

# THE ECHO

PUBLISHED SINCE 1928

VOLUME 91, NO. 5, MAY 2019

DISTRIBUTED FREE TO TEXAS PRISONERS

## Armatus Reintegration Program remains a force multiplier for incarcerated vets

John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

Uniformed men mustered into the Wynne Unit's Rockwell Chapel, exhibiting a soldier's sense of discipline and esprit de corps. An air of optimism permeated the event as the men were marshaled to the stage to receive certificates of achievement for participating in the Armatus Reintegration Program's Anger Management course.

"Soldiers, congratulations! I am so proud of each of you," said Rick Pritchard, an armed services veteran who founded the Armatus Reintegration Program, serves as the program's chief executive officer, and who was in attendance to praise graduates for their accomplishment.

Armatus is a freeworld volunteer-led veteran support group operating on 11 units within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, and operates with the primary objective of serving incarcerated veterans by helping them obtain rehabilitation programming such as anger management and substance abuse treatment.

Many veterans leave the military and face an array of life challenges, including transitioning back to civilian life. A frequent and unfortunate occurrence is that many veterans return home with symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), alcohol

and drug addictions, depression, anxiety, as well as mental and mood disorders. Pritchard recognized a scarcity of programs to address these vital issues and embarked on a mission to broaden their availability to incarcerated veterans.

"This is our first year doing what we're doing. We don't care if we get any recognition, but it gives us positive confirmation that we are on the right track," said Pritchard, a Marine Corps veteran.

With nearly 11,000 offenders with past military service incarcerated within the TDCJ, Armatus volunteers donate many hours of their personal time to achieve the goal of changing offender-veterans' lives for the better. Offender veterans in the TDCJ convene weekly to gather in fellowship to help them deal with the challenges of life behind bars.

"We endeavor to provide a positive atmosphere for incarcerated veterans to cope with their daily struggles, while revitalizing the moral codes they



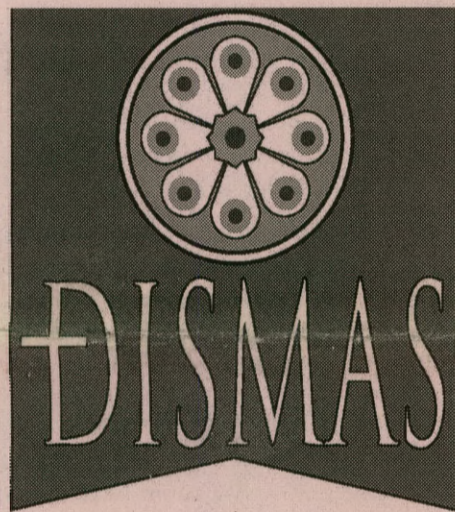
Meeting the challenge

Armatus participants are honored for completion of an anger management course at the Wynne Unit.

once held. We want to renew their attitudes of dignity, optimism and self-worth," says Lloyd Sparks, director of Skilled Trade Programs at Armatus.

"The veterans serving time in the TDCJ have formerly served in the Korean War, the Vietnam Conflict, the Gulf War, Afghanistan and the Iraq War," says Dustin Cackley, director of Operations at Armatus. "It is amazing to be here for them in this capacity, helping them reignite a sense of purpose and belonging they once shared as enlisted personnel in the United States Armed Forces."

ARMATUS continued on page 5 >



John Walter Flagg, ECHO Staff

Faith and fellowship play extraordinary rehabilitative roles in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ). Dozens of faith-based programs are made available to offenders through unit chaplains, helping offenders re-center their lives around moral imperatives and spirituality. One such program is the Brotherhood of St. Dismas (BSD), which recently held the Dismas / WATCH Retreat for Wynne Unit offenders.

"The Brothers of St Dismas have stimulated a religious renaissance within the TDCJ," says Deacon

## Rediscovering the sacred: Wynne Unit hosts St. Dismas Retreat

Bob Leicht Jr., the founder of The Dismas/Magdalene Project Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation. This Catholic outreach program provides structured in-prison fellowship for men and sistership for women who are baptized Catholics.

The retreat was a three-day event in the Wynne gymnasium, attended by 80 offenders. Volunteers from Houston-area Catholic parishes anxiously awaited the offenders by the gymnasium entrance, welcoming them with hymns and clapping.

"Hallelujah! Welcome! Come on in and join the retreat," invited the cheerful volunteers.

The Brothers of St. Dismas is named after the penitent thief, whom Christians believe was crucified next to Jesus. Male Dismas participants seek to emulate the heartfelt, intelligent change into faith, hope, love and sensibility of this namesake patron. In the Bible, Dismas said "Yes" to the Lord's "crazy" and unexpected forgiveness, according to Leicht, whereas the other thief, Gestus, said "No."

The companion organization for women, the Sisters of St. Mary Magdalene, is named after the Biblical woman who opened her eyes to the higher values of

grace and forgiveness in the midst of tremendous social strife. Mary Magdalene said "Yes" to Jesus' words in her own life, which saved her, humbled her, and gave her a spiritual makeover changing her status forever. Women can approach active Christian living because of her, according to Leicht.

Since its inception in 2001, the BSD/SMM Project has been recognized and affirmed by Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Archbishop of the Galveston-Houston Catholic Diocese.

As of 2015, Texas has had as many as 18 men's chapters and four women's chapters, totaling 4,500 members. Three of these women's chapters are freeworld award-winning sororities in Texas, recognized by the Governor in 2009.

There has been an annual retreat at the Wynne Unit since 2007, and retreats have also been offered at the Huntsville, Ferguson, Pack, Estelle, Plane and Ramsey units. According to Leicht, similar Eucharistic ceremonies occur within chapels in the women's TDCJ facilities, where female offenders gather in prayer, communion and sisterhood.

ST. DISMAS continued on page 3 >

## Second Chance Pell Grants providing funding for education, career skills, hope to offenders

William Hill, ECHO Staff

Exams, term papers and all-night cram sessions are challenges faced by all higher education students, whether they are in the freeworld or incarcerated. For many, securing financial aid without accumulating staggering student debt is one of the most important lessons to be learned.

In the past, a Pell Grant was the answer for many college students, including eligible offenders. Pell Grants were established in the 1960s as the Basic Opportunity Grant Program, a form of federal financial assistance for low-income students. According to the Journal of Prisoners on Prison, the name of the program was changed to Pell Grants in honor of Democratic Senator Claiborne

Pell of Rhode Island, who sponsored the legislation to help poor and working class people pay for a college education ("Pell Grants for Prisoners Part Deux: It's Déjà vu All Over Again," by J.M. Taylor, 1997. Formatted online version 2006).

For offenders, Pell Grants became unavailable when Congress amended the Higher Education Act to eliminate eligibility for students in federal and state penal institutions, and President Bill Clinton signed the 1994 Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act into law. When this financial assistance stopped, an estimated 23,000 offenders nationwide lost access to post-secondary education programs. In 1991, approximately 14 percent of the nation's prisoners were enrolled in some form of college but, after the ban, that number dropped to only 7 percent by the year 2004. Fortunate individuals who were able to pay for vocational or college-level academic courses on their own could often afford only a few class hours each semester.

Recognizing the vital role education plays in rehabilitation, Congress introduced the Restoring Education and Learning

Act in 2015, which received the full support of President Barack Obama. That effort launched the Second Chance Pilot Pell Program, in participation with 64 colleges in 26 states. The primary objective of the new initiative is to educate more prisoners so, upon release, they have the necessary job skills to attain gainful employment and are able to support themselves and their families. The initiative, originally planned to run for less than five years, recently received renewal for the 2019-2020 academic years.

A 2013 study published by the RAND Corporation, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization committed to the public interest, showed the recidivism rate for offenders in postsecondary education programs in correctional institutions was less than half

of other offenders (U.S. Department of Education press release: "U.S. Department of Education Launches Second Chance Pell Pilot Program for Incarcerated Individuals," July 31, 2015).

Other benefits revealed by this study include:

- Employment after release was 13 percent higher among prisoners who participated in ei-

ther academic or technical education programs than those who did not.

- Offenders who participate in or complete postsecondary technical programs have a greater chance of finding employment, have better employment retention rates, and earn higher wages than those who have not participated.

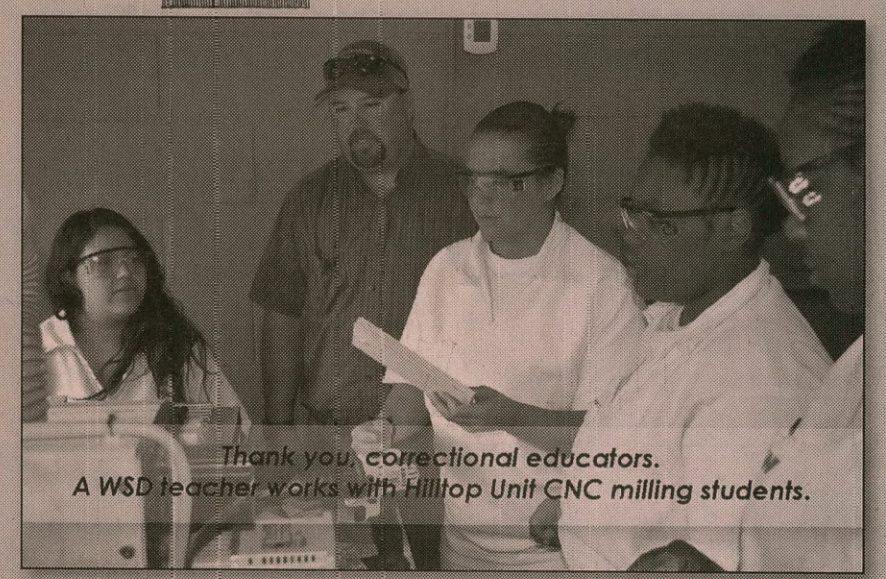
PELL GRANTS continued on page 5 >

### INSIDE

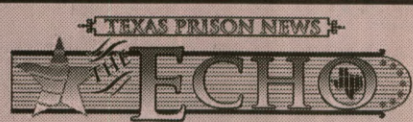
Letters to the Editor.....	Pg. 2
Dear Derby.....	Pg. 2
Heat Prevention.....	Pg. 3
Crime Stoppers.....	Pg. 4
Chow Hound.....	Pg. 4
Help Wanted.....	Pg. 4
Bulletin Board.....	Pg. 5
Contest Winner.....	Pg. 6
Sports.....	Pg. 8

## May: Teacher Appreciation Month!

See more on page 6.



Thank you, correctional educators. A WSD teacher works with Hilltop Unit CNC milling students.



VOL. 91 NO. 5 • MAY 2019 • 8 PAGES  
PUBLISHED FOR 91 YEARS, SINCE 1928  
CIRCULATION: 140,000+ PER ISSUE

— MANAGEMENT —

Dr. Clint Carpenter – Superintendent  
Bambi Kiser – Managing Editor  
Mary Partida – Graphics Consultant

— STAFF —

Todd R. Carman – Staff Writer & Graphics  
John W. Flagg – Staff Writer & Graphics  
William E. Hill – Staff Writer  
Tim G. Scoggin – Graphics  
Cory J. Wisnoski – Staff Writer

— CONTRIBUTING WRITERS —

Sergio D. Alvarez – Hightower Unit  
Lauren Aycock – Crain-Sycamore  
Ashley Dack – Mountain View Unit  
Jim Dent – Polunsky Unit  
Greg Freeman – Allred Unit  
Robert Fridell – Telford Unit  
Joseph L. Fritz – Estelle Unit  
Lisa Jackson – Murray Unit  
Daniel P. Meehan – Darrington Unit  
James Pimentel – Ellis Unit  
Eva Shelton – Crain Unit  
Richard E. Smith – Ramsey Unit  
Michael Wiese – Luther Unit

— UNIT REPORTERS —

Allred Unit – Kenneth Gardner  
Beto Unit – Kyle Bankston  
Beto Unit – Quincy Patterson  
Boyd Unit – Michael Master  
Clemens Unit – Joseph Facundo  
Coffield Unit – Roger Reister  
Coffield Unit – Christopher Stratton  
Connally Unit – Alfredo Arizmendi  
Crain Unit – Jane Callaway  
Dalhart Unit – Ryan Forbes  
Dalhart Unit – Kenneth Dapp  
Darrington Unit – Paul Gillette  
Duncan Unit – Jim Brannen  
Eastham Unit – Johnny L. Wooten  
Ellis Unit – Thomas Quinones  
Ferguson Unit – Steven Thomas  
Hobby Unit – Misty Weaver  
Hughes Unit – Toby Rod  
Huntsville Unit – David McKay  
Jester III Unit – Lucas Morgan  
Luther Unit – Clifford Suranofsky  
Lynaugh Unit – Larry A. Harris  
McConnell Unit – Patrick Hoza  
Michael Unit – Kenny Brooks  
Neal Unit – Robert Zimmer  
Polunsky Unit – Kevin Hargrove  
Ramsey Unit – Paresh Patel  
Roach Unit – Jose Martinez  
Smith Unit – Roger Taylor  
Stiles Unit – Arthur Sterns  
Stringfellow Unit – John Stephens  
Telford Unit – Jamie Stewart  
Torres Unit – Stephen Unger  
Woodman State Jail – Kathleen Miller

The ECHO is a criminal justice publication produced by the publisher and staff for use by TDCJ offenders. Submissions and letters may be sent via truck mail to: The ECHO, c/o WSD Admin. Bldg. or regular mail to: The ECHO, c/o WSD Admin. Bldg., P.O. Box 40, Huntsville, TX, 77342-0040. Permission is granted for the reproduction of non-copyrighted materials, provided credit is given to author and publication. Due to the volume of submitted material, unused material will NOT be returned to the sender. The publisher reserves the right to edit all materials for content and space. Any references to Internet sources have been provided by WSD employees. Annual subscriptions to The ECHO can be purchased for \$12. Money orders or personal checks must be made out to The ECHO/WSD and sent to: The ECHO, P.O. Box 40, Huntsville, TX 77342-0040. ISSN 1530-7298.

Outside Looking In

Feeling different in the freeworld

Jennifer Toon, ECHO Contributor

I feel different. As I walk up to the cashier at the gas station, I feel like I'm an imposter — that I'm pretending to be one of them.

Who is them? The girl next to the gas pump who is washing her window with a squeegee, the older lady complaining about a receipt, the cashier fiddling around with her phone?

Can they tell I'm not normal, that I've come from another place and another time? Are they suspicious when I don't know what certain slang means or how to operate the card reader at the counter? Do they see that I wear a scarlet letter "F" for "felon" on my soul? It feels like it's there, burning and searing through, making clear to everyone that there is something amiss about me.

I'm marked by this difference. In the past I felt so much shame attached to it that I couldn't function. I returned to prison because of my inability to integrate and become one of them, but what I've discovered is that I will never be just one of them. I adapt, but I realize that I must also accept that I am me, and I am you, and we will always carry the burden of the decisions that make us different.

It's still uncomfortable, like that moment at the gas station when my old fear gets the best of me, but I stop and gather myself. I don't feel ashamed. I just feel different. Something has changed me. I look around and I feel I carry a heavier knowledge about the frailty of our lives, about the price of freedom, and about the dangers of selfishness and

instant gratification.

The difference, then, is not linked to the condemnation I have felt in the past or the shunning that society often imposes on us. The difference is the internal awareness that my prison experience changed me forever. I can't go back to wasting time like the cashier does on her cellphone, or to arguing over the price of beer like the older lady, or to the constant anxiety about appearances and material things that seems to preoccupy the squeegee girl.

My prison experience has made my outlook and my understanding about the world around me more expansive. I will be one of them, with daily living struggles and preoccupations about parking spaces, gas prices and fancy phones; yet, I am still one of us. I will still lie awake and stare at the ceiling. I will still wonder why we can't all see the important things in life, why we cause each other's suffering, and how can we help each other find our way home to ourselves and to God.

I patiently wait for the cashier to stop texting and smile with a hello. She just stares at me with an absentmindedness that at first frightens me. Does she see my scarlet letter? I shrug it off. If she knew the real reason why I am different, maybe it wouldn't be so bad. I pay for my gas and cup of coffee. I take a moment to say something kind and she finally looks startled, as though something is amiss about me. There is, and that's finally okay with me. ★



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the editor,

The teachers with WSD here at the Michael Unit, namely Ms. Fox, Ms. Rails and Ms. Green-Clements, have made a positive impact on my life because they have chosen to become educators in a prison and have done so without being judgmental and biased. They have provided an atmosphere in their classrooms in which I haven't been afraid or even ashamed to speak out and share my feelings, thoughts and behaviors. They have given me a sense of normality in my life, and they have helped me realize that I'm not alone and that I share a common goal with lots of people in and out of prison.

After coming to prison, I was given a choice, and I chose to change. When I changed my beliefs, my behavior

changed, too. I was taught to think, and to listen. I ended up with a GED and learned some life skills as well. By changing my habits, I can achieve new goals that will empower success in my life and meet my needs over time. Others can do this, too. This has enabled me to change and has given me hope, desire and strength to come back as a better man. Make a choice: choose to change!

Michael Justice  
Michael Unit

Dear reader,

Thank you for testimony to the influence of great teachers! Your message is strong, and your timing is perfect: May is National Teacher Appreciation Month. In TDCJ, Windham School District teachers and college educators across Texas open minds to new ideas, knowledge and dreams. Correction-

al educators serve as role models and motivators to those who have never experienced academic success. Their jobs are difficult, their students are challenging and the prison environment can be daunting, but these teachers are committed to changing their student's futures for the better. They return each day to conduct classes inside prison walls because they help rehabilitate and return incarcerated men and women to their families, the workforce and free-world society. It is our honor to recognize these teachers for a job well done, so this issue of The ECHO includes several salutes to correctional educators (see page 6). Thanking you for taking time to write to us in support of these great teachers!



Dear Darby,

Standing outside waiting in the line for clothing exchange, most people are usually cranky from their earlier-than-intended broken sleep. I decided to step out of my normal crankiness and ask one out of every four people if they knew how to get to Sesame Street. (Yes, the one Big Bird lives on.) I did this because I wanted to see what kind of reactions I would receive. The most common answer was, "I don't know." They usually looked at me like I was crazy and despite my question, some would smile. That is the reaction I wanted.

Recently, a tragedy happened in my dorm and someone said, "People are

so cold and callous." As true as this may be, I have been here for almost a decade and found that not everyone is like this. I have found that some people make a choice to be bitter and unkind. I have learned that not everyone is like this, and death affects everyone differently — as does life.

My past is my only regret in life, and I have now chosen to become better. I have come to realize life is much too short to remain angry or take for granted the beauty it has to offer. I realize we are only prisoners if we choose to be. I have met people with various sentences and not one of them is the same in their thinking. Life happens, death happens, pain, healing, growth, prayers, comfort, goodness — they all happen in life. I have learned that all lives and all people matter. So even if I ask 100 more people if they know how to get to Sesame Street, and 98 of them look at me crazy,

the smiles I see from even two of them make the looks I get worth the challenge.

Not all life is "cold and callous." All life matters, and life can be beautiful — even first thing in the morning.

Sarah Luedecke  
Crain Unit/Riverside

Dear Sesame Street Sarah,

Girl, folks might think you're crazy, but I think you're on to somethin'. Perspective IS the key to life and to makin' hard times (like doing time) bearable. Be an influencer and keep makin' 'em smile! Sesame Street director/writer/actor Jim Henson had a similar philosophy: explaining, "Life's like a movie, write your own ending. Keep believing, keep pretending." Now, regarding Sesame Street's actual location, I have heard it's where YOUR heart is!

Scrambled eggs

You cannot unscramble eggs." I read those words in a spiritual book about holding on. The simplicity of the message snatched me away from the deafening slam of doors and my cellie's annoying snores. It forced me to ponder the statement's truth and to seek a better ending than a tragic condemnation of our lives. I didn't want to simply hold on, I wanted to prevail and hold out my hand to help another in need.

First though, I had to get my own life straight.

The fact that we are in prison declares that our lives—oureggs—are scrambled. The things we've done, the mistakes we've made and the relationships we've destroyed are unquestionable truths. We cannot take them back. We cannot erase the deep gouge we've etched across the fresh paint job of our lives by our past bad decisions. Our history is our history. In prison, we say, "It is

what it is," meaning it's done and there is nothing anyone can do to change it.

However, I disagree.

We must be willing to scoop up the greasy, scrambled pieces of life and make them into something good, something useful and something that merits pride. Our present circumstances and past actions should not and do not rob us of future hope. Our past cannot be the deciding factor determining who we are to become. This moment is the crucible that molds us into the person we were designed to be.

Bad eggs are not cooked; they are simply tossed away. But you are good. Someone looked at you and deemed you as a good egg. Even if you're scrambled, that means that you are cooked and only good eggs get cooked.



A commentary by Richard E. Smith, Contributing Writer, Ramsey Unit

Scrambled eggs get a bad rap as a cheap, unwanted meal. The fact is, in prison, eggs are widely desired. People rise at 2:30 a.m. to get a tiny scoop of eggs. Outside of prison, eggs have made millions, if not billions, of dollars for restaurants that serve breakfast, even for supper. These restaurants transform scrambled eggs into tasty omelets. We should do the same with our lives.

There should come a time during our incarceration when, despite the bars, we discover our freedom. Having come to this place, we must discover how to love and be loved. Somewhere in this prison

we must find our true identity. In our situation, we must become hope, not only for ourselves but for others, too.

It is within the crushing depths of earth that diamonds are formed. In this place bounded by razor wire, we must become better than the person we have been. We must find a way to allow the pressure to change us into diamonds.

No one, including yourself, can unscramble your past, but we can turn our messes into messages of hope for those who find themselves in the same dark place where we once were. Scrambled eggs cannot be unscrambled but, with work, they can be made into a decent meal. ★

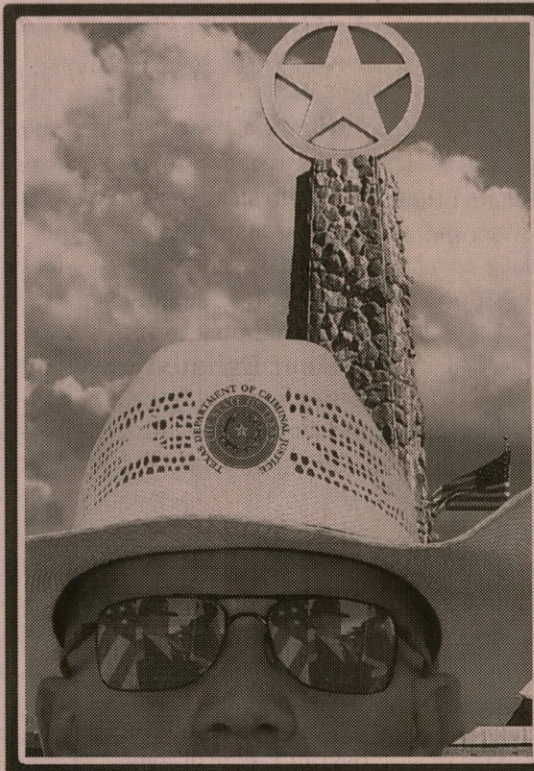
SUDOKU SOLUTIONS

easy

hard

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

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



MAY  
CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS &  
EMPLOYEES APPRECIATION  
&  
FALLEN OFFICERS MEMORIAL

THANK YOU  
FOR SUSTAINED HARD WORK &  
DAILY DEDICATION.

REMEMBERING  
THOSE WHO MADE  
EXTRAORDINARY SACRIFICES  
TO PROTECT OFFENDERS,  
EMPLOYEES & CITIZENS.

**> ST. DISMAS**  
continued from page 1

“Fraternity and sorority chapter members seek to follow the spiritual examples of St. Dismas and St. Mary Magdalene in their own lives. Both Catholic chapters are TDCJ Life Changes Academy Level IV-V programs, and membership progression is based on five certificate degrees with ceremonial advancement,” he says.

Inaugural observances during the Wynne Unit retreat included the Enthronement of the Bible, an important sacramental action in the retreat. Six offenders walked purposefully up the center aisle of the gymnasium toward the pulpit: four carried candles, one bore a large wooden cross and one held aloft a Bible for all to see. The Wynne Unit Ensemble performed Gregorian chants throughout the formal activities, and a participant read from the Bible, reciting ancient passages written by the prophets and sages of Israel.

After the opening ceremonies, offenders were seated at tables and divided up into 10 different teams, each led by two volunteers. Teams were named after the Biblical characters Paul, Luke, John and Jude. Throughout the retreat, teams participated in activities designed to educate offenders on church history and emphasize the importance of faith and religion.

“Whether an offender’s life is currently traveling a smooth path or what may seem to be a convoluted maze, faith-based teachings help offenders navigate their journey well,” says Deacon D. Hayes, the current CEO of the BSD/SMM and Retreat Master.

The retreat also involved a witnessing phase, focusing on speech that contains heartfelt personal testimony and spiritual advice. Volunteers were selected to provide personal accounts to the gathering on topics including Catholic Church congregation, grace, piety and reconciliation.

“These volunteer testimonies were truly inspirational,” says retreat participant S. Walton. “Life experiences — filled with terrible twists and turns just like my own — have touched my life deeply and awakened me to the positive power of religion.”

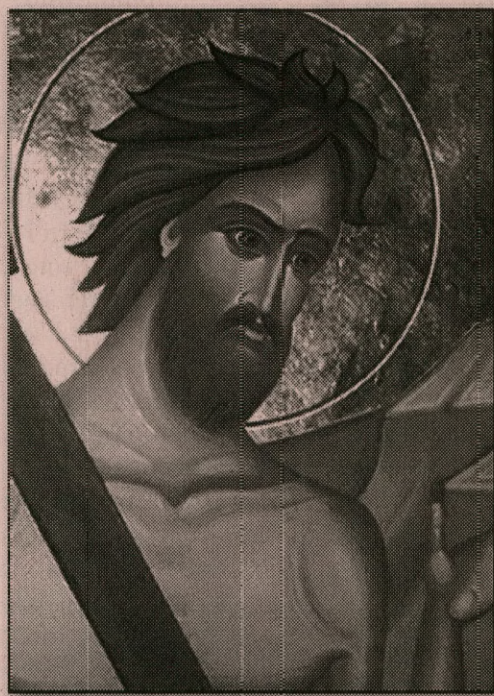
Volunteers and offenders also performed impromptu skits to demonstrate aspects of various Biblical themes. Through parable and portrayal, volunteers revealed to offenders how they can identify with Biblical men who had broken the law — either God’s law or man’s — and were considered outcasts and criminals. These men included Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, Peter the denier and Paul the persecutor.

“Those who once cynically dissected religion tend to observe at the St. Dismas retreat that people of all races, colors and creeds can partake in spiritual fellowship,” Deacon Hayes says.

“As a Brother of St. Dismas, it is essential to comport oneself in conduct befitting a servant,” says offender S. Figueroa of the Wynne Unit, who is also St. Dismas Chapter Eight president. “Learning discipline, responsibility and humility help me to affirm and multiply my faith. I am able to see God working in others’ lives as well my own, and I am very grateful for that.”

Serving others as a goal calls for a tremendous amount of selfless commitment and can become a turning point in the process of character-building and establishing an unshakable faith. A New School of Prayer is a BSD or SMM member’s corporate link to one another as a spiritual tool, where members learn to heal and grow in holiness through scripture and entreaties for theological virtues. Their lifeline is God’s Word.

“During the retreat, the Brothers of St. Dismas were



called upon to partake in a foot-washing ceremony, and we washed the feet of the offender participants,” says Wynne offender and Brother of St. Dismas F. Serna. “This act is a true test of faith and humility. Not everyone is willing to accept this challenge.”

Team participants were later asked to create individual poster boards reflecting their thoughts and attitudes before and after attending the retreat. “Before” posters reflected negative traits like self-centeredness, destructiveness and addiction to drugs, while “after” posters echoed happiness, salvation and love.

“This is my first St Dismas Catholic retreat, and I have learned that they show a lot of love and unity in the community. Their love and sincerity are beyond anything I could have ever imagined,” offender participant Glenn Hoover says.

The retreat ended with an induction ceremony, where offender participants made the step to accept Catholicism as their religion and become a Brother of St. Dismas. Ongoing conversion is the heart and core of both Old and New Testament teachings and St. Dismas encourages participants to open their hearts and minds to religion.

“From the moment I walked in the Wynne gymnasium, I could feel love and joy all around me,” says offender Walton. “I have made the decision to

join the Brothers of St Dismas because it dignifies and reinforces my personal striving for spiritual maturity.”

The Dismas/Magdalene Project also operates the Kolbe House, alternative housing made available to offenders upon release.

“The Kolbe House is a faith-based community,

recognized by the TDCJ, where former offenders can find the necessary spiritual and worldly direction they so desperately need,” Leicht says. “Entrants receive life coaching, assistance with resume drafting, transportation to and from a job site, and mentorship. Furthermore, we also provide three sets of clothes, perishable goods and a hygiene kit, for example.”

Leicht also says the BSD/SMM brothers-and-sisters-in-white are, little by little, becoming a BSD/SMM team in the freeworld. Upon release from prison, BSD/SMM members receive reentry aftercare through local Catholic parish components. Offenders work diligently to prepare to be of service to their communities and participate in weekly follow-up meetings in mutual communion and prayer.

“Incarcerated members of the BSD/SMM endeavor to apply values of friendship and accountability in their life,” says Wynne offender and BSD member T. Stanley. “One of our personal projects is to develop a Parole Plan of Action to present to the Parole Board.”

“Religious values and virtues give guidance on how to navigate the complexity of life, with its frustrations and perplexities. Religion also teaches lessons of peace, faith, humility and service in the midst of a fallen world where order is disrupted or difficult to perceive,” Leicht says. ★

## St. Dismas retreat: Personal reflections

*Wilfredo Garcia, Wynne Unit*

**W**e have gathered at the Wynne Unit gymnasium for the great, long-expected Brothers of St. Dismas Retreat. This is my second time participating in this event. As I sit at my assigned table, I see many people, some whom I know and others that I do not. Everyone at the table of St. Jude has a turn to introduce themselves and, at that moment, we start a journey together.

Through the next few days we will all have our own experiences to enlighten and open our hearts, thanks to testimonies from volunteers. As I look around, I see many different denominations and also notice the joy, love and integrity the volunteers have brought.

Through this second retreat opportunity that I have been granted, I have gotten a better understanding of the Catholic Church and the reason we have our beliefs and why we stick to them. I have learned more about the fellowship we share, how we can strengthen our relationship with God, and many more lovely things. No matter the denomination we represent, we can come together to worship the Lord. Acting as one, we are the Church. ★

## Stringfellow Unit hosts ACC, UHCL graduation

*A staff report from The Alvin Sun & Advertiser, April 9, 2019, reprinted with permission*

**I**f there is one thing that Henry Woodard learned in the pursuit of his education, taking a wrong turn doesn’t mean a person can never find their way.

“One bad chapter in the book is not the end of the story,” said Woodard, the commencement speaker during the Texas Department of Criminal Justice graduation ceremony March 23 at the Stringfellow Unit. Mistakes “strengthen our resolve, and we must grow in wisdom.”

Twenty-six inmates were honored with their associate degree from Alvin Community College after several years of remaining dedicated to their education despite difficult circumstances. Several inmates also received bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Houston–Clear Lake.

Inmates who have graduated from ACC and UHCL have gone on to earn master’s degrees and even start their own businesses. TDCJ studies have shown that the rate of recidivism, or chance of return to prison, greatly declines as an offender’s educational level increases. Offenders, on average, have less than a seventh-grade education.

ACC President Christal M. Albrecht spoke to the graduates and asked that they pursue their education further.

“We know that each of you has your own unique life story, and you have each walked your own pathway to bring you here today,” she said. “We hope that you take pride in your accomplishment and that receiving your degree is

the beginning of a new era in your lives.”

ACC offered the first college classes to offenders at the Texas Department of Corrections in 1965. ACC was the first institution of higher education in Texas to offer college programs at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. In 2016, ACC was one of 67 colleges throughout the United States to be chosen to participate in the Second Chance Pell program, which provides grants to inmate students.

Prior to enrolling in college while in prison, each inmate must first earn their high school diploma or GED and pass all the same entrance tests required for every college student.

Woodard earned his associate degree from ACC during the March 23 ceremony. He said that education has provided him with many opportunities and will continue to benefit him throughout his life.

“We have bloomed,” he said. “We have grown. We are the future of tomorrow. We can be the hope for tomorrow. Seasons change, but you are built to weather the storm.”

UHCL speaker Johnny Ward entered TDCJ with a seventh-grade education. He received a master’s degree in literature during the ceremony.

“I want you to become the best version of yourselves,” Ward said. “Today marks the next chapter in the transition of our lives. Within you, you have the power to achieve your goals.” ★

## Tips for prevention and recognition of heat illness

*Due to the high temperatures, offenders and staff are encouraged to be aware of the types of heat illnesses.*

### Conditions causing higher risk for heat illness include:

- Being newly assigned to a job
- Receiving psychiatric medications or certain other medications, or having certain medical conditions
- Being elderly
- High temperatures and humidity
- No significant breeze

### Prevention of heat illness includes:

- Increasing frequency of fluid intake when working in hot environments. Supplemental water will be made available.
- Taking a break every 30-60 minutes
- Decreasing intensity of work under extreme conditions
- Access to cold water showers
- Access to respite areas
- Allowed fans for all offenders
- Following preventive measures on heat posters for heat related illness



### Types of heat illness

**Heat Cramps:** Can be painful and intermittent, involving involuntary muscle spasms following hard physical work or exercise in a hot environment. Cramps usually occur after heavy perspiration and typically occur in the abdomen, arms and legs. The cause is inadequate replacement of electrolytes (sodium and potassium).

**Heat Exhaustion:** The most common form of heat illness is caused by depletion of water and salt. Symptoms include weakness, anxiety, fatigue, dizziness, headache, and nausea. Signs include profuse perspiration and rapid pulse and breathing. Confusion or loss of coordination may also be present. Heat exhaustion, if not treated, may lead to heat stroke.

**Heat Stroke:** While it may be preceded by signs of heat exhaustion, the onset of heat stroke is often sudden. Symptoms include diminished or absent perspiration, and hot, dry and flushed skin. Other conditions that may be present include increased body temperatures, delirium, convulsions, seizures, rapid pulse, weakness,

headache, mental confusion, dizziness, extreme fatigue, nausea/vomiting, and incoherent speech progressing to coma. Medical care is urgently needed. Death may result if left untreated.

**Treatment:** Seek medical attention as soon as possible. Move the person out of direct sunlight into an air conditioned environment if possible, remove clothing while maintaining modesty, and provide water to drink if conscious. Liberally apply cold water on them, and if possible, fan them if there is no breeze.

**Access to Respite Areas:** During times of extreme temperatures, offenders must be allowed access to respite areas. Employees and offenders will be trained to be compliant with heat precaution procedures including knowledge of respite area locations and offender access. The location of each respite area is also posted in offender housing areas and other common areas on the unit. Please consult unit staff regarding directions to the respite areas if needed.

**Report all incidents of heat related illness to a staff member immediately!** ★



► **ARMATUS**

continued from page 1

Pritchard and Armatus volunteers were presented with the Reentry and Integration Division Award during the Governor's 2019 Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Award program. The ceremony took place in Austin and the awards were presented by Chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice Dale Wainwright and TDCJ Executive Director Bryan Collier (see related article on this page).

The program's success depends on support from all participants, which includes volunteers, friends, family members, veteran service organizations, community-based groups, local health care providers and offender veterans.

"Offenders lose so much when they come to prison. This program is helping them reconnect to that man — that soldier — who put himself on the line for us. They're getting their self-respect back. It's putting them back in touch with the man they are," Pritchard said. ★

# Armatus program receives Governor's award

Joseph Brown, *The Huntsville Item*,  
April 5, 2019, reprinted with permission

**A**n organization with a deep local connection has been recognized by state officials for its work in helping forgotten veterans.

The Armatus Reintegration Program, which was founded with the sole purpose of serving incarcerated veterans, received the Reentry and Integration Division Award during the Governor's 2019 Criminal Justice Volunteer Service Award program.

"Volunteering is a responsibility that these recipients have embraced wholeheartedly, and for that, we are extremely grateful," said Dale Wainwright, chairman of the Texas Board of Criminal Justice.

"These volunteers dedicate themselves each day to helping others succeed," added TDCJ executive director Bryan Collier. "For many years to come, the impact of that invaluable time and effort invested will be felt across the state of Texas."

Rick Pritchard, CEO of the Armatus Reintegration Program, started the program in 2017 after his involvement in faith-based dorms at the Estelle and Ferguson units. He recognized a need for incarcerated veterans to have access to evidence-based curriculum that addressed PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Disorder), parenting, domestic violence, anger management and job training.

"It's not just me. It's all the volunteers," said Rick Pritchard, a Marine veteran. "It's our first year doing what we're doing. ... We don't care if we get the recognition, but it



Armatus is honored in Austin. Photo courtesy of TDCJ.

gives us confirmation that we're on the right track."

The Armatus Reintegration Program is one of six organizations and 16 individuals from across the state recognized for their efforts to help inmates and those who are on parole or probation. They donate many hours of their personal time every year with the goal of changing the lives of convicted offenders, and aiding and comforting their victims.

In 2018, there were 21,728 volunteers who provided a total of 399,705 hours of service.

"Too many of our nation's veterans return home with scars that can't be seen but sometimes lead to incarceration," Congressman Kevin Brady said. "Programs like Armatus Reintegration help restore dignity to the life of these veterans and give them a second chance to once again become productive and proud members of our communities." ★

► **PELL GRANTS**

continued from page 1

- Offenders who participate in prison postsecondary education reduce their re-incarceration rate by more than half.
- Offenders completing two years of college average a 10 percent rate of recidivism and a 5 percent re-incarceration rate.
- Offenders who participate in college programs have fewer disciplinary cases while incarcerated.
- Offender education increases the likelihood that the student will NOT return to prison, which helps the economy. It is estimated that the reduction in recidivism rates due to education programs will save states a combined \$365.8 million per year on the cost of incarceration.
- Employed ex-offenders pay taxes, which improves our economy. Formerly incarcerated workers with college educations could add up to \$45.3 million to the nation's tax revenue.

A frequently asked question is, "Why should offenders be eligible for government financial aid when many who are not incarcerated have difficulty paying for their children's education?" Part of the answer can be found by examining the colleges that offer programs for offenders; many of these are local community colleges that require the financial stability provided by funding sources such as Pell Grants. The more endowments these institutions receive, the more services they can provide the public. Therefore, increasing the availability of college courses for prisoners does not reduce the total number of college

opportunities for the public, it helps increase them.

The following colleges participate in the Second Chance Pell Pilot program and contract with TDCJ to provide financial assistance to incarcerated students: Alvin Community College, Clarendon College, Lamar State College, Lee College, Southwest Texas Junior College and the University of Houston—Clear Lake. Participants in the Second Chance Pell Grant must comply with the same eligibility guidelines as any other student applying for financial aid.

According to statistics provided by the Lee College Huntsville Center, which manages one of the longest-serving colleges that partners with TDCJ, there has been a significant increase not only in the number of offenders attending college but also in the number of degrees earned, thanks to availability of Pell grants. During the 2015–2016 school years, the year before the renewal of the Pell Grant program, Lee College awarded 114 associate degrees. This is compared to 173 degrees awarded after the 2017–2018 school year, a 52 percent increase.

In addition to academic degrees, the number of students completing a Technical Certificate of Completion more than doubled, increasing from 486 in 2015–2016 to 1,352 in 2017–2018. Lee College's enrollment for the 2019 semester grew to 1,036 offenders, with many using the Pell Grant to help pay tuition for academic or vocational courses, or both.

"Second Chance Pell has made clear that when barriers to postsecondary education in prison fall, enrollment will rise. However, we encourage Congress and the White House to go one step further," said Nick Turner, director

of the Vera Institute for Justice, in a Feb. 14, 2019 news release. "The federal ban on Pell Grants for incarcerated people has no place in an America that overwhelmingly supports common-sense criminal justice reform," he said.

In a rare display of bipartisan and bicameral cooperation, legislators have introduced a bill to reinstate Pell Grant eligibility to federal and state offenders, beginning with the 2019–2020 academic years. The Restoring Education and Learning (REAL) Act was introduced in the United States Senate by Senators Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Mike Lee (R-Utah) and Dick Durbin (D-Illinois). Representatives Danny Davis (D-Illinois), Jim Banks (R-Indiana), Barbara Lee (D-California) and French Hill (R-Arkansas) introduced similar legislation in the House of Representatives.

"When we give people in prison an opportunity to earn an education, our communities are safer, taxpayers save money and we can end the cycle of recidivism," said Sen. Schatz. "The REAL Act would restore a program we know already works and give people a real chance to rebuild their lives" ("Bill would restore Pell eligibility to inmates," by Matthew Dembicki, Community College Daily 2019).

**Editor's Note:** Offenders seeking financial assistance from the Pell Grant program are encouraged to contact their unit's college counselor to schedule a Texas Success Initiative (TSI) college readiness test. During the Pre-TSI orientation, offenders learn how to apply for federal assistance through the Second Chance Pell Initiative. College counselors will provide program applications, which are sent to the Pell Grant Processing Center for final approval. ★

## TDCJ/Windham bulletin board



Sanchez State Jail WSD HSE graduates are (front row, l. to r.) C. Chrzanowski, C. Cruz, M. Flores, K. Friemel, C. Jones, E. Jones, T. Jones, K. Lane, R. Mancha, (standing l. to r.), I. Martinez, J. McEntyre, B. Murphy, J. Murphy, C. Ohara, A. Resendez, R. Roberts, G. Salazar, C. Schoonover, A. Seal, D. Smith, R. Thomas, J. Zarate and (not shown) M. Gomez.



Sanchez State Jail's WSD HVAC graduates are (front row, l. to r.) A. Pope, J. Ruiz (standing, l. to r.) D. Flickinger, C. Lopez, A. Martinez and J. Nuñez.



Sanchez State Jail's WSD Culinary Arts graduates (front row, l. to r.) J. Lincoln, A. Nguyen (standing, l. to r.) S. Castro, M. Dando and M. Herrera.



Goodman Unit WSD HSE graduates are (front row, l. to r.) J. Counfiss, J. Contreras, J. Contreras, J. Caraffini, Blackwell, J. Adams, (second row, l. to r.) K. Lynch, D. Lott, R. Hutchins, F. Hernandez, N. Gutierrez Jr., T. Gray, D. Forney, (standing, l. to r.) J. Denova, T. Velkoeffter, M. Teel, R. Smith, D. Rios, D. Pearson and K. Meeks.



Gurney Unit WSD HSE graduates are R. Bass, A. Blanco, R. Culley, A. Garcia, J. Garcia, A. Hasting, S. Johnson, H. Martinez, M. Moreno, D. Northcutt, R. Ramirez, P. Reese, J. Thornton and J. Venegas.



Crain Unit (Terrace) WSD CIP graduates are B. Goree, V. Pouncy, D. Davis, B. Lee, C. Amole, B. Harris, L. Lastrapes, A. Gutierrez, N. Pruett, J. Moreno, D. Honeycutt, J. Rust, A. Wilson and S. Simmons.



Torres Unit WSD Environmental Protection Agency certification graduates are (front row, l. to r.) H. Hicks, E. Espinosa, S. Ramirez, C. Samuel, D. Charles, O. Gray, O. Perez, (back row, l. to r.) T. Tarkley, M. Chavarria, J. Boyd, J. Williams, J. Hayes, H. Villapando, F. Flores, A. Porter, K. Lewis, M. Kerr, J. Benavidez and A. Loera.

\*Education Abbreviations: Windham School District (WSD); Career Technical Education (CTE); Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP); Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC); and High School Equivalency (HSE).

# JOURNAL ENTRIES

Roger D. Reister, Coffield Unit

1<sup>st</sup>  
Place

ECHO CONTEST WINNER  
Non-Fiction

## Thursday the 15<sup>th</sup>

The prison Chaplain just informed me that my mother died. That's all I'm going to write today.

## Friday the 16<sup>th</sup>

I held it together yesterday, despite the never-ending line of people coming by to say a few words. Whoever said that men avoid emotionally charged situations was an idiot. Each guy started with an "I'm sorry" or "I don't know what to say," followed by a whole bunch of stammering and bumbling of words. All of them said the exact wrong thing! Of course, there is never a right thing to say at a time like this.

## Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup>

I finally cried this morning. As usual, I woke up early to enjoy the only peace and quiet available in this place. Instead of enjoyment, I found the normally calming solitude choking, squeezing, stifling and pressing against me from all sides. To escape, I grabbed my headphones and immersed myself in the tunes playing on the radio. Big mistake! My love of music comes from my Mom. There was always an old record or cassette playing in the background of my childhood. Whenever one of her favorite songs came on (Percy Sledge, Patsy Cline, Righteous Brothers or Elvis), she'd grab one of us boys and begin dancing around

the kitchen or living room or backyard or wherever we were. It was always embarrassing ... and I loved it! Most of the time, my brothers and I would wiggle out of arms' reach, but it never deterred Mom. She'd dance by herself, spinning around as she sang every word to whatever was playing. She was enjoying the moment — living. Now she's not. I miss her so much.

## Sunday the 18<sup>th</sup>

I've come to the realization that my body must be just as confused by grief as my brain is. Tears are the body's way of washing irritants from the eyes, a runny nose flushes germs and bacteria away, and shivering warms the body up when it's exposed to cold. None of these things is necessary when grieving, but the body doesn't seem to care about that. All it knows is that it's hurting, and it

is desperately trying to eat that hurt out by any means possible. It seems kind of stupid when I think about it, but somehow it all seems to help.

## Monday the 19<sup>th</sup>

I just came to the conclusion that everyone handles the loss of a loved one differently, and they each believe that their method is best. That's

why the guys are sharing their stories with me. They want to help. They want my pain to go away. They want me to smile again. I want that, too. If I were experiencing physical pain from an injury, I would know exactly what to do and how to go about relieving my discomfort. The guys around me would eagerly give me their treatment advice and we'd share a moment of male bonding:

"Rub some dirt on it."

"I've got some duct tape; that'll fix you right up."

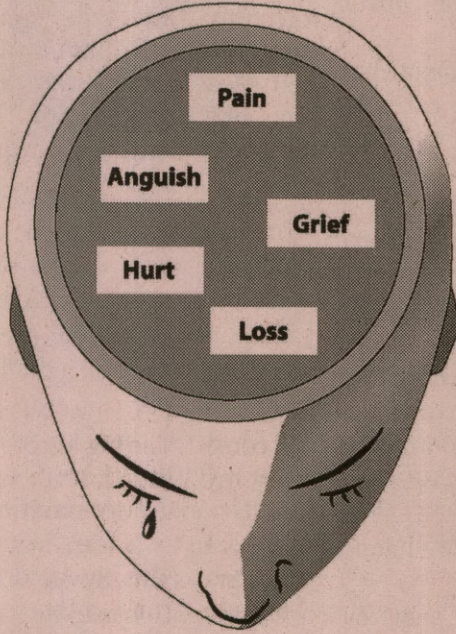
"Chew up two ibuprofen. They work better that way."

Yep, physical pain can be dealt with, but when it comes to helping a fellow man through his emotional pain, we men are clueless.

## Wednesday the 21<sup>st</sup>

In the past couple of days, I've done all of my normal day-to-day activities, but it felt like there was something off, or something ... different. Of course, something is different. I'm different, and I'll never be the same again. Right now, I'm hurting and that emotional wound may never completely heal or get better, but I'll get better. I love you, Mom.

*Author's Note: I shared these personal journal entries to remind everyone that you never know what someone else is going through. Prison itself is a difficult environment to live in without all of the added drama and stress contributed by others. Please be mindful of this as you go through your daily activities. Oh, and always try to be the kind of friend that you would turn to in a time of need. ★*



## ► THANK YOU TEACHERS!

continued from page 1

### Thoughts of a Windham literacy teacher Why NOT teach in prison?

By J. Addy, a longtime literacy instructor for Windham School District

When people find out I teach in prison, their immediate question is, "Why?!" My typical response is, "Why not?"

Students come to my class assuming I teach for Windham because I can't teach anywhere else. In fact, the opposite is true. I have taught in public schools and on college campuses, stateside and overseas. I now teach in the Texas correctional environment and have the privilege of working alongside some of the finest, most dedicated teachers I've ever met. I am inspired by teachers and students who press on daily despite the difficulties encountered inside these walls.

Since 1995, I've enjoyed teaching in adult education and helping people make the needed connections to move forward in their lives. In prison, many people say every day is the same, but no two days are alike when I'm learning and growing right along with my students. When a classroom environment becomes one where each class member can push the others toward continued success, it's a win for everyone.

As is the case with many things in prison, sometimes these wins are long sought after and hard fought. My nickname could be "Are you done yet?!" because I'm constantly asking that of students whose behavior continues

to sideline their lives. I am often heard reminding my students that it is my pleasure to assist them, but I can't do that if their behavior prevents them from joining in learning. Often, my job involves helping students see those talents that they may be too timid — or too distracted — to embrace and develop. How rewarding it is to see men accepting their responsibilities — and begin to enjoy them as mature adults.

I often describe graduation ceremonies to my classes and share with them the impact offender families' words and actions have on me. For me, graduation is the relief on a mother's face that her son is finally pursuing the right direction. Graduation is the hope in a spouse's face that there is really a future and not just talk. Graduation is the excitement in children's eyes that dad has kept his promise. And, even when family is not present, graduation is the proud handshake with a student whose eyes reflect more confidence, more pride, and more peace than previously found.

Education for many people is just a concept, but for me education is a welcoming place where we become aware of our responsibilities, our



Correctional educator equips students for success.

families and our legacies. Learning challenges us to reconsider our futures and how we can use education to better our lives and the lives of those with whom we come in contact. Education is that place that gives us access to all the other places we desire to go. Along the way, we learn how we can give back and become greater than ourselves.

In 2006, I began teaching in a computer lab in Windham, and I started decorating the wall with paper silhouettes of graduates in caps and gowns. Silhouettes are added each time a student attains his GED or High School Equivalency certificate. Last fall, those paper profiles finally formed a complete circle around the class.

"Now you can retire," one of my students said. "You've got graduates all the way around the room!"

I already knew my response: "No, sir, I'm not done yet!" ★

## Prison Teaching

By Katie Wright, May 3, 2018, published with permission from Lee College

Without fail,  
every time I emerge on a hot, heavy evening  
from the four sets  
of clanking, grinding crash gates  
of an East Texas prison  
and tip my toes into the bright,  
cacophony of a grocery store,  
someone asks me  
in the checkout line what I do.  
(What do I do?)

I talk to people and they sometimes listen  
and I distribute writing materials and notes  
and the dreaded writing assignment,  
and we laugh and they make fun of my  
extravagant, wild arm gestures  
as I try to make  
lessons on subordinate clauses fun).  
"I teach English," I answer, willing them  
not to ask the next question  
— "Oh," they say, "Where? In the high school?" —  
they see my baby face, I know —  
"No, I teach college English in prison."  
Gasps. Eyes open wide.  
Their minds fill with dangers  
and assaults and raps.  
"Aren't you frightened?" they ask,  
hoping I'll say yes.  
(Frightened? How could I be frightened  
of a room full of open minds,  
verdant fields of idea-flowers,  
so many questions,

a desire as strong as a storm surge wave  
for knowledge,  
deep, complicated affection for loved ones).

"Of course not," I say.  
"They're the best students I've ever had."  
Disappointed faces.

"Well, they really need you,"  
they answer, moving away.  
Afraid that I'll surprise them again.  
Still disappointed.

I quietly roll my eyes to myself.  
Wanting to scream; knowing it's a bad idea.  
But I hold in a treasured place  
the feeling of seeing our greatest resource,  
as economists like to say,  
though usually about children,  
of minds and hearts  
dressed in various shades of white —  
shirts tucked in,  
marks on their clothes from work  
(and sometimes classroom highlighters) —  
getting excited about stickers,  
hungry for improvement,  
the dingy cement classroom  
packed so full with dreams and hopes,  
like coral polyps on a reef,  
that we have to laugh to make room.  
That coral reef of hopes and dreams  
is what I think of  
when I think of prison-teaching.



## A 'thank you' letter to a teacher

Rachel Johnson, Crain Unit

I am an offender at the Crain Unit and enrolled in the GED class at the trusty camp. I have come a long way from being told at age 32 that I was reading at a sixth-grade level. That hurt! Since I have begun this academic journey, I must say it has been a blessing for me as well as my peers. My teacher, Mrs. Washburn, has not only been an excellent teacher and mentor — she is constantly encouraging us, letting us know that we can turn our lives around for the better and telling us there is nothing we can't accomplish for ourselves and our children. She reminds us that we can turn our mistakes into something great and change our "stinking thinking." I want to say "thank you" to Mrs. Washburn for her inspiration, sense of humor and, most of all, her belief in her students! ★

## Dear Momma

Submitted by Lee Owens  
Garza West Unit

Dear Momma, I really  
don't know where to start,  
but everything I'm about  
to say is coming straight  
from the heart.

I truly appreciate every-  
thing you've done for me,  
All the sacrifices you made,  
providing me what I needed.

Always having my back no  
matter what the situation,  
while the waters steadily  
flood, you taught me to  
have patience.

My trials and tribulations  
as a young alcoholic,  
Your unconditional love  
picking me up  
when I'm falling.

Off the wagon and trippin',  
making stupid decisions,  
If I'd paid attention  
and listened  
I would've stayed  
out of prison.

Wishing that things  
were different,  
I wanna change my life  
and take care  
of my family.  
My Momma  
raised me right.

I love you, Momma.

## Mother's Heart

Submitted by Frank Bernard  
Darrington Unit

What's in a mother's heart?  
Children when they're  
not around,  
love without bounds?

What's in a mother's heart?  
Comfort and joy  
for the girl and the boy?

What's in a mother's heart?  
A sunny ray  
on a rainy day?

What's in a mother's heart?  
Worry and woe  
only she'll know?

What's in a mother's heart?  
Sorrow and pain  
heartache and blame?

What's in a mother's heart?  
Simple and plain:  
Love is the name.

# I AM STUPID DOG

Chelsey West, Crain Unit



I am stupid dog. I have a stupid tail, and I have stupid golden hair that sheds. How do I know this? My humans yelled it at me all the time. That was before they left me in the tree place they called woods.

At first, I loved the tree place with all its smells, but then I got hungry. I am sad. I know my humans are not coming, because when they took my pups from me, they never came back. I miss my pups. I was a good mother, my humans even said so. I do not like humans now.

I chase little animals that smell funny. They do not understand that they are to let me catch them. I tell the one in the tree to come down so I can eat him. "Ruff, ruff... Grr." He does not speak dog.

At night I have to hide. I am not the biggest hungry animal out here. I smell and hear them prowling in the dark. With my humans, I had a doghouse; out here I have to use on-the-ground trees and holes to be my doghouses. As I hide, I have to try and stop my stupid tail from wagging.

Today I found something dead to eat. It stops the hurting in my tummy. On the air I smell human food. It has been a long time since I saw any humans. I do not want to see any, but it smells so good.

I find a human pack and lots of moving houses being pulled by cars. I loved riding in the front of a car when I was a pup. I wonder if my pups ever get to ride in a car. When it gets dark I will sneak to the cans of food.

The cans of food are hard to reach, but I am finally able to jump into one. It is so good and I eat until I am full. I jump down and I waddle to the trees. This close to humans, I do not hear or smell any big hungry animals. I can sleep safe here tonight, as long as the humans don't see me.

It is light now and the big ball is in the sky. Why won't the big ball come down and play with me? I will explore. It is so warm. I find moving water and I jump in. It feels so good as I swim with the flow. Later, I will have to roll in the dirt or maybe something dead. I work hard on my smell.

Oh no, the water is getting stronger. I try to swim to the side, but I cannot. It's hard to keep my nose above the water and then I am falling. When I hit the water, it hurts. I do not know how to get out. I hit against some rocks and then I'm pushed up against a tree that has falling in the water. Never again will I love water.

As I am coughing up some mean water, a sound pricks my ears. It's a human sound. My stupid tail wags. I try to tell it to shut up (another word my humans had used a lot), but it won't listen. I think about biting it, but it always gets away.

The human sound comes again. I sneak around some bushes and come up on a little human female, sitting on a rock. She is crying. This makes me sad. I cry and whine, too.

She hears me and jumps up. She is so little, just a pup. "Doggy?" Little humans have never hurt me, so I put my happy ears on and of course, my stupid tail wags. I creep to her when she holds out her chubby paws. She sinks her paws into my stupid hair and cries into my neck. She is only eye level with me. Where is her good mother? I lick the wet off her face.

She must have fallen into the mean water, too. She has one of those fluffy skins that big humans always put on the little humans in the water. It's a good thing they float, because she's so small, the mean water would have swallowed her.

I must take her to the human place. Maybe her big humans are there. Her good mother must be worried and scared. I do not know how far the mean water took me, but I can find the human place easy. I am thirsty, so I drink some mean water and make the little human drink some, too.

## 3rd Place ECHO CONTEST WINNER Fiction

The little human follows me. She has one paw in my stupid hair and she's sucking on the other one. I do not have any milk to give her. This makes me

sad. I try to stay close to the mean water, but the place where I fell takes the mean water way up. We cannot climb that high, so we must go around.

I keep my nose up at all times. I must protect my little human. Yes, she is mine now. Every time she falls, I pick her up gently with my teeth, like I used to do with my pups. I lick her clean, and I do not like when she cries. This makes me sad, and I cannot help but to whine, too.

My little human even has stupid hair like mine, and it's up on top of her head like ears. She pulls on it, then pulls on mine. This, I do not mind. It's better this way, because I do not like it when she falls.

Over the dirt we walk. Around the on-the-ground trees and mean sticker bushes. My little human is getting tired. This is not good. The big ball in the sky is going down. Soon the big hungry animals will come out. I have to find us a safe doghouse to protect my little human.

We come to a big on-the-ground tree. This is good. I sit my little human down and I start to dig. I am a bad dog when I dig, but I do not care right now. I have to protect my little human.

I dig underneath the tree far enough so that my little human can lay down inside. I will lay in front of her and block her from anything that may try to come into our doghouse. I would fight for her. I would die for her. I am a good mother.

It's almost dark and I hear the night noises start. I nudge my little human with my nose. She does not want to go into the dark doghouse. I lick her face and try to tell her that it is okay. Finally, I get her in there. She lays with her back to the dirt wall and I snuggle in close to the front of her. My nose is partially out of the dog house, but I do not have time to make it bigger.

At least it is warm in our dog house and my little human goes right to sleep with her paws holding me. She was a tired pup. I want to sleep, too, but I have to stay on guard. No big animal is going to hurt my little human.

The howls and growls go on all night, but they do not get too close. My growls made sure they knew that they would have a fight on their paws if they came any closer. When the light comes, I am so sleepy. I just close my eyes for a moment.

I wake with a start. I hear something. I strain my ears, there it was again. It sounds like humans! I check on my little human. She is still asleep, curled in a ball at my back. I slowly crawl out of our doghouse. The big ball is in the sky. I run around the tree and listen. The humans are getting harder to hear. They are going the wrong way!

I run back around the tree, she is still asleep. I do not want to leave her, but I must catch the humans. What if they are her big humans? Her good mother? I will be faster by myself, if I hurry. I run full speed towards the sounds. They are not too far away. I slow when I get close to them. I do not like humans, but my little human needs them.

There are some big males and one female. The female is crying and holding onto one of the males. The other males have black sticks that can make loud noises and hurt my ears. I hope they do not point them at me.

"Susie!" they call. I do not know what a Susie is, but the female smells like my little human. I think she is a good mother! "Ruff!" I yell. They all turn towards me at ones. They point those black sticks at me. My ears go back and I lower my head, but my stupid tail won't listen. It just keeps one wagging.

"What's a dog doing out here?" they ask. I perk up at the word "dog." I know that word. You must come

with me, I try to tell them. I run a short ways away and then back. They don't get it, but at least they are not pointing those black sticks at me anymore. I am nervous now. I do not want my little human to wake up alone.

I run over to the female and sit in front of her, my stupid tail sweeping the dirt. I nudge her with my nose, run away and then back. I am going crazy. Why aren't they moving? I yell at them.

"I think it wants us to follow." The moment when they all step forward I almost howl with relief. Finally, they are coming with me. Back to my little human. After a short time, I see the on-the-ground tree. I am anxious to make sure my little human is safe.

I run around the tree and, yes, she is still sound asleep. The big humans come around the tree and stare at me. I stare at the opening of our doghouse. My paws cannot stay still. I am so excited, and I yell to my little human to wake up. "Ruff! Ruff!"

Now all the big humans are staring at the opening, too. So we all see when a chubby little paw comes out. The big female falls onto the ground and crawls to my little human.

"Mommy?"

"Susie! Are you okay? Oh, my God; thank you, God." The big male that had been holding the big female, runs to them and holds them both. There are a lot of words that I do not understand, but I can tell this is good. This is my little human's good mother. I did good. I am so excited that my whole body is wagging with my stupid tail. I lick my lips and I whine some too. I am so happy, I cannot help it.

My little human's good mother comes over to me and sits in the dirt in front of me. She hugs me to her and I lick her face. She tastes like my little human. I am so happy my butt cannot stay on the ground, and I want to jump up.

Then the big male that is holding my little human comes over to me. I freeze. He is so big and scary, but he drops down to my level. He reaches for me with a big paw. I drop my head and even my stupid tail stops.

"It's okay, girl. I'm not gonna hurt you." I have no idea what he said, but his voice is low and soothing. My stupid tail starts up again when he scratches me under the chin. Oh, that feels so good. I am so happy again.

"Looks here like that there dog dug out this hole to protect your young-un. You can tell 'cause these here are dog claw marks in the soil and the front of that there Golden Retriever is caked in it. It gets mighty chilly here at night, too. I'd say that dog saved your baby's life."

The big male who bent over my doghouse talks some more, but I am too happy licking my little human to pay any mind. My little human, who is still in the male's arms, laughs as I love on her. I am so happy!

"John, we can't just leave this sweet dog out here. She saved Susie's life. I don't know what I would have done if..." The female starts crying into my stupid hair, but I do not mind. She is a good mother, like me.

"All right, we'll take her if she'll come with us." All of the sudden, no more paws are petting me, and they are leaving. I am so sad. I whine.

"It's okay! Come on sweetie. Come with us."

I know that word, "Come." They really want me? Did I misunderstand?

"Come on. It's okay! Come," they coax. So I go. I run full speed to them, and since they are only a short distance away, I kind of run right into the female.

I duck my head, ready for her to be mad, but instead she laughs and pets me!

"It's okay. You are a good dog!" I pick my head up and let my stupid tail wag. I am so happy.

I am not a stupid dog now. I am a good dog now; my new human says so. I love my new humans. ★

## Partnership with TX-CURE supplies free fans, FanDirect allows contributors to buy fans

Two programs are working in cooperation with the Commissary and Trust Fund Department to help TDCJ offenders acquire cooling fans: The TX-CURE Fan Project is for qualified indigent offenders, and FanDirect allows outside contributors to order fans for offenders incarcerated at certain TDCJ units.

### TX-CURE Fan Project:

Free fans are still available for qualified indigent offenders through the Texas Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants' (TX-CURE) Fan Project.

Offenders who have been indigent for six months or more may qualify for a free TX-CURE fan, even if they owe money to the State of Texas.

To request a free fan from the TX-CURE Fan Project, offenders must:

1. Send an I-60 request asking for a free TX-CURE fan

to: COMMISSARY and TRUST FUND, P.O. Box 60, Huntsville, TX 77342-0060.

2. Include their name, TDCJ # and unit of assignment on the I-60.
3. Send all requests to Commissary and Trust Fund. Do not ask TX-CURE for a fan.

Once approved, commissary staff at the offender's unit of assignment will deliver fans to qualified applicants. Only one TX-CURE fan per offender is allowed, even if an offender's current fan is broken, stolen or confiscated, or if the offender receives a fan under a previous TDCJ number. Offenders should not apply for a free fan if they have received one in the past.

Offenders who receive a free fan are advised to protect their property papers and immediately report malfunctioning new fans to unit commissary staff. Offenders who do not receive a fan this year should apply again next year,

beginning Jan. 1, 2020.

TX-CURE pays for these fans, but does not choose who gets one. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, TX-CURE relies on donations and may not have funds to fill all eligible requests.

### FanDirect

Some TDCJ units offer the FanDirect program, which allows freeworld friends and family to purchase a fan for eligible offenders by going to the TDCJ website, printing an order form, and mailing a money order or cashier's check for \$20 to the Commissary and Trust Fund Department. The fan will be delivered to the offender within 10 business days after completion of the order form and receipt of the money order or cashier's check. FanDirect information is available online at: [http://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/bfd/comm\\_FanDirect\\_Purchase\\_Program.html](http://www.tdcj.texas.gov/divisions/bfd/comm_FanDirect_Purchase_Program.html). ★

## 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-or-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.

