

Hamblen County learns about inmate career pathway

BY AMBRIA COLLINS

Tribune Staff Writer

Many problems are said to plague communities like Hamblen County.

These include large numbers of incarcerated citizens and repeat offenders, which result in jail overpopulation and vacant employment opportunities in the community since there are fewer bodies to fill them.

Greene County has set out to solve each of these issues through a new program, Correctional Career Pathways: Journey to Hope.

Thursday, HC*EXCELL board members invited program leaders and partners to speak to Hamblen County leadership about the program and the possibility of implementing it in the Hamblen County community.

Those gathered for the presentation included leading local businesspeople, non-profit leaders, community and government leaders, including commissioners and the county mayor, and Marshall Ramsey, president of the Morristown Area Chamber of Commerce.

“One thing that county governments are having a hard time doing is managing jail population and Hamblen County is in that situation as well... As we go through our planning process for what we do about our population in our justice system, we need to

look at alternatives to warehousing prisoners,” Hamblen County Mayor Bill Brittain said. “What Greene County is doing, I think, is a good example of what we need to be looking at.”

In Greene County, the program takes place through the cooperation of several parties including Greene County Adult Education, the Greene County Sheriff’s Department, a local industry partner in DTR Tennessee and its staffing agency, A Services Group, LLC (ASG) in addition to county government members and volunteers.

The idea for the Greene County program began in 2014 when Greene Technology Center career specialist Kim Gass was alerted to local industries’ struggle to meet production because of a lack of qualified employees.

She saw it as an opportunity to benefit many lives in the community by giving inmates an opportunity for a new life, getting them out of a life of incarceration and into a life of productivity and by providing local industry with much needed employees.

It has done just that.

“Quite honestly, I think it’s very beneficial for us being able to have guaranteed employment, have people who are coming through



Chuck Hale/Citizen Tribune

Hamblen County community and business leaders gathered on Thursday to hear a presentation given by leaders and participants of the Correctional Career Pathways program in Greene County. Panel members from left are Greene County Detention Center administrator Roger Willett, Tennessee Adult Education lead teacher Debbie Fillers, Greene Technology Center career specialist Kim Gass, A Services Group, LLC regional manager James Pierce and DTR, Tennessee Inc. human resources manager Frankie Debusk.

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Calendar A2 Classified B4-6 Comics B5 Deaths A5 Editorial A4 Horoscope B5 Sports B1-4 Sudoku B5

+



Charlsie Brown
Everett Bryant, 87
Barbara Collins, 70
Brandon Davis, 23
Helen Davis, 79

DEATHS

Teresa Davis, 53
Robert Niederlander, 56
James Mullins, 68
Grover Martin, 49
Margaret Perkey, 82

Carolyn Seals, 65
Benny Wilder, 74
Marilyn Woods, 70
Jimmy Wright, 71

Obits A5

WEATHER

High Low
85° 69°
Partly Cloudy
Weather A2



cers had a bullet go through his leg as three members of his squad were fatally shot around him.

"He felt that people don't understand the danger of dealing with a protest," said Rawlings, who spoke to the surviving of-

icious, calculated and despicable."

The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, which tracks on-duty deaths, said the fatal shootings made Thursday the deadliest day for U.S. police since Sept. 11.



In our Book of Common Prayer, a collection of prayers, liturgies, and rites of worship, there is a listing of prayers called collects, one for every day of the year. These prayers were derived from the Scriptural readings appointed for each day: one reading from the Old Testament, one from the Epistles or Letters, a Psalm, and one reading from the Gospels. From these readings, the collect encompasses the main ideas of each and "rolls it all together" in a short prayer.

This Sunday's collect is, as follows:

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

**Come worship with us at All Saints.
All are invited.**

Sundays:
8:00 a.m. Rite I Holy Eucharist (spoken)

ers without power following Wednesday night's storm

Pathway

(Continued from page A-1)

transportation, that are meeting their production, that are coming to prove a point," DTR human resources manager Frankie Debusk said. "They walk through the door with a desire to be a perfectionist... I think it's good for us, but it's probably better for them as a person."

Greene County Detention Center administrator Roger Willett agreed with Debusk.

"It really changes their circle of influence, and that's the big thing for these inmates," Willett said. "If you don't change that circle of influence, when they get out of jail, I try to query the inmates. 'What are you going to do? What's your plans?' They really don't have any plans.

"They're going to fall back right in with the group that they run with, their comfort zone... If we don't break

and Southwest Virginia.

The combination of high

that up, they're not going to change," he continued. "They're doomed to come back to us."

Participation in the program is a process.

Potential participants are first selected by Willett based on their willingness to work and their willingness to make a change in their lives. In addition, they have to have positive behavior records since the beginning of incarceration, must have clearance to work in the community and must hold a high school diploma or its equivalent (they can be assisted in this).

Willett said 10 are selected at a time, and they participate in a 40-hour course taught at the jail by Gass and her crew called "Makin' it Work." It teaches soft skills and other staff development techniques.

"It's a reentering the

over the weekend. The rain changes decrease to 10 to 20

cast period, the meteorologist said.

community and the world of work curriculum. In 20 years, it's probably the best staff development I've ever been to," Gass said. "It addresses things like thinking skills and how to get along with others. It's not just a soft skills training. It's in your face and (making you) think about the decisions you've made in the past and how you are not going to make them again."

She said it's critical.

After the class is completed, the participants are put into a pool with other ASG candidates and are sent out to work for DTR in temporary, full-time positions. They are paid the same wages as other employees, are not treated any differently and are given the same opportunities for full-time employment.

"When we started this little program, we just wanted to give these folks hope that we wouldn't see them again... The goal, on the front end, wasn't to get all this publicity and collect all these funds," Gass said. "It was to give individuals a hope to be a better citizen in our community, to take care of their family, to keep them out of our detention center, to keep them off our county's payroll, to let them begin to earn their own money and

prior to DTR employment, they are given a certificate of completion to present to potential employers.

"If they bring me a certificate, they've got a job," regional manager of ASG James Pierce said.

With all of the benefits taken into account, with the overcrowding issues at the justice center and with the high number of open jobs available with no one to fill them, the Hamblen County leaders present at the presentation were eager to learn more about implementing the program in the community.

"When we heard about this program, it just seemed like a no brainer that we try to learn from you all the great things that you're doing," HC*EXCELL president and publisher of the Citizen Tribune R. Michael Fishman said to the program leaders. "We're very vested in improving our own work force in this community and also trying to help those that, for whatever reason, have trouble helping themselves."

Founder and executive director of the local non-profit organization Stepping Out, Inc., Patrice Puglise, said she felt ready for the next steps.

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If, at any time during the program, participants fail a random drug screening or act out in any way, their privilege to participate is revoked, and they will not be allowed to reenter the program.

Also, if a person completes the 40-hour class but is released from incarceration

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"It's phenomenal... If an individual is given an opportunity, that's what they usually lack," she said. "They don't have a good community to support them when they get out. They don't have an opportunity of somebody encouraging them. When they get that, it can change their lives very quickly. This program you guys are doing is phenomenal... I think it's a great opportunity for our community."

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