long distance to show their support of their loved ones, revealed the importance placed on the graduates' accomplishments.

After a short invocation offered by graduate M. Wiese and a brief musical performance by the Wynne Unit Ensemble, Lee College made several presentations to deserving faculty members. Dr. D. Brown, Lee College president, recognized one individual with a national award. Out of more than 1,100 nominees from two-year colleges across the United States, instructor P. Allen was selected to receive the American Association of Community College's annual award for Excellence in Faculty Innovation. Dr. Brown quoted the Community College Journal to detail Allen's contributions to correctional education:

“For Paul Allen, chair and professor of business management at Lee College Huntsville Center, bringing educational opportunities to those in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice's prison units has been his calling. Allen was honored in the faculty innovation category because of the restrictive environment, with

no connection to the outside world and no internet access, Allen has developed innovative strategies over his 36 years of teaching incarcerated individuals. He developed the curriculum that encourages and promotes open dialog and discussion and simulations of real-world systems, such as the stock market. Allen's innovative effort has led to successful courses and also provided priceless life lessons and skills that help students become successful employees and entrepreneurs upon their release from prison.”

Every year Lee College also recognizes two professors, one from the academic side and one from their extensive vocational curriculum, as Faculty Members of the Year. This year Lee College Huntsville Center Dean D. Zuniga recognized J. Banewski, professor in the business management program, as Academic Faculty Member of the Year, and J. Langley Jr., professor of horticulture, was recognized as Technical Faculty Member of the Year.

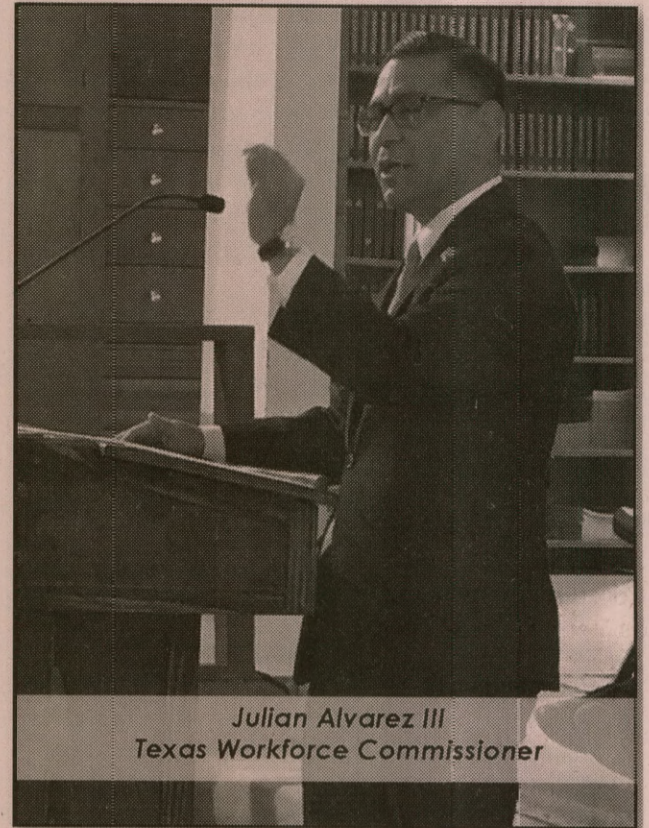
The final presentation was a plaque honoring Dr. Brown's presidency at Lee College, which began in 2012. Dr. Brown, who has been a tireless advocate for Lee College students regardless of their status as free or incarcerated, is retiring from his position at the end of January 2020. During his time at Lee

College, Brown strove to offer the same educational opportunities available to students at the main campus in Baytown to students in TDCJ. He has been a vital proponent for getting Pell Grants, workforce grants, and other sources of funding for financially challenged students.

In addition, Dr. Brown recognized Dean Zuniga's many years of service to Lee College, beginning as an academic counselor and progressing to serve as dean of the Huntsville Center. In all, she has played a major role in more than 30 commencement exercises and currently oversees the selection of the keynote speaker, as well as emceeing the ceremony.

The highlight of Lee College's 2019 commencement exercise was J. Alvarez's inspiring message concerning the next phase of the graduates' lives.

“Are you ready for the future? I urge you not to allow your time in prison to define you, but rather serve as a place to receive an education and learn new job skills and how to make better decisions



Julian Alvarez III
Texas Workforce Commissioner

upon your return to society,” he said.

In addition to a degree program in business management, Lee College also offers vocational courses in such diverse fields as microcomputer application, welding, truck driving, horticulture, HVAC, cabinet making, culinary arts and automotive technology. All are designed to prepare students for reentry into society and the workforce.

One of the major themes of Alvarez's speech was that simply coming to prison does not terminate one's ability to pursue dreams or live a rewarding and fulfilling life.

“No one's destiny is determined by their past — but by their character,” Alvarez said. “Prison can be a defining moment in a man's life, but not the definition of the man.”

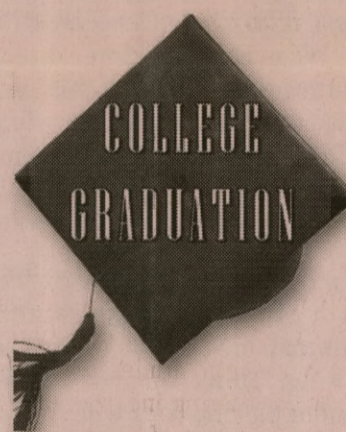
Following Alvarez's motivating speech, proud family members listened as their loved ones' names were called and the graduates walked across the auditorium to receive their degree. For many, receiving that simple piece of paper is proof that they are no longer the man they were when they first entered prison. It validates the hard work and commitment each student invested in achieving this worthwhile accomplishment and making certain that this time away from family and friends is not wasted. ★

“No one's destiny is determined by their past, but by their character.”

— Julian Alvarez

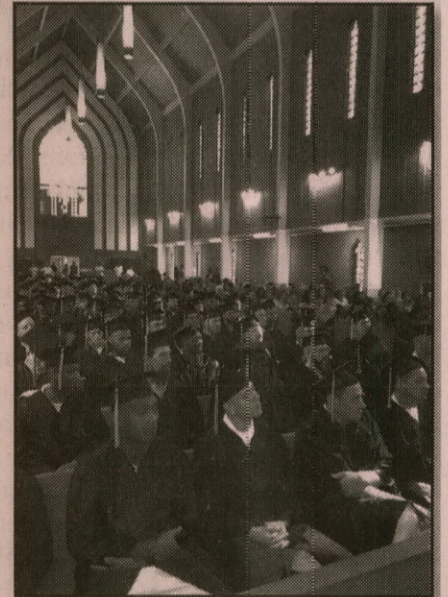


Photos courtesy of Lee College.



Alvin Community College Graduates:

Ciprian Almanza • Shelton Phillips • Stacy Guzman



Lee College Graduates:

Michael Alder
Eric Alejandre
Reynaldo Amaya
Joel W. Anderson
Jerome D. Applewhite
Erik Arevalo
Joshua Armenta
Roy Armstrong
Robert Daniel Banks
Jerome L. Barber
Brendon Lamar Baker
Helton M. Barahona
James Dale Barton
Marcus Bell
Quentin Bell
Todd Berzley
Joe Pat Bessinger II
Jimmy Billingsley
Christopher E. Binch
Reginald Bishop
Brandon Scott Blasdel
Jeremy Bolen
Thomas G. Boulware
Stefon Brantley
Timothy Kelsey Brantley
Lee Brooks
Cora D. Brown
Jesse A. Brumley
Joshua Buckjune
Lance Allen Burress
Danielle Keith Burks
Kervin D. Burns
James K. Burton
James Butler
Ricky Vander Carter
Paul Andrew Cantu
Roel Ramon Cantu
Joaquin Merced Cardona
Isbaal Chavez
Eric Wayne Christopher

Jaime Cisneros
Jose Contreras
Anthony Coon
William Crawford, Jr
Navor Cristan
Shane Cade Crowson
Samuel John Davis
Eric Delossantos
James E. Dorsey
Creig Dugas
Corey Gaylon Dunn
Ted Christian Eason
David Lee Elliott, Jr.
Darold Ellsworth
Patrick Evans
Anthony Fanelli
Ronnie Lynn Farris II
Michael Faught



Jose Flores
Gregory Lynn Franklin, Jr.
William Fuller
Kevin Robert Gardiner
David Allen Garrett, Jr.
Russell M. Georg
Roger Dale Gibson
Roy L. Gilbert
Blaze P. Glocar

Ty W. Gonnerman
Jesus Gonzales, Jr.
Nicolas Gonzales
Jose Alberto Gonzalez
James Good
David Guerra
Jaxon Kirk Guerra
La Derrick Hardeman
Adrian K. Hardy
Cory Harris
Gary Benjamin Haga
Lakendrick Hayden
Steven Harold Hays
Cody Ray Hash
Paul Hengel
Rodolfo Hernandez, Jr.
Robert Hidalgo
William Earl Hill
Douglas L. Hunt
Kory Isfalt
Aron L. Johnson
TaDarrian Antwoine Johnson
James Jones
Dalton Jordan
Michael Juarez
Michael Kane
Clint Kemp
Jairus D. Kesse
Andrew Riley Kindred
Charles Christopher Lancaster
Kip Kevin Lamb
Keith Leyendecker
Scott B. List
Robert Lopez
Domingo Luera
Robert R. MacCurdy
Keith Martin
Brian Pate Matlock
Jeff McClendon
Billy Jo McCoy
David McGlinchey
Todd B. McMaster
John Gregory McNew
Taylor Cole McShan
Victor Medina

Marland Harper Meeks
Kevin Meeniefee
Jason Patrick Meyer
Henry W. Molina, Jr
Delfino Morales
James Mulieri
Michael Paul Mungiola
Rick Mungia
Rudolph C. Munoz, Jr
John Muth
Michael Nieves
Robert Shanon O'Dell
Ted R. Ogg
Ray Dale Ogles
Kevin Diaz Ortega
Marcial J. Ortega
Jose T. Ozuna, Jr
Justin Parker
Tommy Lee Parks
Jamie Lee Perdue
Johnny Perez
Ron Perriott
Frederick Phillips
John Phippen
Stacey Porter
Malcolm Ali Pulliam
Antoine Verdell Rachell
Michael Lynn Randell
Alan Dale Riley
Dominick Roberson
William H. Roberts III
Kevin W. Robinson
Michael C. Robinson
Jose A. Romero, Jr
Spencer Sale
Nicholas Salinas
Michael Sanchez
George Sanders, Jr
Aaron Quan Scott
Patrick Semple
Javier Sendijo
John D. Shotwell
Emmanuel Jerome Sigarst
Joe Sims
Matthew Simmons
Cody Gray Smith

Eldon Smith
Mark Anthony Smith
Titus J. Smithers
Christopher Michael Solis
Christopher James Spain II
Jodi Sparkman
Travis Jennings Stansell
Kasey Sykes
Troy Thoele
Danny Thomas
Jonathan Roy Thomas
Matthew Topete
Dustin Traynor
Harley Davidson Trott
Stephen Michael Turnbull
Dwayne Andrew Tyson
Chad VandenBosch
Jacob Van-Decarr
Thuan Duc Vu
Hymon A. Walker
Richard Walker
Jeffery Wallace
Taylan Camaron Watters
Marlin Webb
Shaun Michael Welch
Scott Allen Wildey
Jason D. Whitlock
Michael John Wiese
Justin Wilkins
Marlon D. Williams
Ryan Williamson
Cory James Wisnoski
Brian Young

Benefit and service updates for incarcerated veterans

ECHO Staff Report

Benefits and services

Veterans of the military who are incarcerated can access reentry services by contacting Reentry and Integration Division (RID) case managers on each unit. Case managers can help veterans obtain records of military service, apply for a DD-214 Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty, and link up with military peer support and continuity of care services. They also help veterans complete benefit applications, including those for compensation, pension and enrollment in the Veterans Association (VA) health care system.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) collaborates with a variety of organizations groups to provide reentry services for incarcerated veterans. To date, the TDCJ has partnered with Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN), Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services, Texas Veterans Commission (TVC), Military Veterans Peer Network (MVPN) and Veterans Affairs (VA).

Incarcerated veterans are provided with the following support services:

- Assistance completing veterans benefit forms and mailing them at no cost
- Facilitating exams for eligible veterans
- Assistance setting up direct deposit for VA benefits
- Assistance in reinstating benefits before release
- Access to community resources after release
- Access to continuity of care for eligible veterans

In addition to assisting veterans complete benefit forms, TDCJ works with the VA to allow contracted doctors to examine eligible veterans in order to determine compensation and pension eligibility. The VA determines if a veteran needs additional examination to determine an outcome for a pending claim.

Hazlewood Act

The Hazlewood Act is a State of Texas benefit that provides qualified veterans, spouses and dependent children up to 150 hours of tuition exemption, which includes most fees at public institutions of higher education in Texas, but excludes living expenses, books or supply fees.

These education benefits are available to incarcerated veterans who meet the following qualifications:

- At the time of entry into the U.S. Armed Forces, they designated Texas as Home of Record; en-



The Veteran's Honor Guard lowers the flag at the Wynne Unit with pride.

- Received the service in Texas; or was a Texas resident
- Received an honorable discharge or separation, or a general discharge under honorable conditions
- Served at least 181 days of active duty service (excluding training)
- Received no federal veterans education benefits, or has no federal veterans education benefits dedicated to paying tuition and fees (such as Chapter 33 or 31, Pell and SEOG are not relevant) for the term or semester enrolled that do not exceed the value of Hazlewood benefits
- No default on a student loan made or guaranteed by the State of Texas
- Enrolled in classes for which the college receives tax support, that is, courses that do not depend solely on student tuition and fees to cover their cost, unless the college's governing board has ruled to let veterans receive the benefit while taking unfunded courses

Veterans who are granted their first Hazlewood Act exemption beginning in the fall of 2011 must reside in Texas during the semester or term for which the exemption is claimed. This requirement does not apply to the Veterans who either received the exemption prior to the 2011-2012 academic year, have reenlisted into active duty, or reside with a spouse who is on active duty.

Veterans Reentry Dorm

TDCJ-RID, in partnership with MVPN, offers a Veterans Reentry Dorm at Travis County State Jail in Austin. The dorm provides veteran-specific housing, along with supportive services, for men serving a state jail sentence and nearing their release date. The services are provided by veteran peers and other professionals in order to prepare men for a successful return to the community following incarceration. Veterans within the dorm have an opportunity to meet other incarcerated veterans to regain trust in their comrades and establish a support system. They can work in small and large groups which focus on dealing with traumas in their past, substance and alcohol abuse, family reunification and reentry planning. Individual sessions are also provided when needed.

The Veterans Dorm program begins the benefit information and application process prior to release. Veterans also receive contact information for the MVPN representative and TVC county service officer for the area where the offender plans to reside upon release. TDCJ has also partnered with the VA and MVPN to provide continuity of care services for offenders not residing in the Veterans Dorm. Upon request, the Guidebook for Veterans Incarcerated in Texas will be provided to any veteran offender at the time of release.

To be eligible for the Travis County State Jail Reentry Dorm, a veteran offender must be a state jail offender, be serving a sentence that does not require registering as a sex offender, be without a felony or ICE detainer, have a J1 or J2 custody status, and have at least 100 days remaining on their sentence.

Commissary fund debit transfer

Eligible family members, such as spouses or dependent children, can receive an apportionment of up to 90 percent of the veteran's benefits while an incarcerated loved one is in TDCJ. Veterans who have established benefits or have been awarded benefits while incarcerated are eligible to receive up to 10 percent of their benefits by direct deposit to their commissary accounts.

Questions regarding reentry services for veterans may be addressed to the unit reentry case manager by 1-60 or mailed to the TDCJ Reentry and Integration Division at 4616 W. Howard Lane, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78728. ★

Graduation started as a thought

Matthew Topete, Wynne Unit

As the guy in the blue shirt and shiny boots fired off names in rapid succession, I watched passively and waited for my name to be called. One by one, everyone lined up in alphabetical order. It was a warm Saturday morning.

"Topete!" the guy in the blue shirt and shiny boots called out, and I raised my hand in acknowledgment. I was led to a spot in the growing line of inmates who were also waiting for directions. Sweat glistened on my forehead, my heart picked up pace, and it seemed as if I waited an eternity before the line started to move.

Coming into the prison system as a teenager, I was confused, angry, sad and just a big ball of negativity. The world was against me, and no one could tell me otherwise. I felt I was at the end of my road and that my life had been completely deprived of direction and purpose.

"Straighten the line up and walk it off," the officer said as the winding line inched forward at an agonizingly slow pace. Up two flights of stairs, through a door and to the right, the giant snakelike line crawled its way through the unit. We passed by dayrooms where convicts pointed and stared while others hit on windows and yelled. I kept my head forward and focused on these thoughts: "How did you get here? You better not show you're nervous!"

Entering prison at such a young age, they housed me accordingly. Yet, I still met old schoolers. There's one who has stuck in my mind even after 10 years. He left a lasting impression on me and gave me advice when I needed it the most. He was the first person who clearly defined an undeniable path to success for me. It may not have meant much to me then, but his little dayroom lesson and talk on success impacted me and ultimately changed my life.

What truly defines success? Depending who you ask, the answers may be different, but three steps must be realized to understand the path that lead us there. To even begin climbing the ladder to success, we must understand three critical elements: vision, understanding failure and taking action.

Step One: Have a Vision

We need a purpose or goal in life that we put all our effort toward and never stop reaching for until we achieve it. When I speak on vision, I'm not talking about apparitions people see in a dream state or even the amazing feat our eyes do when we are "seeing." No, I'm talking about the type of vision that resonates deep within us. It's that one thing we conceive in our mind's eye that nobody can take from us. It starts as a single thought, and it's built upon

the emotion we feed it. The limitations our mind shackles it with are its only restraints. This is the "anything is possible" type of thing.

The first step on the path to success is to have a vision. If you don't have a goal or know where you're going in life, it's like having the nicest car in the world without a destination in mind. We'll drive around aimlessly in life and never get anywhere. Being incarcerated does leave us with a mountain of limitations physically, but it has no restraint on us mentally. Most of us lost our sense of purpose after being incarcerated, but this does not mean it's an end, only a new beginning to something better. Always remember how easy it is for us to fall into the trap of driving around with no purpose or goal in life, idling along like a boat with no rudder. Get a vision, purpose or goal. Stick to it and never give up.

Step Two: Understand Failure

Technically, I could've stopped at the first step, but there are two other elements that complement step one on the pathway to success. Understanding failure is just as important. To understand it fully, we can't be single-minded, and we must look at it from both sides. Most people see failure as something negative. But when we step back and look at it from a different point of view, we see that without failure, there would be no learning.

In a way, the failures in our life teach us the deepest of lessons. If we can learn to take our failures and become better because of them, they become a positive aspect in our lives. We are scared to get out of our comfort zone for the fear of failing, yet almost every success in life has had a failure attached to it in some type of way. The only time we undoubtedly fail is when we give up. To illustrate this point, Thomas Edison said that after he failed 10,000 times, he had wonderful results. How could anyone in their right mind have wonderful results in the midst of such failure? According to Edison, he now knew 10,000 ways which didn't work. He believed that to become a truly successful individual, one must first experience failure. This means we can't be afraid to fail, because subtly hidden within failure's grasp lies the treasure trove of success.

Step Three: Take Action

On the path to success, anyone can have a grander vision or an understanding of failure, yet the last step is a critical step on the path. A quote by Bruce Lee says it all: "To know is not enough. One must apply." Our vision manifested into action unfolds a magical type of power, and there is no use in having

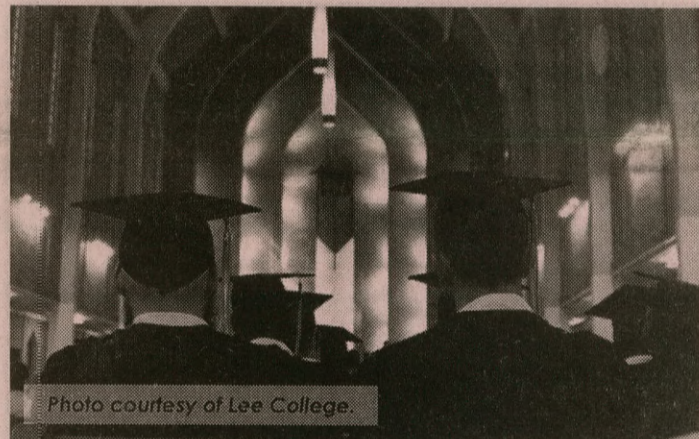


Photo courtesy of Lee College.

a vision of climbing a ladder to success unless we're willing to put one foot on the rung and climb it ourselves.

To get to any destination in life, we must take action, and our work, drive and commitment are the avenues we take to get there. As Edison also said, "Genius is 1 percent inspiration and 99 percent perspiration." There is no substitute for taking action and working hard toward our vision. When we take anything in life and push it as far as it will go — beyond our limits and where it has never been before — only then will we force it into the realm of success.

As the winding line that Saturday continued to proceed forward, I granted myself one last thought of the old me, for the 137 names that were called by the man in the blue shirt and shiny boots were all Lee College graduates. My thoughts settled on one word that started it all: success.

Entering the chapel for my graduation ceremony, I heard sounds of joy and saw smiles beamed from hundreds of faces. Family members, college professors and supporting staff looked like brightly lit Christmas trees in a field of happiness. Black caps and gowns covered the graduates like a vast dark ocean as they slowly filled the pews. Dangling down from my cap, the red and white tassel brushed my cheek. I sat down, and realization settled in like the dawn of a new day. I did it!

That morning I got my first real start in life born in the dark confines of a prison cell, dimly lit with the familiar yellow glow of a night light — a place where the average naysayer would think nothing was possible. That morning I felt lifted into paradise, a place in my mind I chose to inhabit, complete with pencils, paper and a stack of books. On this path there was scarcely a minute in which I did not learn, discover how much there was to learn, or acknowledge how little I knew. I now had my foot upon the ladder leading to success, and I knew I was destined to climb.

Ten years ago, I would've never thought this was possible. It all started as a single thought, one that turned into a vision that I put my all into, and even though I stumbled along the way, failure was never an option. Success was my only avenue.

Editor's Note: Writer Matthew Topete is a June 2019 Summa Cum Laude graduate of Lee College, earning an Associate of Applied Science degree in welding at the Wynne Unit. Congratulations to all graduates in TDCJ. Your hard work and personal changes define life success. ★



Estelle Unit

Suicide prevention awareness

The Health and Wellness coordinator at the Estelle Unit, D. Thompson, hosted a Suicide Prevention Awareness program for Estelle residents. The event began with a message from the mental health department, who circulated useful tips and resources about suicide awareness to the crowd. Next, a skit was performed by Estelle residents R. Davis, C. Grashem, W. Glen and L. Osby.

The skit, which was written by Grashem, was set within a fictional dayroom where a man suffering from depression sits alone at a table. Three other residents ask if they can join him, and soon a game of dominoes and conversation about sports ensue. In a matter of minutes, the three guys notice the other's depression and ask what's affecting him. He says his appeal was denied, his mom was just diagnosed with cancer and given six months to live, and his father has come back from retirement to find a job and pay for her treatment. The depressed man is determined to take his own life before things get worse, but the three others comfort him by sharing their own struggles and bouts of misfortune. They remind him that tomorrow holds something new and hopefully better, but suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem.

After being allowed to vent, the depressed man begins to feel better about his situation and his problems. Although the problem didn't go away, he realizes that talking these things through with people who can relate helps him cope. The skit had a perfect balance of humor and emotion.

Following the skit, Thompson led the crowd in a relaxation exercise, teaching the audience how to calm the mind and body when it is overwhelmed, anxious, angry or just stressed.

Later, resident C. Gabriel gave a powerful and visual performance with a spoken word presentation, moving the audience with his poetry. Peer educator and skit participant Osby talked to the audience about goals and how important it is to love oneself. Questions were fielded respectfully and answered with knowledge and care. The event ended in a game of Jeopardy, with the audience being divided into four teams. Intensity and excitement

The Lace Up — TDCJ Unit News

ruled the day, and in the end, Team 1 answered the final Daily Double, which gave them the winning points.

More than 120 Estelle residents attended the production, along with members of Estelle Unit's administration, such as the count room, mental health and education department personnel. Appreciation goes out to Assistant Warden T. Hutto, Major B. Rigsby and Region 1 Health and Wellness Supervisor C. Jones for their support.

Reported by the Estelle Unit Health and Wellness Unit Coordinator

Hobby Unit

Culinary program stirs positive growth

The Cook's Apprentice Program was introduced to the women of the Hobby Unit in 2016 as a joint effort between the United States Department of Labor, TDCJ and the Windham School District. This program is just one of many options developed to reduce recidivism and teach practical skills. Participants must be assigned to the Food Service Department as a cook, and there is a requirement of 6,000 hours of On-the-Job Training (OJT) and 432 Related Training Instruction hours (RTI).

The program generally takes three years to complete. An apprentice's hours of on-the-job learning and classroom hours are recorded and maintained in a U.S. Department of Labor database and the number is accessible for potential employers to review by using an account number assigned to each participant. Those interested in this program must complete an application and undergo an interview process. Once selected, a meeting is held to review the contract and program policies, along with any awarded credits for prior education and work history.

Current Cook Hobby Unit apprentices are R. Anderson, A. Brown, A. Christian, T. McIlvenna, T. Ouozenne and H. Pumphrey.

Reported by Tonieka McIlvenna

Lewis Unit

Marriage seminar rekindles vows

The Moffitts, a volunteer couple which devotes time to rekindling love and devotion between incarcerated individuals and their spouses, sponsored a marriage seminar on the Lewis Unit. This unique event helps to strengthen matrimonial vows that may have weakened over time due to incarceration. Teams of volunteers led by the Moffitts brought a

healing and transformative element to Wynne Unit. Throughout the seminar, participating married couples could share meals, repair relationships and create new memories.

"It was a special occasion, like being on a first date," said one resident participant.

Participants thank both Lewis Unit administration for supporting the event and the Moffitts for their tireless energy on behalf of TDCJ residents.

Reported by Marco Antonio Garcia

Stiles Unit

Transformation begins in Hip Hop Service

The R.E.A.L.G. (Reconciling Everyone and Loving God) Ministry at the Stiles Unit presented its first annual "Hip-Hop Service" at the Chapel of Hope. The service aimed to provide inspiration and encouragement to those who are incarcerated, and it included Christian rap videos played on a video screen by Field Minister C. Small. Music was provided by the chapel choir known as TG and the Soul Stirrers, while the event was kept moving by Field Minister Louis "Boogie Down" Harper. Participants thank their wardens and TDCJ staff for support and dedication to this event.

Reported by Field Minister Michael E. Hubbard

Torres Unit

Book-A-Thon promotes reading for success

The Peer Education Department teamed up with WSD to launch a six-month Book-A-Thon competition on the Torres Unit. The purpose of this program was to build a sense of community, reduce disciplinary rates, and promote literacy within the incarcerated population. Nearly 80 incarcerated individuals — from Medium Custody level to J-2 trustee level — signed up to compete in teams of four to see who can read the most pages. Each team was required to complete book reports and maintain good disciplinary records throughout the competition.

Every genre was welcomed, such as classic literature, fantasy, thrillers, westerns, sci-fi and mysteries. Teams were named Book-A-Holics, Dream Chasers, Living Legends and Ricky Bobby, with many of the competitors reading thousands of pages. Many thanks to Sgt. Loera of the Peer Education Department and J. Rivera, Torres Unit WSD librarian, for their help and support for this effort.

Reported by Stephen Unger

Preparing for inclement weather: Recognition of cold-related illness, injury

Editor's Note: The following information was provided by TDCJ Risk Management.

Frostbite

Not only can wind chill cause a rapid body heat loss, it also can cause frostbite, the freezing of body tissues. Frostbite can occur in 15 minutes or less at wind chill values of 18 below zero or lower. Residents can be at an increased risk to frostbite because of factors such as exhaustion, hunger and dehydration, which further lower the body's defenses against cold.

Watch for the following symptoms of frostbite:

- cold, white and hard skin;
- pain;
- itching;
- loss of feeling in the affected area;
- spots or blotches on skin;
- swelling and blistering;
- skin becomes red and blotchy when warmed and tissue loss, depending on the severity of the frostbite.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition occurring when the body loses heat faster than the body can produce it. With the onset of this condition, blood vessels in the skin constrict (i.e., tighten) in an attempt to conserve vital internal body heat, thus affecting the hands and feet first. Hypothermia, the severe or prolonged loss of body heat, begins when a person's body temperature falls below 95 degrees. Because the temperature drop may be gradual, and an early symptom of hypothermia is mental confusion, the victim may not know a problem exists. If one's body continues to lose heat, involuntary shivers begin. This reaction is the body's way to produce more heat and is usually the first real warning sign of hypothermia. Further heat

loss produces speech difficulty, forgetfulness, loss of manual dexterity, collapse and finally death.

Some offenders can be at an increased risk to hypothermia if they have predisposing health conditions or take certain medications. Some of these conditions include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, poor physical condition, poor diet, and/or advanced age.

Watch for the following hypothermia symptoms:

- confusion;

- drowsiness;
- slurred speech;
- a drop in blood pressure;
- shallow breathing; and
- a pinkish tint to the skin.

Report all incidents of cold-related illness to a staff member immediately. ★

Transition specialist Warren warns, beware 'felony-friendly' employer lists

Brandon Warren, Lee College Transition Specialist

Thanks to everyone who reached out to me as a result of the article published in The ECHO (Vol. 91, No. 6, June/July 2019). The ECHO graciously offered to let me respond to many of the most common reentry questions.

Let's get started with "felony-friendly" employer lists.

Here is my advice: always be cautious of felony-friendly employer lists, and do not make reentry plans relying on them.

There are many reasons you should be wary of these lists, but the strongest argument against them is that even the best sources can have inaccurate information. Always ask yourself at least four questions: first, who compiled the list? Second, how did the companies get on the list? Third, when was the list last updated? And finally, are some felonies excluded from the list?

Who compiled the list?

For example, if your name was on a list of people with FI-1s on a dayroom bulletin board, you might initially feel a jolt of excitement. But your next thought should be "Where did this list come from?" I don't mean who sent you the list or who tacked the list on the bulletin board, I mean who compiled this list? If the list itself does not tell you where it originated, then don't even bother with it. Someone could have just printed off

a list of companies from a website that claims to have lists of felony-friendly employers, but many of those websites are shady. There are nonprofits, ministries, and government agencies that have these lists, but some are more reliable than others. Even I maintain a list as I encounter new employers, and I mean well, but even my list suffers from an important flaw I'll mention below. Also, I do not send out my list through the mail!

How did the companies get on the list?

Did someone put a company on the list because their homeboy or cousin got a job there? So what?! Maybe he got the hookup; that does not mean the employer has an actual policy to hire felons. For example, there is a website that supposedly provides a list of felony-friendly employers for every city. But what you will find out after researching the lists is that they give you the same list no matter which city you search. And when you look at the employer, there is a disclaimer at the bottom of the screen that says the employer is not guaranteed to be felony friendly but that "according to their research" the employer "appears to be" felony friendly.

When was the list last updated?

An employer who hires felons today may not hire them next year. Managers and policies change all the time. This is



Lee College transition specialist
Brandon Warren.

where my list suffers. I don't have the time to go back and verify all the employers I add each month. I do my best, but I lack the time and resources to stay up to date.

Are some felonies excluded from the list?

Even if they "hire felons" that does not mean they hire all felons. Some will hire felons except for sex-offenders or those who have committed violent crimes. Retail stores might accept violent crimes but not theft and check fraud. Some hire felons if the conviction is several years old. Every company's policy is different.

There is a lot more to be said here, but ultimately these lists are becoming less and less important for people with a criminal background. I will explain why in a separate article. ★

►TEBOW continued from page 1

Resident Jarrett Driver, nephew of ex-Green Bay Packers wide receiver Donald Driver, won the contest by doing 84 push-ups to Tebow's 71 in one minute.

Tebow's message highlighted various aspects of practical living. One aspect dealt with brotherhood and finding common ground despite personal differences.

Tebow also stressed how important it is to understand that God values us all, regardless of what we have done.



Driver challenges Tebow.

Photos courtesy of TDCJ.



Tebow meets residents.

account of David, explaining how God can make great use of those who have been deeply wounded.

"Life is short, just a vapor compared to all eternity, and every choice we make matters not just for

us, but for everyone around us," he said.

Writer's note:

Thank you, Tim, for your inspiration. We would like to give a special thanks to the Hughes Unit Administration, Chaplaincy Department, and all those who worked to make this event possible. ★



Next issue:

Residents perform the "Bad Company, Bad Choices" skit at the "Man Up" summit at the Wynne Unit.

Preview:

Bad Company goes to 'Man Up' at Wynne

Reported by Will Hill, ECHO Staff

Innovative peer outreach at the Wynne Unit is tackling problems like K2 danger, low self-esteem and the consequences of choices.

►WRITE continued from page 1

- Multiple submissions are allowed and can be included in the same envelope. Entries must be received by The ECHO no later than March 1, 2020.

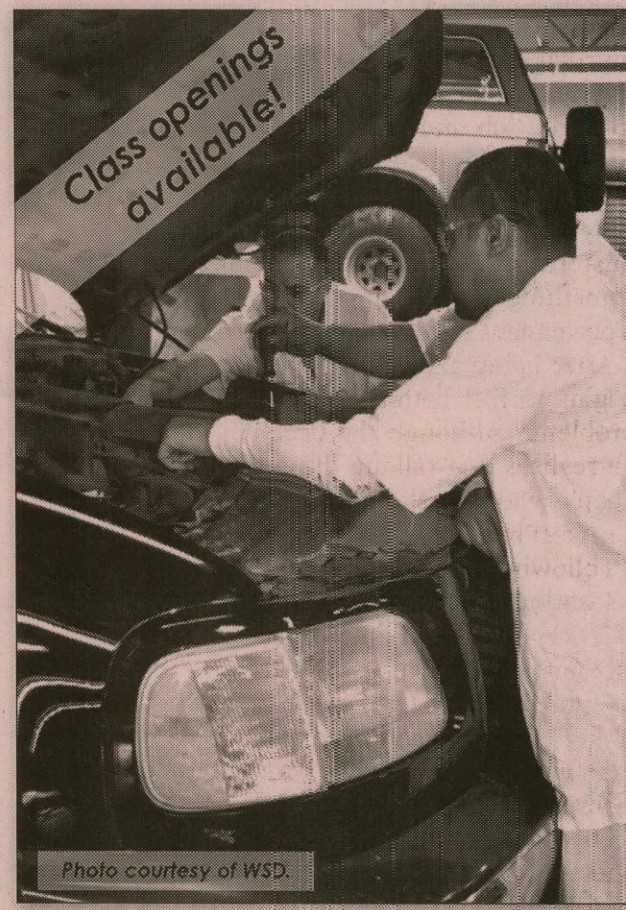
The ECHO Writing Contest, P.O. Box 40, Huntsville, TX 77342-0040

Due to the large number of entries, submitted materials will not be returned. Entries must be received by The ECHO no later than March 1, 2020. ★

WANTED: WSD Automotive Students

Wardham School District (WSD) has openings for new Automotive Fundamentals students. Students will learn the core concepts and skills of automotive repair.

Interested applicants should send an I-60 to their unit's WSD principal or counselor requesting to be put on the District-Wide Waiting List (DWWL) for this WSD Career and Technology Education course. ★



Class openings available!

Photo courtesy of WSD.

►SCFO continued from page 1

Choosing an innocence clinic

SCFO does not handle innocence claims. This means you will have to hire an attorney or reach out to a legal clinic to help you file the claim.

All five clinics share a common database. This means that if you write one clinic, it is noted in a database and the other four clinics can see the database entry.

All five innocence clinics share at least one characteristic: they only take cases involving actual innocence.

1) Innocence Project of Texas (IPTX) -- For IPTX to accept your actual innocence claim the following must apply to you and your case:

- a) You must be claiming actual innocence (either no crime happened, or a crime did happen, but you had nothing to do with it).

- b) Your conviction is a felony (IPTX does not review misdemeanor cases).
- c) Your conviction took place in a Texas state court (IPTX does not review federal cases).
- d) You have completed your direct appeals (your case is in "post-conviction" status).

2) Actual Innocence Clinic - University of Texas Law School, Austin - The Actual Innocence Clinic focuses on felony cases where all direct appeals have been exhausted.

- a) Death penalty cases.
- b) DWI cases.
- c) Federal cases.
- d) Drug offenses.
- e) People who are not currently incarcerated.

3) Texas Innocence Network (TIN) - University of Houston Law School, Houston - TIN will not pursue claims where you were an accessory or party to the criminal scheme, even if you did not commit the physical act resulting in the conviction.

4) Thurgood Marshall School of Law Innocence Project (TMSLIP) - Texas Southern University, Houston - For TMSLIP to accept your actual innocence claim, the following must apply to you and your case:

- a) Direct state appeals have been exhausted.
- b) The crime took place in Texas and was prosecuted in Texas.
- c) There is new evidence or potentially new evidence that conclusively proves your innocence, and this evidence was not introduced in your original trial.

5) Joyce Ann Brown Innocence Clinic (JABIC) - University of North Texas, Dallas - The JABIC considers cases with the following criteria:

- a) Claims of actual innocence: the person seeking assistance must be in no way responsible for the crimes for which he/she was convicted.
- b) There must not be a claim of self-defense.
- c) There must still be five (5) or more years remaining on the person's sentence.

- d) The matter must be in post-conviction status: the trial must have finished and resulted in a conviction and sentence.
- e) There must be some new evidence that was not available during the original trial.

The Texas Prisoner Innocence Questionnaire (TPIQ)

All five clinics listed above worked together to create the Texas Prisoner Innocence Questionnaire (TPIQ). It is a very comprehensive form that will take several hours or days to complete.

When you are ready to fill out the TPIQ, request a copy from your unit law library. If your library is out of TPIQ forms, send an I-60 to Access to Courts.

Complete the TPIQ and send it to one of the five clinics listed on the form, paying careful attention to the criteria they list for the type of cases they accept.

If there is not enough room on the TPIQ form for your answers, write as much as you can on the form, then write "see attached." On a clean sheet of paper, write the corresponding number of the question you are finishing and complete your answer.

Do not send any other documents when you send in the TPIQ. If the clinic needs additional information, they will request it from you.

What to expect after sending the TPIQ

Any clinic you send the TPIQ to will respond to you. If you do not meet the criteria, you may receive a postcard or letter to that effect.

It takes a very long time to work up a case based on innocence, and many times this is measured in years or even decades, rather than months.

SOLUTIONS

Word

Hard

Two crossword puzzle grids with numbers in some cells.

TDCJ/Windham bulletin board



Crain Unit — Terrace campus Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) graduates are: E. Martinez, H. Mcris, M. Marshall, S Jackson, L. Jones, K. Thomas, S. Tyson, S. Stephenson, Q. McCoy, M. Millstead, V. Hodges, S. January, J. Murrell, W. Morgan, A. Pena, R. Payne, T. Thomas, M. Galyean, M. Garcia, W. Brown and S. Crw.



Mountain View Unit Business Computer Information Systems (BCIS) graduates for Windham School District (WSD) are: E. Zamarripa, D. Melvin, T. Marek, T. Ayala, S. Archiga and S. Jackson.



Crain Unit CIP graduates are: L. Zazueta, A. Meaux, A. Davidson, Y. Lina, L. Pruitt, M. Kryzck, K. Hicks, S. Escobedo, J. Dotson, D. Smith, B. Mays, D. Pitts, G. Hernandez, S. Crave, T. Martin, S. Watson, A. Cirillo, F. Borrego, A. Garcia, L. Cortez, R. Preciado, J. Buckiew, K. Byers, V. Villa and S. Kelly.



Crain Unit Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning (HVAC) graduates for WSD are: A. Eakin, M. Cisnero, R. Boaz, M. Travis, A. Cooper, and M. Ealem.



Crain Unit CIP graduates are: E. Abrego, A. Babcock, M. Carrillo, C. Carter, K. Cline, A. Cruz, E. Donaghe, L. Fuentes, M. Garcia, M. Gines, J. Gonzales, D. Harvin, V. Ibarra, A. Johnson, S. Johnson, C. Jones, M. Lork, S. Massey, A. Rothlis, R. Sandoval, J. Seigier, L. Shelton, C. Turrubartes, A. Woodward, and T. Butcher.



Hamilton Unit High School Equivalency (HSE) graduates are: J. Williams, O. Biade, E. Rojas, N. Ahmed, R. Rodriguez, K. Henix, N. Hinton, L. Griffith, M. Garrett and J. Noaker.



Beto Unit CIP graduates are: W. Hooper, M. Mosely, M. Turner, J. Humberson, J. Vargas, A. Carter, R. Morales, M. Martinez, W. Davis, K. Shields, C. Bluiord, P. Davenport, G. Harris, R. McBeth, D. Robinson, T. Barfield, D. Williams, L. Kerr, J. Woodson, P. Eva, M. Smith, D. Williams, M. Antunes, M. Smith, B. Bradley and K. Gordon.



Cole State Jail electrical trade graduates: J. Orona, B. Perry, J. Catron, C. Brown and A. LeDoux.



Hughes Unit HSE graduates are B. Williams, A. Clivo, B. Phillips and H. Kambona.



Cole State Jail electrical trade graduates are: P. Williams, L. Arbor, A. Hernandez, I. Wilson, E. Oliva, C. Hendrix and W. Marquines.

HELP WANTED

ECHO Workers Needed

Work in an office environment creating a newspaper read by more than 140,000 TDCJ residents. Applicants should have a positive attitude and work well with others. The ECHO prefers workers to have experience in similar/related work in the free world or in TDCJ.

Graphic Designer:

Job duties include page layout, photo scanning and editing, art creation and general clerk responsibilities.

Preferences:

- Experience with Adobe InDesign or Page Maker, Illustrator and Photoshop.

Staff Writer:

Job duties include writing articles and stories on various topics, typing, editing and general clerk responsibilities.

Preferences:

- Experience in journalism/publishing or a degree in journalism or related field.
- A strong knowledge of grammar, punctuation and news writing styles is required.

Requirements:

Applicants **must** meet the following requirements — those who do not will automatically be screened out.

Applicants must:

- Be classified as a G2 custody status.
- Be willing to relocate to the Wynne Unit, Huntsville, Texas.
- Have no history of convictions involving aggressive sexual acts.
- Have no history of convictions involving kidnapping.
- Have no history of institutional disciplinary cases involving aggressive sexual acts.
- Have no major disciplinary infractions within the past 12 months.
- Have no history of security precaution designators.

Interested applicants may send an I-60 with qualifications to:

**Managing Editor
The ECHO
Windham Admin. Bldg.
P.O. Box 40
Huntsville, TX**

Huntsville Unit Maintenance

The Huntsville Unit Maintenance needs qualified applicants for the following job positions:

Inside Maintenance

- Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVACR) with an (Environmental Protection Agency) EPA certification or experience
- Electrician
- Electrician that can read Schematic
- HVACR which has hands-on experience for kitchen / laundry
- Anyone who has experience with kitchen/laundry equipment with three years experience minimum.

Outside Maintenance

(Applicants must be currently classified as G1/S2 and must note this on the I-60)

- HVACR with an EPA certification
- Plumber — must have experience.
- Carpenter — Must have experience
- Welder — Must have experience

All applicants who apply for a job in either inside or outside maintenance must not be currently working for a maintenance department and must have experience. **Important:** Before sending an I-60, applicants must have their boss sign off to release them from their currently job.

**Interested applicants should send their qualifications on an I-60 to:
Mr. Price or Mrs. Steele
Huntsville Unit Maintenance**

What time is it?

Submitted by Brenda Morgan,
Crain Unit

Count time, count time:
morning, noon, and night
Count time, count time: sure
hope they get it right!

Count time, count time: it's
always on my mind
Count time, count time: wish
I had not done this crime!

Count time, count time: now
I walk the line.

Count time, count time: get
my act together, things will
turn out fine.

The Franklin Reality Model

Submitted by Brandon Barton, Sanchez Unit

Stop. Relax. Breathe in slow.
What do you see through your belief window?
Do you follow in the footsteps of all those fools,
Or do you walk the line and follow the rules?

Your thoughts and actions are your own savior,
The results depend on your own behavior!

If you have to question your own mind,
Ask yourself: "Will this meet my needs over time?"

So, before you commit a crime or pick up some drugs or a bottle,
Step on the brake and let off the throttle,
And run it through the Franklin Reality Model!

Hot pot

Submitted by Daniel Huffman
Jester Unit

Oh, Hot pot, let me sing your praise,
I leave you plugged in for days and days.

I always have hot water directly from you,
Without you I don't know what I'd do.

For \$20 you were the sweetest deal,
Hot coffee all day long, oh, what a thrill!

You heat up my drinks and my soups you cook,
I've got property papers so you won't get took!

You are just perfect, and always hit the spot,
You will always be my beloved Hot pot!

Being in prison

Submitted by Arturo Aranda
Lindsey State Jail

Being in prison is lonely at night
it's waiting for letters that no one will write.

It's sitting around with nothing to do
trying to figure out just who is who.

It's finding out that hearts are made of stone,
and realizing that you are all alone.

It's waiting for visits that never take place,
from so-called friends who have forgotten your face.

It's wondering why time seems to move so slow
and every dream you love has no place to go.

Therefore, I'll do my time with my head held high,
and keep my integrity until the day I die.

Reticence

Raymond Trinidad
Contributing Writer — Powledge Unit

They are the Rembrandts, Van Goghs and Picassos of this world.
The dayroom, infirmary, chow hall and commissary line are their canvases.
Brevity of expression is the color of their paint.

Reticence as art form.

They paint masterpieces oblivious to the mindless chatter.
Beauty in the midst of chaos.

Glimmering visions of tranquility illuminating the human spirit.

Stark reality imbued with art.
Aesthetics versus garish verbosity.

And beauty prevails.

KEEPING COUNT

William Andrews, Jester III Unit



After consuming 417 bags of corn chips, 4,976 ramen noodle soups and 837 pints of ice-cream, he walked toward the prison gates. Of course it took 10 years to eat all of that, but those were the numbers, and he knew this unmistakably.

It became a habit, then an obsession, to keep count of many things that were not all so trivial. But he kept count of them just the same. It was like counting down the days and months, and as they swiftly went by, the years went as well.

All 10 of them.

He held no grudges against those from his past that had helped him find his way behind bars, but there was still a nagging voice echoing deep in his soul that connected the counting of things to those antagonists. The hand-made calendars, various lists and other documentations seemed to make the years a tangible thing — something that can be held and felt, as well as folded or crumbled, rather than just abstract and lost. After a few years, the weight of the paper stack became incrementally heavier and valid. He kept it neatly in an envelope tucked inside a file folder which was bound with clear tape.

Upon each page he would keep track of life. Things like every letter sent -- to whom and when. Each letter he received and each day spent waiting on a response was scribed into each appropriate space. Unit changes, housing changes, cellie changes and even a couple changes in his religion were noted as well. Each sheet of copy paper accounted for a month. On the back of each sheet were facts and hopes. Some of the facts were things like every book he had read in the past de-

cade. An occasional highlight about it, or a "look for this one" would be noted when he felt it contained some info that would be worth rediscovering one day when he was free. It was fruitful insight that would stimulate him and help him to retain his freedom, lest he forget.

Websites that perked his interest and were gleaned from the thousands of magazines he had perused over the years would make the list. But there was no mention of the magazines themselves since they became like useless husks once reaped of their seed.

Maybe he was looking for some pattern or algorithm which might be used to enlighten him about his habits or just life in general. Sometimes when he would pull out the folder to add another page, he would get pulled into the details on the pages and run across things both forgotten as well as moments very much remembered. They'd seem to jump off the page as his eyes darted to follow the path to which his memories would lead him. Each square prodded the recall of hopes dashed or fulfilled.

Sometimes she didn't write back, or sometimes an unexpected letter would surface that would bring momentary joy. Stopping to reflect on those times, he began to understand the impermanence of all the creations of the mind. How something as worthless as a few sheets of paper could have become so significant still baffled him. The accumulation of each leaf also demonstrated the value he had found in compiling something a little at a time. His ability to save money, much less anything, was never strongly exercised when he was free, but now he felt he may actually have the ability to become a

miser of sorts, if need be. Stashing away a bit of this or that and knowing one day he would have a wealth of the things hidden enthralled him.

His grandfather was a collector of odds and ends found in that distant era which held different values. Skeleton keys of varied shape and size are one example of the old man's fetish. Some were worn already when he found them while others gained a patina as they sat in a damp, dark drawer. Some became shiny and oiled from being handled and tumbled in his large creased hand as he felt for each groove and ridge, envisioning the cold hard shape in his grip since his blind eyes saw only darkness.

Also in his collection were glass doorknobs. They gleamed from the old wooden crate that was kept on the floor in a dark corner. Smooth and multi-faceted, they would imprison any light that strayed their way in the dimly-lit apartment. The knobs would seem to explode to life if ever lifted into a sunbeam that found its way through the one tall, heavily curtained window.

But those days are long gone, and the grandfather has been buried years ago. The things he had collected and treasured are now scattered to parts unknown and their histories are never to be told. The grandson's recent collection of paper will hold no such longevity or mystery. He plans to ensure they will never be lost and scattered. He plans to burn them himself, in some backyard grill after he has scanned them on a computer, turning each bit of data into a series of ones and zeros to be held inside a one-inch by two-inch flash drive—something to put on his key fob, per-

haps. It will be a reminder. Every now and then, he would ponder the stack, beginning with the first month, which is, and will be the last month, December. He is amused by the slow but obvious progression of neatness and order.

Month one scribbled to the degree that it looks childish. Crooked lines trying to divide uneven squares denote each day. Capital letters of different sizes attempt to express the importance of this or that, while retaining no real order of thought. Toxic blood still flowed through his veins as cigarette cravings and a miring codependency to the phone trying to reach those he once trusted pulled him to and fro.

As the months passed, the lines across the pages began to straighten and the writing neaten, becoming uniform in size and style. The squares became evenly divided as the days of his life became equally structured, allowing time to flow and fit together neatly.

Today his list contains more than dates and book titles. He has also compounded his dreams and plans for the future, as well as places he intends to explore that he had only before read about. He has given away all his other possessions aside from his calendars and some worn photos of loved ones. The typewriter, hot pot and radio were the first to go. It felt good to lighten himself of those things he had been lugging around for so long. A car is waiting for him outside. The past has been given its due. The time is now to move towards a new way of thinking and planning — a time to light a fire and count on a brighter future. ★

THE SPORTS VIEW

Lane Frost — Remembering a legend

Will Hill, ECHO Staff

Inclement Wyoming weather could not deter thousands of fans from attending the final round of the 1989 Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo. For many in the crowd, the annual event on the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) tour represented their only opportunity to see their favorite competitors in person. None who entered the arena that fateful day knew the gloomy, overcast sky served as a somber portent of a tragic event about to take place.

Bull riding is the most popular and dangerous event in professional rodeo. Competitors who climb onto the back of angry bucking bulls weighing more than one ton are the rock stars of the sport. In the long illustrious history of the PRCA, no bull rider has enjoyed the popularity of Lane Frost, a charismatic young cowboy who took the sport by the horns during the 80s.

A palpable buzz of anticipation spread throughout the crowd when Frost's name was announced as the next competitor. In bull riding, a competitor's score is composed of two components: 50 percent for the performance of the bull, and the other half for the skill of the cowboy. Therefore, riders hope to draw the hardest bucking bulls in order to increase their score. For the final round of the rodeo, Frost drew Takin' Care of Business, one of the rankest bulls on the PRCA circuit.

After situating himself on the back of the bull, Frost nodded his Stetson-hatted head and set in motion a sequence of events that have become a part of rodeo lore. As the gate to chute number two swung open, Takin' Care of Business exploded into the arena with a series of violent jumps, twists and turns, illustrating its agility and power. The bull's raw strength and explosiveness would eventually earn him the title of PRCA world champion bucking bull.

As exceptionally as the bull performed that day, the former world-champion bull rider was equal to the task. The determined cowboy perfectly countered every move that bull made. When the whistle signaling a qualified ride sounded after eight action-packed seconds, Frost dismounted with his usual flair for the dramatic by somersaulting over the back end of the bull.

While the cowboys who ride the bulls are the sports stars, the unsung heroes of rodeo are the clownishly dressed bullfighters who are tasked with the serious responsibility of protecting thrown and dismounted riders. As Frost dismounted, they sprang into action attempting to distract the bull and lead it away from the cowboy and out of the arena. Up to this point, nothing had happened out of the norm, but that was all about to change.

Believing the bull was leaving the arena, Frost stood smiling and waving to the cheering crowd as was his custom, instead of getting to the safety of the fence. For a reason known only to God and Takin' Care of Business, the bull doubled back on the unsuspecting cowboy, ramming him full speed in the back with his massive head and brace of deadly horns.

The force from the fatal collision between the one-ton bull and the 145-pound cowboy broke several ribs. Frost valiantly struggled to his feet and staggered a few steps toward the fence while waving for assistance to Tuff Hedeman, his longtime friend. Before Hedeman or anyone from the medical team could reach the injured

cowboy, however, he collapsed to the ground in a heap. Doctors believe this second fall resulted in displacing a broken rib, which severed an artery. Lane Frost, 25 years old, died July 30, 1989, lying in the Cheyenne rain and mud.

Frost accomplished more in a career that lasted less than seven years than many cowboys who competed for 20 years or more. Five years after his high school graduation, he was on the top of his sport, having earned the coveted title of PRCA World Champion Bull Rider. He had dreamt of winning this honor since he began riding calves on his family's farm at the age of five. In 1988, the sport of rodeo was included as a demonstration event for the first, and to date, only time in the Olympics. Frost won an individual bronze medal while helping the American team secure the gold medal. He also became the only cowboy to score a qualified ride on the iconic bucking bull Red Rock, doing so four times in a series of competitions called "The Challenge of Champions."

The life and death of Lane Frost raises an interesting question: How does one define a successful life? Some people define it as living a long, productive life, while others measure it by the amount of wealth one accumulates. Either of those definitions would render the life of Lane Frost as unsuccessful: he died before reaching his 26th birthday, and his career winnings amounted to less than \$500,000. Black Sabbath famously sang, "He who dies with the most toys wins," yet life is more than simply striving for the accumulation of things. Those left behind will not long remember the number of expensive automobiles and large homes a person owns, but instead whether the person was a devoted son or daughter, loving spouse or faithful friend. Frost wisely used his time on Earth doing what he loved, inspiring a new generation of young bull riders and influencing the lives of others.

"He's the guy that every young bull rider wants to grow up and be like," said Sage Kinsey, who is also a champion bull rider (Ian St. Clair in the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle, July 19, 2014).

Frost's death had an immense impact on the issue of safety in the sport of rodeo. Cody Lambert, a friend of Frost, helped to develop the safety vest that is now a required piece of equipment along with a helmet for bull riders on the PRCA and Professional Bull Riders tours. While it is impossible to eliminate the danger factor from the sport of rodeo, these innovations have helped prevent the tragic loss of any more lives.

Frost's sphere of influence extends from beyond the sport of rodeo even to the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR). Austin Dillon, who was not born until almost a year after the death of Frost, paid tribute to the late rodeo legend after he emerged unscathed from the wreckage of his race car during the Coke Zero 400 at the Daytona International Speedway. He even waved to the crowd using a gesture similar to the one that Frost used. In a post-race interview with FOX Sports, Dillon admitted that the gesture was tribute to the rodeo legend (FOX Sports, July 6, 2015).

Films such as the 1994 biopic "8 Seconds" starring Luke Perry and songs such as Aaron Watson's 2012 single "July in Cheyenne" immortalize the life of Frost, emphasizing the manner in which he lived. The fact that more than 3,500 people, including members of the Oklahoma state legislature and country music stars, attended the funeral of a relatively unknown 25 year-old professional bull rider, is a testament to the way he lived. Most of us will never be a rodeo world champion, yet each of us still has the opportunity to edify and inspire others. ★



Photo from Wikipedia.

Making A DENT

Contemplating the 2019 NFL season ... from a future perspective

Jim Dent, Contributing Writer — Polunsky Unit

Editor's Note: The ECHO proudly continues to publish an exclusive sports column by Jim Dent, New York Times best-selling author who has written 14 books, two of which have been developed into movies (including The Junction Boy). Dent covered the Dallas Cowboys for 11 seasons during his career in the newspaper business. Opinions expressed in his column do not reflect the opinions of The ECHO or the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. Read on!

As I ponder the passing of the 2019 season, I am writing this column in February of 2020 (or at least pretending to), looking back at a season chock full of shocking developments, last-minute pass interference reversals, and heartbreaking defeats for Fantasy owners who played Tom Brady instead of Patrick Mahomes on the day he rewrote every single game-passing record in the history of the NFL.

It was a season like no other, simply because there will never be another 100th anniversary of the NFL that cranked up in 1920 with leather helmets and gutsy stars with names like Bronko, Crazy Legs, and the Galloping Ghost. Those guys never sat out of training camp in a contract dispute or tested positive for PEDs, but I digress.

The season of 2019 was filled with controversy from start to finish, and this is what I will always remember:

- The Cleveland Browns failed to fulfill the overhyped expectations of ESPN, which stands for Every Second Promoting Nonsense. The Browns possessed the talent to reach the playoffs, but the geniuses in Bristol failed to factor in their overarching inexperience. Fat Freddie Kitchens couldn't handle the pressure of being a head coach for the first time. Baker Mayfield failed to meet some rather high expectations and Odell Beckham pouted. Maybe next year, Brownsies!
- The NFL was founded in a Hummobile Dealership in Canton, Ohio in 1920, and, a hundred years later, Houston Texans coach Bill O'Brien is still running the Model-T offense. Deshaun Watson is a great quarterback who needs someone else calling plays. Can you say 8-and-8?
- The Oakland Raiders looked great on HBO's "Hard Knocks," but not so much in the regular season. Maybe they will be a better bet when they open the show on the Las Vegas Strip in 2020.
- The same could be said of the San Diego Chargers, who played for a third straight year in a stadium where the fans cheered for the other team. Next year will be different when the Chargers move to the Palace in Inglewood, just down the road from Hollywood.
- The Green Bay Packers returned to the playoffs, and Aaron Rodgers didn't get the coach fired this time. The pact between Rodgers and new coach Matt LaFleur (sounds like a hockey name) worked because the quarterback designed the offense and called the plays (well, not every play). LaFleur did prove that NFL quarterbacks are at least smart enough to make a few decisions. Rodgers even smiled.

- Andrew Luck stayed healthy for the entire season for the second straight year and the Indianapolis Colts were declared the leading candidate for the "Team of the Twenties." With so many great receivers, and the addition of rookie Parris Campbell, they look like the Colts of Johnny Unitas.
- During the 2018 season, the Minnesota Vikings learned that the straightest route to mediocrity is Kirk Cousins, who single-handedly caused them to miss the playoffs one year after reaching the conference championship game. Did the Minnesota coaches actually watch any of Cousins' tapes from his years in Washington?
- Why did the Los Angeles Rams miss the playoffs after making it all the way to the Super Bowl in '18? Because the schedule-maker sent them on four cross-country road trips to the Eastern Time zone and the jet lag was stifling. Also, the NFC got a lot tougher with Kyler Murray wheeling and dealing for the Arizona Cardinals and Jimmy Garoppolo returning from a knee injury to the San Francisco 49ers. The NFC West will be the fast-improving division for years to come.
- Speaking of Murray, he had a better overall season than fellow OU Heisman Trophy winner Baker Mayfield because Kliff Kingsbury scripted a better offense than Kitchens. Wait until the Cardinals draft some elite receivers and Murray becomes the next Mahomes.
- Pittsburgh missed the playoffs again because quarterback Ben Roethlisberger couldn't find a decent player to boss around. Le'Veon Bell and Antonio Brown had already split.
- Jerry Jones thought that meeting the contract needs of Zeke Elliott, Dak Prescott and Armani Cooper was a headache until he was forced to renew his deal with Coach Jason "Red Jesus" Garrett, who fulfilled Jones' demands by coaching his team to the NFC championship game against Atlanta. Yet the Cowboys still lost as a seven-point favorite to the Atlanta Falcons. So, for the 26th straight year, Jones suffered the humiliation of not going to the Super Bowl, which left him to pull out his hair plugs. Again.
- Feb. 2 in South Florida was Ground Hog Day all over again for the Falcons. They led the Patriots 28-3 at halftime of Super Bowl LIV, just as they had three years earlier. But the best player in the history of the NFL rallied his team once more for four touchdowns in the final two quarters as the Pats beat the Dirty Birds, 31-28. Somewhere, Bill Murray was laughing his butt off as Tom Brady hoisted the Lombardi Trophy and announced that he planned to play until the Ground Hog saw his shadow. ★

Prison Rape Elimination Act Ombudsman

In 2007, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Ombudsman was established by the 80th Legislature (Texas Government Code §§501.171-178) and was appointed by the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ). The PREA Ombudsman office was created to provide offenders, family and friends of offenders, and the general public with an independent office to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment occurring in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional facilities. The PREA Ombudsman also provides a confidential avenue for offenders to report sexual abuse and sexual harassment and ensures impartial resolution of complaints and inquiries related to allegations of sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The PREA Ombudsman reports directly to the TBCJ Chairman and may be contacted at the following address:

PREA Ombudsman P.O. Box 99 Huntsville, Texas 77342

TDCJ has a "zero tolerance" for all forms of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of offenders. Offenders knowledgeable about offender-on-offender or staff-on-offender sexual abuse or sexual harassment that occurs within a TDCJ correctional facility are encouraged to immediately report the allegation to the facility administration, PREA Ombudsman or the Office of Inspector General. Offenders may remain anonymous upon request.

Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión Ombudsman

En el 2007, el Acta de Eliminación de Violación en Prisión (PREA) Ombudsman fue establecido por la 80a Legislatura (Código de Gobierno de Texas §§501.171-178) y fue nombrado por la Junta de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TBCJ). La oficina PREA Ombudsman fue creada para proporcionar a los ofensores, familia y amigos de ofensores, y al público en general con una oficina independiente para reportar el abuso sexual y el acoso sexual que ocurre en los establecimientos correccionales del Departamento de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TDCJ). El PREA Ombudsman también proporciona una vía confidencial para que los ofensores reporten el abuso sexual y acoso sexual y asegura resolución imparcial de las denuncias y consultas relacionadas con las acusaciones de abuso sexual y acoso sexual. El PREA Ombudsman reporta directamente al presidente de TBCJ y puede ser contactado en la siguiente dirección:

PREA Ombudsman P.O. Box 99 Huntsville, Texas 77342

El TDCJ tiene una política de "cero tolerancia" para todas las formas de abuso sexual y acoso sexual de ofensores. Ofensores con conocimiento acerca de un abuso sexual o acoso sexual de un ofensor a otro ofensor, o de un empleado a un ofensor que ocurre dentro de un establecimiento correccional de TDCJ se les recomienda hacer inmediatamente la denuncia a la administración de la unidad, PREA Ombudsman o a la Oficina del Inspector General. Los ofensores pueden permanecer anónimos al solicitarlo.