

San Quentin News

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PREPARING TO GO HOME

MT. TAM RESOURCE FAIR OFFERS TOOLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL REENTRY

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Over 100 San Quentin Prison residents descended on the Catholic chapel to collect valuable information about how to prepare for reentry and how to succeed when they are freed.

It was a first-ever resource fair arranged by SQ's Mt. Tamalpais College. Formerly and currently incarcerated worked together to offer resources for those who have little to no tools to do so for themselves. These resources can be instrumental to successfully reenter society and significantly improve their quality of life.

Around 20 volunteers staffed 10 tables loaded with reentry aids and information.

"We should start the connection with resources for incarcerated individuals prior to release," said former resident Corey McNeil. He spoke of how his work helps bridge the incarcerated community and society.

SQ resident Kevin Sample described his reaction: "A puzzle is beautiful when connected. We are the pieces missing while in prison. When places come in to connect and give us support, I feel a sense of wholeness."

The concepts for the fair derived from a Black Studies group offered at Mt. Tamalpais called PREVAIL. The goal was to address the school-to-prison pipeline and the prison-to-employment pipeline.

The idea came about when PREVAIL participants discussed how unemployment was a prevalent topic during the prior presidential elections. Aware that the problem starts with them, self-preservation kicked in and they wondered how they could help gather and provide information on successful reentry for themselves and those in similar situation. This became their driving force.

Doing all the footwork to make this event happen was a formerly incarcerated group of Corey McNeil, DeJon Joy, Phillippe Kelly, and Adamu Chan. They teamed up with Mt. Tamalpais representatives Kirstin Pickering and Nandita Dinesh to get the various organizations into SQ.

The visitors passed out pamphlets, business cards, and printouts of a variety for programs and services.

The main theme was reentry and the organizations presented services from

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Visitors and residents wait in line for popcorn and cotton candy served by Chief Deputy Warden Oak Smith and his wife, Michelle.

SQ CELEBRATES 4TH WITH FOOD, MUSIC, FLAGS AND FAMILY

By Randy C. Thompson
Staff Writer

San Quentin Visiting program administrators have hosted another successful Fourth of July celebration.

Visitors and residents were treated to an extraordinary day of visiting thanks to the contributions of visitor donations and the arrival of two very special guests.

On the day of Independence, decorations of bright red, white and blue hung from all over the visiting room. No matter where you looked there was a United States flag proudly on display.

If these were not enough to change the mood of the room, the live music struck the right chord.

"The music definitely changes the vibe," said resident Luis Light, who didn't seem to stop smiling once during the visit. "The whole energy is better."

The live music was courtesy of residents Lee Jasper on guitar, John Zeretzke on violin, Brian Conroy on upright bass, and Gor-



SQ resident Luis Light enjoying the day with his wife, a San Quentin IFC volunteer.

don "Flash" Kimbrough on Percussion.

Kimbrough discussed in an interview with SQNews that the band's goal was to create an ambiance without being overinvolved.

"Music brings out emotions, positivity and tranquility," he said. "To be able to provide my service to the community, inside or out, makes me happy. It inspires me to inspire others."

Despite the day beginning with news that the pizza could not be obtained, due to COSTCO being closed—and an artist couldn't be found last second for the face-painting, all was soon forgotten with the arrival of two very special guests.

Chief Deputy Warden Oak Smith and his wife Michelle surprised all in attendance when they entered the visiting room wheeling in their familiar cotton candy and

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Dante D. Jones // SQNews

FATHER-DAUGHTER DUO RIG UP TRUCK DRIVING CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

By Juan Haines
Editor Emeritus

A telephone conversation between a father and his daughter took an unexpected turn that resulted in the creation of an opportunity for San Quentin's incarcerated residents.

In August, 50 residents will begin a four-part, correspondence course leading to certification as truck drivers. As the first group moves into the second

module, another 50 will enter module one, and so on until as many as 200 at a time will be training.

More than 370 SQ residents attended an orientation for the first class of Concrete Rose Trucking in the prison's Protestant Chapel in June, listening intently to cofounder Autumn O'Bannon's presentation and playing her with questions.

Autumn says that her program prioritizes people with felony records and folks who struggle to get back into the

workforce. It will serve both incarcerated and formerly-incarcerated people.

"We're here to serve the underserved. You guys are a priority to us," she said in an interview with San Quentin News.

Returning citizens often fair better seeking work in trucking than in many other industries, according to Autumn. She said that attitudes toward hiring the formerly incarcerated depend on the

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TUTORING PROGRAM RETURNS AFTER COVID HIATUS

By Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism Guild Chair

After a long pause, Berkeley students have returned to San Quentin to teach incarcerated students to read, write and solve math problems, working side-by-side with the assistance of San Quentin instructors.

Spring of 2023 marks the return of the Teach in Prison program, which the pandemic had shut down in 2020. TIP has brought hope to many incarcerated students who feel helpless in their journeys at the desks of a classroom.

"I decided to work at San Quentin because a lot of times incarcerated students are ostracized and left out of conversations surrounding education, even though they also deserve equal access to education," said Sarai, a tutor and Berkeley student. Sarai said she believes that stakes seem higher for incarcerated students whose performance on tests and in school can drastically affect their entire experience inside the prison.

According to San Quentin's education department, TIP began in 2000 at UC Berkeley in cooperation with the San Quentin warden's office and the Robert E. Burton Adult School. As a "Democratic Education at Cal" program, TIP belongs to a "collective of student-run courses at UC Berkeley where students create and facilitate classes on a variety of subjects, many of which are not

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FILMMAKER
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WANT
MORE?
CHECK
US OUT
ON SOCIAL
MEDIA!



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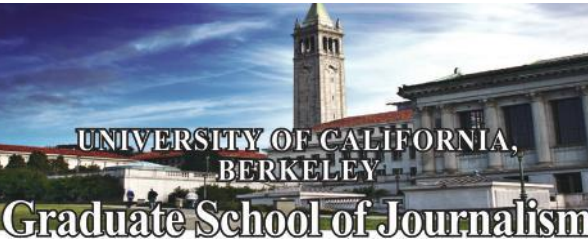
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PROFILE



MAN WITH MANY HATS

OUR BEHIND THE SCENE AND TRUSTED RESEARCHER STUART WAGNER

By Charles Crowe
Contributing Writer

The masthead of the *San Quentin News* lists Stuart Wagner as one of its 13 “Advisers.” While the newspaper’s staff esteems its advisers’ advice, in Wagner’s case the title is a less than adequate description of his contribution to the publication.

The newspaper does not have internet access. To overcome this obstacle, Wagner serves as *San Quentin News*’ primary source of news articles from outside publications. This “source material” provides the basis for many stories the paper publishes about criminal justice, incarceration and social justice.

Wagner also serves as the newspaper’s primary researcher, fielding numerous requests from writers to investigate and report on a myriad of specific questions and topics. This research materially informs the content of the publication.

Without Wagner’s help as provider of source material and researcher, the newspaper’s staff would be relatively blind.

Wagner is a native of Bridgeport, Conn., but he has lived in the Bay Area for most of the last sixty years.

He joined the Marine Corps following high school then went on to earn his bachelor’s degree from the University of Connecticut.

He came to the Bay Area for post-graduate studies at Stanford. As he developed his doctorate dissertation, he spent a year in Bogota, Colombia.

With his early education complete, Wagner embarked on a professional life and subsequent retirement that paint the picture of a modern renaissance man.

He utilized his education to teach Latin American history and Chicano Studies at the University of Minnesota for five years. Weary of both Minnesota weather and academia, he returned to the Bay Area in 1974.

There Wagner started an electronics business, which he ran for 15 years until, in his words, he “burned out.”

What followed was a retirement filled with an almost dizzying breadth of service and activity. Wagner took art classes at College of Marin and City College of San Francisco. In the 20 years since, he



Photos courtesy Stuart Wagner

has had a presence in many art exhibits locally and beyond. His three-dimensional art is on display at his website, stuartwagner.com.

Besides his service to the *San Quentin News*, Wagner has a history of volunteerism that includes working with Mount Tamalpais State Park, the Marin Food Bank and The Cedars of Marin.

His first contact with *San Quentin* prison was in 2008. He participated in an art group’s exhibition called “The Prison Project,” which took an empathetic look at prison life. Wagner visited the prison with the group, interviewed residents and observed some programming.

The visit whetted the artist’s interest in criminal justice, in the penal system and particularly in *San Quentin*.

“In the process, I became acutely aware of my unexplainable good luck in avoiding ‘the system’ after a couple of juvenile scrapes with the law,” said Wagner.

As a volunteer, Wagner thought that he might be hearing a renewed call to the classroom. He trained to teach in the Prison University Project, now known as Mount Tamal-

Top: While visiting El Morro Fortress, Havana, Cuba, Stuart gives a shout out to SQNews. **Inset:** Stuart and wife Colleen spend quality time together.

Above: At home working on his 3D art project called Diminished. It is an observation of what faces the newly released and how ill prepared most are for the challenges.

pais College, but ultimately did not serve in that role.

Through this experience though, a friend who also volunteered at *San Quentin* asked him to assist with preparations for an event she described as the Day of Peace.

There, said Wagner, “... I met some *San Quentin News* staff who invited me to attend a weekly meeting of staff and advisers.

“I was gob-smacked when I walked into the newsroom. I couldn’t believe my eyes; it reminded me of the bar scene in *Star Wars*: every iteration of race working together in harmony for a common goal — getting that paper out every month. A racial utopia in a prison! No one believed me.

“By the end of that meeting, observing the harmony and good will of the men, I was hooked.”

Wagner wore a number of hats in service to the newspaper. He researched grants,

instructed staff in the use of Photoshop, raised funds, and when COVID-19 cut off access to the prison’s newsroom, began to serve as the newspaper’s researcher from outside the prison.

The newspaper’s “adviser” reports that he currently spends about 10-20 hours per month in service to the publication, depending on how extensive its research needs are.

He enjoys the work, saying, “[I] ... relish every minute of it because the staff at *San Quentin News* is making a difference at the most basic level in advocating and in spreading the news, not only with content, but equally importantly, by example.”

The staff of the newspaper, in turn, relish every minute of Wagner’s service, and the thousands of incarcerated people that enjoy the *San Quentin News* benefit from his efforts each month without knowing it.

San Quentin News

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DOCUMENTARY

Courtesy Adamu Chan

FORMERLY INCARCERATED FILMMAKER WINS AWARD

ADAMU CHAN WINS DIRECTOR DEBUT FOR 'WHAT THESE WALLS WON'T HOLD'

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

A formerly incarcerated documentary filmmaker, who honed his skills in San Quentin's media center, has won an award from the oldest film festival in the nation.

Adamu Chan, director of the film "What These Walls Won't hold," received the Golden Gate Award for best mid-length documentary at the San Francisco International film festival this year.

The film was created during the Covid-19 pandemic and the backdrop for the film centers around the outbreak of Covid-19 at San Quentin. But Chan said this film isn't about the pandemic.

"The main point of the film is really that our relationships can be transformational to us," Chan said in an interview.

The film has been screened all over the country. Three April screenings sold out. He is still making his rounds and hopes to one day premiere inside the walls of San Quentin Prison.

"I want to screen it here," he said. "This is my most important audience. I'm using skills, to build my career, I learned from inside San Quentin. I want to show others inside what can be done."

During his time at SQ, Chan joined a media center program called First Watch which helped him developed the skills for documentary filmmaking.

He traveled around the prison with film crews to film short clips about prison life. These clips were broadcast at prisons throughout the state — First Watch has since become Forward This Productions.

Chan spent 13 years in California's prison system. He served the last two years of his sentence at San Quentin. He was fortunate enough to be moved during the outbreak from West Block housing to the H-Unit dorm, which was unaffected by Covid-19 at the time.

Chan stayed connected to friends and family by using the prison phone and writing letters.

"What These Walls Won't Hold" is a film about how people come together and respond during a crisis.

The film follows Chan's relationship with his best friend, Isa Borgeson, formerly-incarcerated person Lonnie Morris, and Rahsaan Thomas, the former co-host of SQ's Earhustle, who paroled earlier this year.

Chan was eventually released and became a 2022 Mellon Artist Fellow at Stanford's center for the Comparative Study in Race and Ethnicity. The fellowship provides funds for a year of film-making projects. This opportunity helped him finish the film.

Chan's goal is now to make films that open up avenues for others who are impacted by incarceration. He hopes system-impacted people can tell their own stories in a way that feels true to them, sharing their own experiences rather in a way that is not shaped by the state or the biases of outside media.

"I feel like all people are storytellers to some degree, and I think in the communities that I grew up in, storytelling was always a huge component in the way that people share knowledge and also connect with each other," Chan said. "For me, coming to terms with this identity that I carried, as a currently incarcerated person or formerly incarcerated person, and within the context of that community, systematically being silenced and kind of not heard, I think it made me want to develop those skills."

Chan just finished a short documentary with Independent Lens called "Bridge Builders." He has also been working on other material with PBS.

He hopes that this film will be made available for screening at SQ by the Fall of 2023.

"My goal is for distribution to be acquired by PBS and to have a national broadcast so people across the USA can watch this film. It isn't about money but impact."

FOUNDER OF RADIO DIARIES PODCAST VISITS SQ

JOE RICHMAN EXPOUNDS ON 30 YEARS OF RADIO BROADCASTING EXPERIENCE

A 'maverick and master of radio,' Joe Richman, visited San Quentin State Prison to share some of his audio trade secrets with incarcerated journalists.

Richman is the founder and executive producer of *Radio Diaries*, a program that tells extraordinary stories about ordinary life.

"I'm an evangelist for audio and radio; I really love storytelling and sound," he said to a group of incarcerated people sitting in the *Uncuffed* podcasting room of SQ's media center.

Since 1996, Richman has been giving people tape recorders and working with them to report on their own lives and histories. He came to San Quentin with Nigel Poor of *Ear Hustle* and Amy Standen of KQED to teach an audio workshop.

In his 30-years of reporting, Richman has won every major radiobroadcasting award including a Peabody. He has produced some of the most memorable documentaries ever heard on public radio. His stories broadcast on NPR's *All Things Considered*, *This American Life*, *BBC*, and on the *Radio Diaries* podcast.

Radio Diaries is a nonprofit organization, and a member of Radiotopia from PRX — a curated network of cutting-edge podcasts.

"I thought I wanted to do documentary film. I didn't know I wanted to do documentary audio," said Richman. "I became intoxicated by the act of going up to talk to people with a microphone."

Radio Diaries has collaborated with teenagers, octogenarians, incarcerated people and prison guards, gospel preachers, the famous and the unknown. Along the way, the organization has helped pioneer a new form of citizen journalism.

During the workshop, Richman played several recording examples of how to create good radio stories. One of the stories shared was from Josh, a high school kid who lived in Manhattan. Josh looks normal but documents living with Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder that involves involuntary ticks. The listener experiences the awkwardness Josh lives with.

Josh recorded a diary as a teen, then 16-years later as an adult trying to live a normal life with a brain that often betrays him. The listener can hear the arrested development in his voice.

"Something about hearing people without the images that we feel things," said Richman. "How much can we feel through characters is what I like to explore. With *Radio Diaries*, you get to experience it, hear it as

its happening. I ask myself how much can I see and experience the story for myself."

Richman also shared the story of Claressa Shields, a two-time Olympic gold medal-winning boxer from Flint Michigan. Claressa started boxing at 11-years old. She lives her life vicariously through her father who was a boxer that never made it.

Claressa's soft voice reminds the listener of a dainty young person, a stark contrast to the fact that she likes 'beating up girls.' Throughout her story, she displays the personality of Muhammad Ali and the boxing skills of Floyd Mayweather.

Each of these recordings empowers the listener to construct places and times and understand characters without visual aids.

Richman has taught audio journalism storytelling for radio podcasts at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and has worked as visiting faculty at Princeton University. For the incarcerated journalists at San Quentin, his one-of-a-kind workshop was an extraordinary experience.

Dante D. Jones // SQNews

TRUCKING

Continued from page 1

company.

The first seeds of the program were planted when O'Bannon drove a truck simply "to see if I would enjoy it," and then "learned to love it." Eventually she bought her own truck. The independence and steady income gave her peace of mind.

After having a baby and taking maternity leave, she hired a driver so that her truck would continue generating income. But she went through six drivers in three months. So she decided to open a truck driving school in her community.

She told her father, Vincent O'Bannon, a San Quentin resident, that she needed "decent drivers that would take care of the equipment that would know what it takes to make a profit in a truck."

Vincent told her that many San Quentin residents are interested in truck driving and talk about it as a viable option once they are back in the community. The father-daughter

Program offers incarcerated residents a pathway to certification as truck drivers

duo successfully pitched the idea of creating a correspondence course to San Quentin's administration.

In its present form, the course may be a precursor to a classroom with simulators.

"There have been two dynamics around the buzz about the program," Vincent said.

"A lot of guys are interested in participating in the program, liking the idea of another avenue for reentry once they finish their time. On the flip side, guys want more than just [the limited involvement of] a correspondence course."

Vincent says that for that reason he has been in talks with the administration about providing the training in a classroom setting as opposed to just as a correspondence course.

"Five years from now, I see men and women being able to not only get the classroom training, but having simulator training so that they'd feel what it's like to [drive] an 18-wheeler."

Autumn shares her father's vision that the course will go beyond training by correspondence. She believes that simulated driver training through technology such as Oculus fits well into plans to transform San Quentin into an innovative rehabilitation center.

The entrepreneur plans to take the program beyond San Quentin and is determined to include incarcerated women, envisioning the program at "other male prisons and also to the female prisons as well."

"Right now, there's a lot of women truck drivers, but we only cover about 15% of the trucking industry," she said.

"From my experience, a lot of companies love the women drivers — just to be able to give that same freedom and stability that I found in trucking — to be able to offer it to those I know that need it just as much as I did."

Vincent added, "I hope that more women would be interested in truck driving since



the Concrete Rose Trucking non-profit board consists of all women."

In her interview with the San Quentin News, and in the town hall meeting with San Quentin's residents, Autumn appeared poised and in command of her topic. Her vision goes beyond the training she offers to its potential benefits.

She foresees incarcerated people returning to their communities prepared for good jobs with the earning potential to help ensure the stability and continuity of families in their communities.

RESOURCE

Continued from page 1

Mt. Tam College sponsors resource fair for San Quentin residents

education, health and wellness training, employment assistance, housing assistance, legal services, and vocation training.

SQ resident Corey Smith said he believes if incarcerated people connect with resources, they are less likely to reoffend. "I believe if this is to be a rehabilitation center, there needs to be a focus on the transitioning opportunities available," he said.

California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation presented vocational services for people with disabilities.

The energy at the Creating Restorative Opportunities and Programs table was dynamic as the two representatives spoke of the vision of how society needs to invest in rehabilitated people. CROP representative Jesse Foshay commented, "How can you expect people to rehabilitate and not help them acclimate into society?"

CROP representative Kit Berry spoke with enthusiasm on the organization's focus, "We are facing a world that wants to put up barriers and we are busting them down." Its focus is on a holistic and human-centered approach to support reentry.

Sol Mercado, a former resident at a California Woman's facility, provided material from Planting Justice, which hires previously incarcerated. The nonprofit organization in Oakland offers parole support, therapy help with reentry, DMV connections, and self-help groups upon release.

"It is our lived experiences that help other people," said

Mercado, explaining why she gives back.

The California Lawyers for Arts table explained how it arranges internship positions up to seven years after release from prison. It provides referral services in all forms of art, writing, music, and even curating.

The Cal State East Bay table provided information on behalf of Project Rebound. It featured former resident Forrest Jones, a recent graduate. He mentioned how humbling the experience of returning to visit prison and that initially the environment brought back feelings of the restrictions he faced when at The Q. However, his eagerness to contribute and connect with the people inside superseded his unease.

He told the group that he networked as best he could with the different people that came in to help while incarcerated. Jones said many resources are available and attributed those to his success.

Other groups that attended were Bonafide, Restorative Reentry, Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth, Reentry Success Center, Black Men's Wellness, Prison 2 Employment, Just Desserts, Code Tenderloin, Community Works West and the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights.

Resident Mark Hernandez appreciate Mt. Tamalpais for opening doors and said he looks forward to more resource fairs in the future.

"This opportunity gives me hope that we can participate in anything out there with the right resources," said Hernandez.

4TH

Continued from page 1

Visitors and residents enjoy a special day with food, music, and family



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews



popcorn machines.

In similar fashion to the Easter Spectacular event this past April, the well-known couple showed up on their day off and stood side-by-side to make and serve the snacks to all. Michelle's characteristic smile could be seen from across the room as she greeted the young children who asked for some of the colorful cotton candy.

As part of the festivities, families and loved ones were able to take photos with Fourth of July-themed frames, which were donated by the Inmate Family Council volunteer.

Resident Jonathan Raridon, proudly bragged to SQNews about his wife, Samantha, donating not just the frames but also \$100 for the decorating of the visiting room.

One of the three volunteers that make up San Quentin's IFC, Samantha, a combat veteran, values the connection between family and their incarcerated loved one.

"It's difficult to be married yet live completely separate lives," she said in an interview. "Visits like this mean a lot. Hopefully we see more like it with the new California Model."

The prison received up to \$350 in private donations from visitors contributing to make the event special. SQ's Community Resource Manager, Lieutenant Gardea, and Sergeant Ramirez personally went shopping for the event's supplies and for the items in the goodie bags kids were able to take home after the visit.

On this year's Day of Independence, the Visiting

room was filled with happy, smiling families by noon, yet no one was asked to leave to make space for walk-ins. All who came were able to enjoy the festivities and partake in honoring freedom in the most unlikely of places.

One resident in particular, who had seen his daughter that day, was happy to share his appreciation with SQNews.

"Out of the six prisons I've been to, I've never seen anything like that," said Jarrod Williams in a later interview. "For the IFC, prison administration, and incarcerated people to go through all that trouble is incredible," he said. "It was the best visit I've ever had. So, thank you. It couldn't have been more perfect ... Unless I could have set off some fireworks."

Visits like this mean a lot. Hopefully we see more like it with the new California Model.

—Samantha, Inmate Family Council volunteer

From top, clockwise: Jeremy Strain and his family were all smiles during a game of Life in Visiting's child playground.

Tommie Hall shared a precious moment with his daughter.

Resident Frank Justo enjoyed a pre-celebration of his birthday with family during the Fourth of July event.



Vincent E. O'bannon // SQNews

PROGRAMS

INCARCERATED WRITERS SHARE THEIR TALENT IN ANNUAL PUBLIC READING

WILLIAM JAMES ASSOCIATION
EVENT IN SQ CHAPEL PROMOTES
CREATIVITY AND WRITING SKILLS

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Seventeen San Quentin Prison residents shared their vulnerabilities, experiences and personal life trials at the 14th annual Public Reading event.

“Creative writing allows me the freedom to travel beyond my physical barriers,” writer Jim Bottomley said after reading his piece.

The writers wrote to produce their own narratives. Their honesty, vulnerability and authenticity moved the crowd to a sense of connection with the authors on July 7, 2023.

Since 1999, Zoe Mullery has taught the student writers how to express themselves on paper. Her generosity in sharing her knowledge and experience with the art of writing touched current and former members of the class, which is sponsored by the William James Association’s Prison Arts Project.

She spoke about how SQ has been influential to her and said that the view civilization has of incarcerated individuals is in stark contrast to the work she sees inside the classroom.

“A society should be judged

by how it treats its criminals,” said Mullery.

In attendance were SQ’s Community Resource Manager Lt. Robert Gardea, Public Information Officer Lt. G. Berry, Senior Librarian Gabriel Loiederman and 100 supporters from inside and outside the facility.

Outside guests included several formerly incarcerated writers who were in the creative writing class during their SQ incarceration. Among them were Henry Edward Frank, Joe Krauter, Felix Lucero, John Neblett, Watani Stiner, Michael “Yahya” Cooke and Troy Williams.

Williams was a part of the Journalism Guild and Brothers in Pen during his 13 years behind the wall. During his time of incarceration, he focused on stories about incarceration.

“I want to say to all the men in blue, especially all the youngsters: Stay with it. I want to encourage y’all to keep it up. As I walk through my freedom, know that I think about y’all. We need y’all in the communities, with y’all’s families,” he said.

The first eight residential writers were Mesro Coles-El, Paul Stauffer, Lee (reading

for Steve Drown), Elton Kelley, Marcus Eugene, Kevin D. Sawyer, Raheem Ballard and Todd Winkler.

They designed their reading creatively to this group prompt: “A 767 passenger plane with some notorious incarcerated people aboard are on their way to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to spend the rest of their sentence. A sudden

volcanic eruption from an uncharted island causes the plane to crash on the island.”

Their stories symbolized manifestations of hidden truths and the power dynamics between prison guards and prisoners.

At intermission, guests and writers enjoyed snacks like mini cinnamon rolls and drank coffee with biscotti as

they mingled.

The remaining nine writers were Joshua Strange, Michael Zell, C.K. “Clark” Gerhartsreiter, James Bottomley, Osbun Walton, Kelton O’Connor, Bruce Davis, Stu Ross and Juan Moreno Haines. They spoke about truth, reconciliation, life struggles and love.

Cooke said, “I joined the

creative writing class to develop these skills. These gentlemen encouraged me to get this stuff on paper. It was a 48-year exploration of the criminal justice system. I feel the genuine sincerity that these men feel because I was once there.”

—Staff Writer Michael Callahan contributed to this story.



Participants gather after the reading for a Q&A session.

Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

HELPING THEMSELVES
EARNED LIVING UNITS DEAL WITH LONG WAIT
LISTS BY STARTING THEIR OWN GROUPS

Randy C. Thompson
Staff Writer

San Quentin’s Earned Living Units are providing programs for themselves by creating incarcerated-run self-help groups.

South Block’s Alpine and Donner units now offer the Returning Citizens Program, a weekly interactive, reentry-based approach to human development. The 18-week program consists of workshops covering courses in subjects ranging from relapse prevention to criminal thinking patterns that result in write-ups for contraband cellphones

“When I got to San Quentin, I thought I would be able to take groups. That’s why I chose to transfer here,” said SQ resident Larry “Ali” Deminter, the program’s creator. “Instead, I heard about these waiting lists that are years long. That’s when I decided to try to start up my workshops.”

Deminter developed the courses while incarcerated at California Men’s Colony-West, where he also taught it under the Ambassadors of Change banner, another self-help group. The group was formed around all the information Deminter has collected over his 19-years of incarceration and studying self-help materials.

At its height at CMC, there were 12 workshops running and 150 men graduated every three months.

Now, here at SQ, Deminter has ten men and two workshops. He plans to expand.

While correctional staff were initially hesitant about the program, it got moving when South Block’s Lt. Haub got involved.

Deminter jokingly refers to Lt. Haub as the program director of his workshops because of the vital assistance he has so freely given. Lt. Haub agreed to sign the laudatory chronos to acknowledge participation of incarcerated people in attendance, he makes any copies needed and even hunts down a whiteboard for the classes. Building staff now assist by closing the dayroom in Alpine to make space for the classes.

Other incarcerated residents also help. Alpine resident Terrell “TJ” Marshall currently holds the position of secre-

“These workshops are for the men here who are serious about programming and changing their lives.”
—Larry “Ali” Deminter

tary, and has plans to facilitate one of the workshops himself. He experienced similar setbacks with his programming when he arrived at SQ two years ago.

“I’ve been waiting two years just to get into college. When I got here I signed up for a bunch of stuff. After a year of waiting, I managed to get into AA. But during a Covid lockdown I missed three weeks and got kicked out,” Marshall said

When Deminter proposed the idea of the workshops to Marshall, he jumped onboard immediately. Marshall handles getting the rosters made as well as putting up signs for the program.

Deminter teaches the classes as a part of his living amends. But here at SQ, he said it has become more than that for him. “Before getting here [Alpine], I was told that the people living in the Earned Living Units would get priority on groups, but that hasn’t been the case,” he said. “These workshops are for the men here who are serious about programming and changing their lives.”

Despite all of his efforts, he believes that it will not succeed unless staff gets more involved. At CMC West, staff and administration were involved with the workshops. They attended the meetings, provided the needed copies and supplies, and hosted graduation ceremonies. That help and support from staff is what kept it going.

The current plan for Returning Citizens is to soon have workshops every day of the week. Deminter also wants to hold them within the building, where they do not have to worry about staff coverage, program being open, or room availability. He wants attendance to remain exclusive to just those in the Earned Living Unit.



Joshua Strange // SQNews

RESIDENTS OF H-UNIT FIND HEALING IN PLANTS

By William Harris
Journalism Guild Writer

A San Quentin garden program uses the power of planting and growing to help students apply what they learn to their rehabilitation.

The Insight Garden Project is a group that brings the healing power of the earth to the residents of the prison’s H-Unit, according to Isa Pena, IGP program manager. Pena said her interest in prisons dates back to visiting an incarcerated family member at the age of eight.

The garden includes a few food plants such as strawberries and salad ingredients, but mostly grows medicinal plants. Pena said participants learn ways in which to handle plants gently and to understand the plants’ need for care. IGP helps prison residents cultivate mindfulness by connecting with the earth, and it teaches about the medicinal benefits of herbs and roots, she explained.

The 25-member class takes

place every Friday from 3-5 p.m. Pena starts each class by using guided meditation that explores the ways in which nature works and the way nature can apply to the students’ lives.

The San Quentin IGP was founded by Beth Waitkus in 2002. At reirement, she left it in the hands of Pena and outside volunteers.

Student Bruce Bowman said, “The group is beneficial on a few levels. It’s beneficial if you want to plant and get more intimate with the soil’s healing part, and good for healing the inner garden. It helps with my calmness or serenity. It helps me to have hope for the future.”

Resident Raymond Morris commented, “The group taught me a lot about the healing power of plants and when I’m in the soil, the meditation gives me a chance to clear my head.”

The intersectional trauma-informed curriculum utilizes practices of therapeutic horticulture,

restorative justice and meditation mindfulness.

“When I think about it, it blows my mind. The garden itself is mind-blowing beautiful,” said volunteer Faryn Hart, a horticulture therapist. “We all want people to be able to access what they feel. We all deserve to be humanized.”

“Out of all the groups I attended, this is the best one for me,” said Ethan Crum, a garden project participant.

The program also assists students when they are released from San Quentin. The reentry process begins with a transition questionnaire that is mailed to the IGP office. The assistance also includes a warm meal, a backpack of essential supplies, a smartphone, a laptop computer for returning citizens enrolled in college and \$100 to buy clothing. Weekly support circles are held on Zoom meetings with a licensed social worker, and they provide rapid response funding for participants who need extra financial support for food and rent.

REENTRY

EXTINGUISHED: LAW TO EXPUNGE RECORDS ALLOWS FORMERLY INCARCERATED TO BECOME FIREFIGHTERS

By Hugo Arredondo-Ortiz
Journalism Guild Writer

Formerly incarcerated firefighters can now get fire protection jobs when released.

A law passed three years ago allows them to apply to have their criminal record expunged, the *Marin Independent Journal* reported.

A forestry and recruitment program started by two formerly incarcerated people smoothed the way.

One of the beneficiaries is Benjamin Fowler, who said, “As soon as I heard about the law being passed, it was probably a two-year process. But when I got to the fire camp, I knew that’s where I was supposed to be.”

He was serving his second 10-year prison term when in September 2020 he heard about the firefighting program.

Fowler’s good behavior enabled him to become eligible for the program. He applied to the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation’s conservation camp. Fowler underwent a certification and physical training before his selection to be a CDCR firefighter.

Fowler would have been unemployable to do the job in the outside because of his criminal record. AB 2147 changed that.

Prior to AB 2147, Califor-

“As soon as I heard about the law being passed, it was probably a two-year process, but when I got to the fire camp, I knew that’s where I was supposed to be.”
—Benjamin Fowler

nia was experiencing a two-way problem: mass wildfires but with a shortage of firefighters.

About 50 people started the six-month program, but only 10 graduated.

“When they’re with us, they’re choosing to be better people for themselves, for their friends and family, for their community,” said Cari Chen, the program’s recruitment director. “It’s not just a job, it’s not just a career, it’s a lifestyle.”

Fowler will be working in the Mendocino National Forest. He considers the best part of his job is that his son brags to his friends about what his dad does for work.



Archive photo

Incarcerated firefighters clear brush in preparation for California's wildfire season. Many hope to have their record expunged upon release and eventually gain employment as firefighters.

COOKING UP A SECOND CHANCE FORMER SQ CORRECTIONAL OFFICER STARTS CULINARY PROGRAM FOR THE HOMELESS AND THOSE RECOVERING FROM SUBSTANCE ABUSE

By John Schoppe-Rico
Journalism Guild Writer

After working as a correctional guard and ironworker, Paul Fields became an executive chef. Now, he’s using his skills to lead a culinary training program that helps participants turn their lives around.

Fields once worked as a correctional officer at San Quentin State Prison and as an ironworker who helped build San Francisco’s Oracle Park, reported *CBS Bay Area*, which honored Fields with one of its weekly Jefferson Awards.

“I’m giving them a chance to restart, a fresh start,” Fields said. “They’re clean and sober now. I give them a path to get them to the next step of success.”

He was recruited in 2016

by Salvation Army to start the nonprofit’s culinary academy in Napa, north of San Quentin, the article noted.

“Once I started diving into the program, I realized this was the place I was supposed to be,” Fields said.

He created the Culinary Training Academy, a free 14-week hands-on program that allows adults who were once homeless or substance users to learn culinary skills via one-on-one mentoring.

About 120 students have graduated from the program so far. More than 90% have landed jobs with partnering businesses or the Salvation Army.

While they work, graduates also receive a discount for housing for two years.

As part of their training, students cook meals at the



Courtesy twenty-below.com

Salvation Army for more than 80 people a day.

“This is an awesome opportunity to straighten my life out and have a great future,” Ram-

sey said, who has been clean and sober for 12 months. “It feels great to feed people who are hungry and less fortunate.”

Fields stopped teaching at the academy last fall, but still helps with publicity support and continues to inspire students.

He runs his own catering company, Fields of Grace, and travels with some of his graduates several months of the year to prepare VIP meals at Christian musician Zach Williams’ concerts.

“They’re clean and sober now. I created a path to get them to the next step.”
—Paul Fields, Executive Chef

BILL AIMS TO STOP THE PRISON TO SHELTER PIPELINE

By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

New York lawmakers are once again considering legislation aimed at helping formerly incarcerated people get a place to live, *The New York Times* reported. A similar bill was rejected last year by the Governor’s office during budget negotiations.

The bill, known as the Housing Access Voucher Program, would provide assistance to people affected by high-rent costs, which contributes to homelessness, evictions, and recidivism.

“They should be allowed to apply for various resources in advance of their release date so they get a chance of not going from prison to shelter,” said Democratic State Sen. Brian Kavanagh, who reintroduced the bill.

Kevin Brooks, convicted in 1999 of murder, is one person who could benefit from this bill upon his release, said John Lennon, the author of *The Times* article, who is currently incarcerated. Brooks has been disciplinary free and obtained a bachelor’s degree while incarcerated. Yet he is likely to join thousands of other formerly incarcerated people who will leave prison and have nowhere to live.

Before he was arrested, Brooks was renting a small New York City apartment for \$800 per month. That same space currently goes for around \$3,000 a month.

People being released from prison don’t have much assistance, which can drive them back to crime to survive. Those with lifetime sex-offender status, those previously convicted of drug charges in housing programs that are

federally funded, and those where there is a “preponderance of evidence” of crime activity, are all excluded from receiving or applying for federal Section 8 housing subsidies.

The proposed bill would provide vouchers to people in immediate need of housing assistance, whether they are homeless, facing eviction, or are about to be released from state prisons.

Kavanagh said he expects the legislation to pass. “What’s unusual is that the large real estate interests of New York have been quite active in supporting this,” he said.

However, there are critics. Howard Husock, a senior fellow in domestic policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, a center-right think tank, questioned the fairness of making vouchers more accessible to people getting out of prison.

“There will be a limited number of vouchers. We don’t want justice-involved persons in competition with poor New Yorkers,” Husock said.

Husock claimed reentry programs and transitional housing were more appropriate. However, such beds are already scarce and are often only temporary in duration. Currently, such programs are typically the only housing resource available to people getting out of prison in New York.

Brooks noted that a reentry program is his only hope.

“I just want to get out, land a gig, and find a spot to live,” Brooks said.

If Kavanagh’s bill passes, people like Brooks will have a lot more options for stable housing and fresh start.

CLEAN SLATE LAWS HELP WITH A FRESH START

By Bruce Bowman
Journalism Guild writer

An estimated 70-100 million Americans have arrest records, which seriously hamper their efforts to find housing and productive jobs, The Marshall Project reports in its *Closing Argument* newsletter. However, the report noted new “clean slate” laws are making a positive difference.

“Every time I try to do something better, my criminal record is my nemesis,” said Terrance Stewart, who served time in a California prison for a drug conviction. He said he was homeless or lived in “one roach-infested apartment after another” following his release.

Stewart is now a member of a California organization

called, TimeDone. It advocates for a person’s criminal record to be sealed or expunged.

States vary widely on how they handle this issue, but more than half have adopted some form of a “ban the box” law, which prohibit asking about criminal records on job applications and delays background checks until a job interview.

After its full implementation, a recent California law will result in the automatic sealing of most felony records for people “who are not convicted of another felony for four years after completing their sentence and any parole and probation.”

Those convicted of serious felonies will have to petition a judge to have their records sealed and the law excludes

Conviction and arrest records for most felonies will be automatically sealed.

registered sex offenders.

The law passed despite opposition from groups such as the state’s Peace Officers Research Association, which argued such laws put community safety at risk.

However, research cited by The Marshall Project suggests that denying someone employment because of their

past can encourage criminal behavior. In addition, when a person does not commit any new crimes four to seven years after their release from prison, their likelihood of reoffending is on a par with those with no criminal record.

At the federal level, a bipartisan group of lawmakers is currently formulating clean slate legislation.

The leader of TimeDone, Jay Jordan, spoke to importance of giving formerly-incarcerate people a true fresh start when they return to their communities.

“It is literally [the correctional] system saying this person is rehabilitated, go on and live your life. It signifies that when your time is done, your sentence should be complete,” Jordan said.

KENTUCKY

KENTUCKY MAKES MAJOR PROGRESS ON RECIDIVISM

By Jad Salem
Journalism Guild Writer

At his weekly press conference, Kentucky Democratic Gov. Andy Beshear recently revealed that recidivism rates in the Bluegrass state have fallen to a record-low of 27.15%, down from 44.56% in 2017. By comparison, California’s has been hovering around 50% for years.

The governor hailed the accomplishments of various efforts that have assisted incarcerated residents in finding employment and receiving addiction treatment at record levels, according reporting by *The Associated Press*. He credited these for

preventing more Kentuckians from going back to jail or prison.

“Those are people that are getting in secure jobs, hopefully getting back with their families,” Beshear said. “They are not reoffending and they are contributing to society.”

Beshear cited a recent study that found 75% of prisoners who successfully completed the correctional department’s treatment program were still employed a year after being released from incarceration.

“This is treating the cause,” Beshear said. “So many of these crimes probably began with an addic-

tion that led to the crimes. Treating the addiction helps prevent the type of recidivism that we have seen in the past.”

According to Beshear, the employment rate for people who have been released from state prison has increased to 57% from 49% over the last four years.

In order to enable formerly incarcerated to access the services they need, whether treatment for addiction or help with job interviews, the governor praised a statewide project that offers no cost transportation.

He also credited the corrections department for beefing up its reentry staff along

with a “prison-to-work” initiative started last year that helps arrange jobs for incarcerated people before they leave prison.

Even with the record low levels of people reoffending and committing new crimes in his state, Beshear wants to see those figures fall even lower.

“I still believe and continue to believe that good people in the nonprofit sector and the private sector and in government, working together, can make a difference in our society,” Beshear said in regards to reducing recidivism. “We can get on a better track, which makes us safer in our communities.”

NATIONAL

GREATER OVERSIGHT PROPOSED FOR FEDERAL PRISONS

By Bruce Bowman
Journalism Guild Writer

Congress is considering bipartisan legislation to provide additional oversight of federal prisons to address widespread scandals and misconduct, in particular sexual abuse of incarcerated residents at the hands of prison officers.

Under the proposed reforms, people incarcerated by the U.S. Bureau of Prisons would have the ability to report abuses to an accountability office through a hotline, reported *ABC News*.

The bill, known as the Federal Prison Oversight Act, was introduced by Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff of Georgia.

“My bipartisan investigations of corruption, abuse, and misconduct in the federal prison system revealed an urgent need to overhaul federal prison oversight,” Ossoff said. “I am bringing Republicans and Democrats together to crack down on corruption, strengthen public safety, and protect civil rights.”

The bill would also mandate inspections by a federal watchdog, a risk assessment of all BOP facilities, the for-

mulation of response plans, and expand congressional reporting requirements.

Last year, former residents of federal prisons testified to congress about abuses they suffered while incarcerated, which helped lay the groundwork for the legislation.

For example, Briane Moore testified in December 2022 that an officer at a federal facility in West Virginia raped her, according to the *ABC* story.

“I knew he had the power to prevent me from being transferred to a prison closer to my family, closer to my

daughter,” Moore said. “He was a captain with total control over me. I had no choice but to obey.”

The legislation has broad support from prison reform groups such as Families Against Mandatory Minimums, as well as incarcerated people and a correctional workers’ union.

Families Against Mandatory Minimums Pres. Kevin Rigg said, “Families with incarcerated loved ones and correctional officers have known about this crisis for years, and now Congress is on notice.”

NATIONAL

VOTING RIGHTS FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED VARY WIDELY

By George Franco
Journalism Guild Writer

Across the United States, many formerly incarcerated people face a variety of setbacks in their pursuit of voting rights.

Some state governments are seeking to restrict voting rights for ex-felons, *The New York Times* reported.

The Republican-dominated Florida Legislature has effectively nullified a citizen ballot initiative granting voting rights to a large number of former felons in 2020.

In March, Virginia Republican Gov. Glenn Youngkin rescinded a policy of automatically restoring votes to former felons.

Other states have questioned or overturned citizen ballot initiatives granting voting rights to former felons, the story said.

On the other side of the voting coin, Gov. Tim Walz of Minnesota, a Democrat, signed legislation that expands voting rights for former felons and the New Mexico State Legislature, also led by Democratic, enacted a similar law, according to article.

Virginia is the only state in the nation that disenfranchises anyone that commits a felony, the story said.

“We’d reached a point for the first time in recent mem-

ory, maybe ever, where there was not a single state in the country that disenfranchised everyone,” said Sean Morales Doyle, director of the voting rights program at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. “It’s disappointing that on an issue in Virginia that had gotten support from both sides of the aisle, they do seem to be taking a step backwards.”

Minnesota and North Carolina each gave 56,000 former felons the vote, but Florida negated the ballot initiative that affected up to 934,000 formerly-incarcerated residents.

In Virginia, former governors had granted upwards of 300,000 former felons the right to vote. Two Democratic governors, Terry McAuliffe and Ralph Northam, expanded that policy to include anyone freed from prison.

That was the policy eliminated by Virginia Gov. Youngkin, but it did not affect previous beneficiaries. Virginia has a long history of suppressing Blacks’ right to vote, dating back to 1902, according to the article.

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear now automatically restores voting rights for persons convicted of nonviolent crimes. California restores voting rights upon a person’s release from incarceration due to felony conviction.

1. Oregon — (*The Oregon Capital Chronicle*) Gov. Tina Kotek signed into law a bill that provides stiff penalties for street racing, including for those who organize the racing or block public roads. The practice has become increasingly troublesome for motorists and law enforcement in the wake of the popular *Fast & Furious* film series. Portland police arrested five and cited 33 people in a one-night May operation targeting the problem. Under the legislation, the maximum punishment for street racers, organizers, or those who block public roads to facilitate the racing is a \$6,250 fine and 364 days in jail. A second or subsequent offense within five years is subject to a \$125,000 fine and five years in prison.

2. Oklahoma — (*Enid News & Eagle*) Almost seven years after reclassifying some drug and property crimes from felonies to misdemeanors, lawmakers have finally settled on a process to pass savings from reduced incarceration to fund local services. The reclassification of the crimes has contributed to a 20% reduction in the state’s prison population in the last five years. Meanwhile, county jails have experienced increased pressure to provide substance abuse and mental health services. Local officials are gearing up to request their share of the state money. Ben Crooks is administrator of the Garfield County Detention Facility. “Anyone that truly knows jail operations understands how critical [mental health] services are to maintaining safety and security of staff and inmates,” said Crooks. “Garfield County has waited more than five years for these funds.”

3. Mississippi — (*The Guardian*) A case challenging Mississippi’s permanent disenfranchisement of persons convicted of any of 23 specific felonies remains intact after being turned



NEWS BRIEFS
By Charles Crowe
Senior Editor

away by the U.S. Supreme Court in June. The list of felonies includes crimes that 19th-century lawmakers thought Blacks were most likely to commit in order to suppress voting by Blacks, according to *The Guardian*. The list originated during a state constitutional convention in 1890 where the president of the convention said, “We came here to exclude the negro. Nothing short of this will answer.” The felony list includes murder, rape, theft, carjacking, bribery, bigamy and timber larceny.

4. Alabama — (*Alabama Reflector*) Voting rights advocates are hailing as a victory the failure of a bill intended to criminalize organizations or individuals assisting people with absentee ballots. Republican

Rep. Jamie Kiel sponsored the legislation. Subject to certain exceptions, the bill would have provided a maximum punishment of 20 years in prison for paying someone to assist with a ballot and 10 years for accepting money to complete a person’s ballot. “That was thinly veiled voter suppression,” said Muaath Al-Khattab, community organizer for Faith in Action Alabama.

5. Florida — (*The Marshall Project’s Closing Argument*) The Legislature recently passed a bill to allow erasing certain adult criminal records: arrests that did not lead to charges, dropped charges, and not guilty verdicts. Although the predominately Republican Legislature approved the bill almost unanimously,

Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed it, reported *The Marshall Project* in its *Closing Argument*. Criminal records affect efforts to secure housing, jobs and other necessities. The bill was modest in its reach and scope compared to similar legislation passed in other states. Matt Dixon of NBC News said that DeSantis’s veto makes sense in light of his 2024 presidential aspirations. DeSantis also proposes to repeal the First Step Act, a Trump-era criminal reform bill, in an effort to position himself to the right of Trump on law and order issues, according to the *Closing Argument*.

6. New Jersey — (*NorthJersey.com*) New Jersey reduced its prison population by 45% between 2017 and 2022 without a significant

change in violent crime, according to a report from the ACLU of New Jersey. The state’s Public Health Emergency Credit legislation enacted in response to the Covid-19 crisis, drove the decrease with the release of almost 9,000 people. “This law is one of the most significant modern policies for decarceration in the nation, and the resulting releases marked a groundbreaking moment for public health and criminal legal reform,” said New Jersey’s ACLU Policy Director Sarah Fajardo. The state’s jail population also fell from about 9,000 to just over 5,000 in 2018 and 2019 following a 2017 law that allowed judges to release pre-trial defendants without bail.

7. Connecticut — (*Connecticut Inside Invest*

igator) Gov. Ned Lamont signed into law a bill that makes inadmissible in court statements, confessions or admissions of guilt made to law enforcement agents if those agents use coercive tactics or deceptions to attain such statements. The law provides a rebuttable presumption that the statements are involuntary. The state can overcome the presumption by showing with “clear and convincing evidence” that confessions or admissions were made voluntarily and that alleged deception by law enforcement agents did not create substantial risk of false self-incrimination. The definitions of deception or coercive tactics are more expansive if the person under interrogation is under the age of 18.

CALIFORNIA

FRIENDS OF POPULAR BAKER CALL FOR ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON FOR HER MURDER

By Harry C. Goodall Jr.
Journalism Guild

Friends of a popular baker killed in an Oakland robbery are urging that the man responsible be spared prison. The baker, Jen Angel, was known as being an opponent of prisons and attended police-accountability protests. Since her death, Angel’s friends have come together to honor her memory by calling for the use of restorative justice in her case, according to a June article by Ayla Burnett posted on *berkeleyside.org*.

“We’re committed to carrying out Jen’s legacy and the vision of the world that she pushed every day to create in her daily life, and we know that does not involve moving towards punishment and harm and retrenching racist and damaging practices,” said longtime friend Pete Woiwode. “We’re eager for the district attorney to take that seriously and move towards potential opportunities for restorative justice.” The Alameda County DA’s office has acknowledged the desire of Angel’s friends for

“If there was some sort of alternate place to prison where he could work and have education and learn, and if he wants to become a better human. I’d love for him to have that opportunity if he wants.”

—Julie Barr, close friend of the victim

an alternative to traditional punishment, according to the article. It is unclear how that could move forward. The crime occurred on Feb. 6, 2023, when Angel was robbed while she was in her car in Oakland. She hung on to the car door and was dragged before letting go, dying in a hospital three days later. A 19-year old man, Ishmael Jenkins Burch, was later arrested and charged with her murder. “If there was some sort of alternate place to prison where he could work and have

education and learn, and if he wants to become a better human, I’d love for him to have that opportunity if he wants it,” said Julie Barr, a close friend of Angel. Angel’s fiancé, Ocean Motley, said, “I don’t know what it’s like to be Black, but I know what it’s like to be young and poor and desperate and thinking I needed to commit crimes in order to survive.” Angel was known for bringing cupcakes to a variety of social justice events, including homecomings of people released from jail.

“Set a plate of cupcakes in the middle of the table and already, the world is more just,” Woiwode said. Angel created her Oakland bakery, Angel Cakes, as a commitment to building community while serving those in need, the article said. The opinion of Angel’s family was not reported in the article. Neither was Alameda’s DA Pamela Price, who won office last year on a platform that included focusing more on restorative justice and less on traditional forms of punishment.

ARKANSAS

NEW STATE CRIME: 'AGGRAVATED DEATH BY DELIVERY'

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

Expansive criminal justice bills to protect public safety have been signed into law by Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders. Sweeping changes will target the state’s parole system and dealers of dangerous drugs such as fentanyl, who are responsible for overdose deaths, according to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*. “We will not rest until we hold criminals in Arkansas accountable and enforce the law on the books,” said Sanders in a news conference. “We can and we must do everything that is within our power to protect the people of our state.” The Protect Arkansas Act was legislated to require those convicted of the state penal code’s most violent felonies, including capital murder and rape, to complete the entirety

of their prison commitments. In addition, people convicted of lesser violent felonies such as second-degree murder, first degree battery, or sexual indecency with a child, will be required to serve 85% of their sentence before being eligible for parole, reported the article. *Arkansas’ Fentanyl Enforcement Accountability Act of 2023* includes a charge of “aggravated death by delivery.” Those convicted of knowingly distributing fentanyl to someone who then dies because of ingesting the substance, faces a sentence of 20 to 60 years or life. Any dealer who delivers fentanyl, methamphetamine, heroin, or cocaine to a minor, who then dies as a result, would also be guilty of “aggravated death by delivery,” and would face up to a life sentence. Anyone convicted of “predatory marketing of fentanyl

to minors” by packaging the drug in a manner that entices children could face a life sentence and a \$1 million fine, asserted the article. The new law requires courts to add a period of post-release supervision to persons convicted of these violent felonies if they are not already sentenced to the statutory maximum for their crime. Anyone who will have to serve at least 85% of their sentence and then violates their parole terms will be penalized by having to serve the remainder of their original sentence and the time assessed for the violation. Felonies not itemized by the new law could be required to serve only 50% or 25%, depending on the seriousness of the crime as established by the Arkansas Sentencing Commission, reported the article. The statute for those having to serve 100% will take effect on Jan. 1, 2024, and for per-

sons convicted of lesser violent offenses, the new post-release supervision system will begin on Jan. 1, 2025, stated the source. The lengthy measure is structured to give support to child victims of crimes, prepare incarcerated people for reentry into the workforce, and suspend court fines for incarcerated defendants for 120 days after they are released from custody. Part of the package also includes the addition of 3,000 beds to the state’s prison system to help alleviate the backlog of those waiting in county jails, noted the article. The state’s Democratic lawmakers support some of the legislation but are opposed to sentence restructuring, citing studies indicating that longer sentences do not lead to a reduction in crime. They suggest more investment in prevention, treatment, and reentry programs.

NEW MEXICO

CAN FELONS RUN FOR PUBLIC OFFICE?

By C. K. Gerhartsreiter
Contributing Writer

The recent arrest of a New Mexico political candidate has highlighted a series of disparate state laws dictating whether people with felony convictions are eligible to run for public office. Solomon Peña, a Republican candidate for the New Mexico statehouse, was arrested earlier this year for allegedly recruiting hired guns to shoot at the homes of Democratic lawmakers after he received just 26% of the vote in a race against a well-established Democratic incumbent. Peña rejected the election results and claimed the election was “rigged.” Even if convicted, Peña could again become eligible to run for public office after completing his sentence, according to New Mexico law. Each state decides whether candidates with criminal convictions are eligible to hold office, resulting in a wide range of laws on the subject. In many states, including New Mexico, would-be political candidates can run for office as soon as their voting rights have been restored. But in California, re-enfranchisement is not enough. State law requires candidates for public office to disclose felony convictions when running for high office, even an expunged conviction, according to the Shause California Law Group’s website. California candidates who have been convicted under state or federal law of certain malfeasance such as vote-buying, bribery, perjury and forgery are permanently disqualified from holding office. The rules for federal candidates are less complicated, said Derek Muller, a law professor at the University of Iowa. Under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Muller said, two crimes can disqualify a candidate from running:

“Our lawmakers truly need to realize how important it is to help those that have changed their lives.”
—Sam Titus

swearing to protect the Constitution and then engaging in insurrection or rebellion, or giving aid or comfort to the country’s enemies. In West Virginia, Derrick Evans declared his 2024 candidacy for the U.S. House of Representatives a year after pleading guilty to a felony civil disorder charge for his participation in the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol. Because Evans was not convicted of treason or insurrection, he can still run for Congress, according to the deputy secretary and general counsel for West Virginia’s secretary of state. In 2016, Peña finished a nine-year prison term after being convicted of retail theft. In 2021, his voting rights were restored, making him eligible to run for office. Peña’s opponent sued to challenge Peña’s candidacy qualifications, but a New Mexico District Court judge ruled the state’s Constitution only requires candidates to have the right to vote. New Mexico now re-enfranchises incarcerated persons upon completion of their sentences, said Lauren Rodriguez of the state attorney general’s office. In Nebraska, convicted felons can run for office two years after release, but cannot hold office unless they are pardoned by a state panel. In 2020, Nebraska resident Sam Titus won a seat on a local airport authority board, but was unable to take office for two years, when the panel gave him a hearing in December, 2022. “Our lawmakers truly need to realize how important it is to help those that have changed their lives,” Titus said.

NATIONAL

CONGRESS EXAMINES ASSET SEIZURES BY LAW ENFORCEMENT

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Congress is considering legislation that would end illegal confiscation of property from people who have not been convicted of a crime, according to a *FOX News* report. The proposed bipartisan bill would overhaul asset forfeiture laws, restoring Americans’ protection from private property seizures without warrants, said the article. “The lawless seizure and ‘forfeiture’ of people’s private property by police officers is becoming standard operating procedure in many parts of the country,” said Democratic Rep. Jamie Raskin. Billions of dollars of seizures by the federal government over decades could end.

Currently if an owner fails to file a claim fast enough for their possessions to be returned, agencies keep the property, according *FOX News*. The Department of Justice says the goal of its asset forfeiture policy is to deter criminal activity, depriving criminals of property used in — or gained through — wrongful ventures. The agency claims asset forfeiture aids law enforcement in defunding organized crime. The Fifth Amendment Integrity Restoration Act, also known as the FAIR Act, would restore constitutional rights with reforms and limit government overreach. The FAIR Act would disallow law enforcement agencies from keeping seized property by depositing assets to the Treasury’s gen-

eral fund. Further, agencies would have to appear before a judge with a valid reason for a seizure, *FOX News* reported. Administrative forfeitures are the most common tactic federal agencies use for seizures. The tactic allows them to operate without judicial authorization, the story said. Los Angeles resident Linda Martin lost her life savings in 2021 when the FBI raided hundreds of safe deposit boxes at U.S. Private Vaults, seizing \$86 million in cash. Martin has yet to determine where her money is and she has filed a civil suit against the FBI. Between 2000 and 2019, the Department of Justice’s seizure cases were 78% administrative, according to a 2020 report by the Institute

for Justice. Treasury Department seizure cases were 96% administrative. Treasury Department and DOJ forfeiture revenues have exceeded \$50 billion since 2000, according to the Institute for Justice report. The FAIR Act would put the burden on the federal government to provide evidence linking seized property to illegal activity and guarantee people who have had their assets seized have the right to legal representation. “Seizing property and handing it over to the government without proof of wrongdoing is fundamentally un-American,” Democratic Rep. Tony Cardenas said. “In the U.S. we are innocent until proven guilty, and the government may not seize our property without just cause.”

ALABAMA

VOTING RIGHTS ACT LIVES ON DESPITE RECENT ATTACK IN SUPREME COURT

By Dante D. Jones
Staff Writer

The Voting Rights Act has survived another attack on its existence in a surprise ruling by the majority conservative Supreme Court in June, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. The Court ruled 5-4 in *Allen v. Milligan* that Republican legislators in Alabama must create a new election district that would allow for the likelihood of a Black Democrat’s election to Congress, reasserting the Act’s principle that minorities deserve fair representation. The decision is a “massive

win for voting and for voters across the country. Black voters in Alabama have long been denied fair representation — and today’s Supreme Court decision in favor of voters marks a landmark moment to move the needle in the right direction,” said Marina Jenkins, executive director of the National Redistricting Foundation, an affiliate of the National Democratic Redistricting Committee. In 1982, Congress amended the Voting Rights Act to protect Black voters’ opportunity to “elect representatives of their choice,” wrote Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. Although civil rights advo-

cates applauded this decision, making the point that if states are allowed to draw their districts to maintain White majorities, then Black people’s voting power would not only be “diluted” but made worthless. The ruling comes as a bit of a shock to most people who support the Act. This is because Justice Roberts has a long history of criticizing the Voting Rights Act, from opposing amendments to the Act in 1982 as a young lawyer in the Reagan administration, to leading the charge ten years ago to overturn key provisions of the Act. The key provisions required nine states (Alaska,

Arizona, and seven Southern states) and select jurisdictions to seek permission from Washington before changing voting rules and election laws. (See *Shelby County v. Holder*). Alabama has seven congressional districts. Six of those districts are Republican strongholds, according to the *Times*. Taking into account that 27% of Alabama’s population is Black, a three-judge panel last year ruled that the state could create a second compact district in which a Black person could be elected by simply drawing a district that’s “reasonably configured.”

Brett M. Kavanaugh, a Trump appointee, along with Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson all joined Roberts to affirm last year’s decision. Due to the reluctance of Republican-led states like Georgia, Florida and Texas to draw up voting districts that would increase a Democrat’s chance to be elected, the *Allen v. Milligan* ruling could change their political landscapes. Furthermore, this ruling will strengthen legal challenges that claim these election maps are denying Blacks and Latinos fair representation.

Because the House of Representatives is so closely divided, the *Milligan* ruling could possibly shift its balance of power, according to David Wasserman, a U.S. House expert at the nonpartisan Cook Political Report. He tweeted that along with Alabama, new election maps in states like Louisiana, South Carolina and Georgia may lead to the “creation of 2-4 new Black-majority districts, netting [Democrats] 2-4 seats.” Election districts for state legislatures, county boards and city councils will also be affected by the high court ruling.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

TRANSFORMATION AND REDEMPTION

TWO MENS' JOURNEYS: FINDING FREEDOM THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION AND CHOICES

By Joshua Strange
Staff Writer

There are many different routes to redemption and transformation.

For many the journey from being active in gangs and politicking on maximum-security prison yards to programming at lower-level yards like San Quentin is not easy. Yet for some residents, it's been the key to finding freedom and redemption — by denouncing their past criminal lifestyles and transforming their lives for the better.

One of those people is Jose Mojica, 56, who walked away from being active in gangs in 2011 at the beginning of a new prison term. "It felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. It was a different world," he said about his decision.

According to Mojica, loyalty was always expected but not always returned. "It opened up my eyes seeing things that were done to someone who didn't have it coming," he recalled.

He understands now that he cannot go back to his old friends or old ways — that part of his life is forever closed. Seeing that guys who used to be active in gangs are now walking on programming yards reaffirms that he made the right decision, he added.

However, he said he cannot understand why some people "come over to this side" (to programming yards) to change their lives around, but then "come here and try to do the same old crap — it doesn't make any sense."

Like many rehabilitated men, Mojica had to endure much hardship before realizing he was ready to get out. After he made that decision, he still had to prove to prison administrators that he was a programmer before they would transfer him to a prison like San Quentin.

Mojica's first incarceration was in 1987. By 1992, he had received an indeterminate Secure Housing Unit designation due to gang association. Over several prison terms, he endured years of hard time in SHUs with only one hour per day out of his cell, at best.

Along the way, a guard shot him with the "Big Bertha" block-gun.

Because of his refusal to "debrief" (testify) against his former gang associates, it took years of programming through correspondence courses and staying out of trouble before he moved on from his SHU designation.

While on parole, Mojica worked as a union carpenter and began raising a family. But alcohol use led to multiple relapses to an earlier lifestyle. Every time he came back to prison, his gang life was waiting for him, along with the criminal mentality of prison politics.

His release from the SHU followed several court rulings determining that it was unconstitutional to hold prisoners in isolation indefinitely or without specific evidence. Seven years after his decision to drop out, he finally transferred to a lower-level programming yard — variously called SNY, PC, or non-designated yards — where he had the opportunity to join self-help groups.

His perseverance and commitment to rehabilitation paid off. Before long, he transferred to San Quentin and is now finishing out his sentence at a community reentry program. The program includes daily work furloughs and a chance to spend time with his loved ones before officially paroling.

"I'm going to go out there and do the right thing," Mojica said shortly before transport. "I really don't want to come back. I don't want to disappoint my daughters anymore."

Another San Quentin resident, Michael Sperling, 46, can relate to Mojica's story. Incarcerated since 2012 and serving a life sentence, he was an active gang member for 30 years before dropping out. He was attracted to the gang life for the brotherhood, but now sees that it was all lies.

"I grew up with a warped believe system. I thought I was only hurting gang members, not women and children. Yet each one of them had all of their families behind them, all of their women

and children loving them, and I hurt them too," he said.

Sperling grew up in a rough neighborhood and suffered from multiple childhood traumas, including at home. He endured severe abuse at the hands of his father, and by 12, his father was shooting him up with heroin. Two years later, he was committed to the Youth Authority for murder.

"I was the one that wanted to be a super gangster," he said. "I was a shot caller at prisons, jails, on the streets. I was always the one being like, '[screw] the dropouts, [screw] the PCs.'"

Sperling explained that in prison politics you could be at the top one minute and the bottom the next. A wrong turn can be a life or death situation. He said he was severely attacked by other prisoners due to backlash from the same politics that he himself once enforced against others.

He survived the attack, but afterwards he felt betrayed. All the abuses that he had suffered from his father resurfaced, and he made the commitment never to return to the criminal lifestyle.

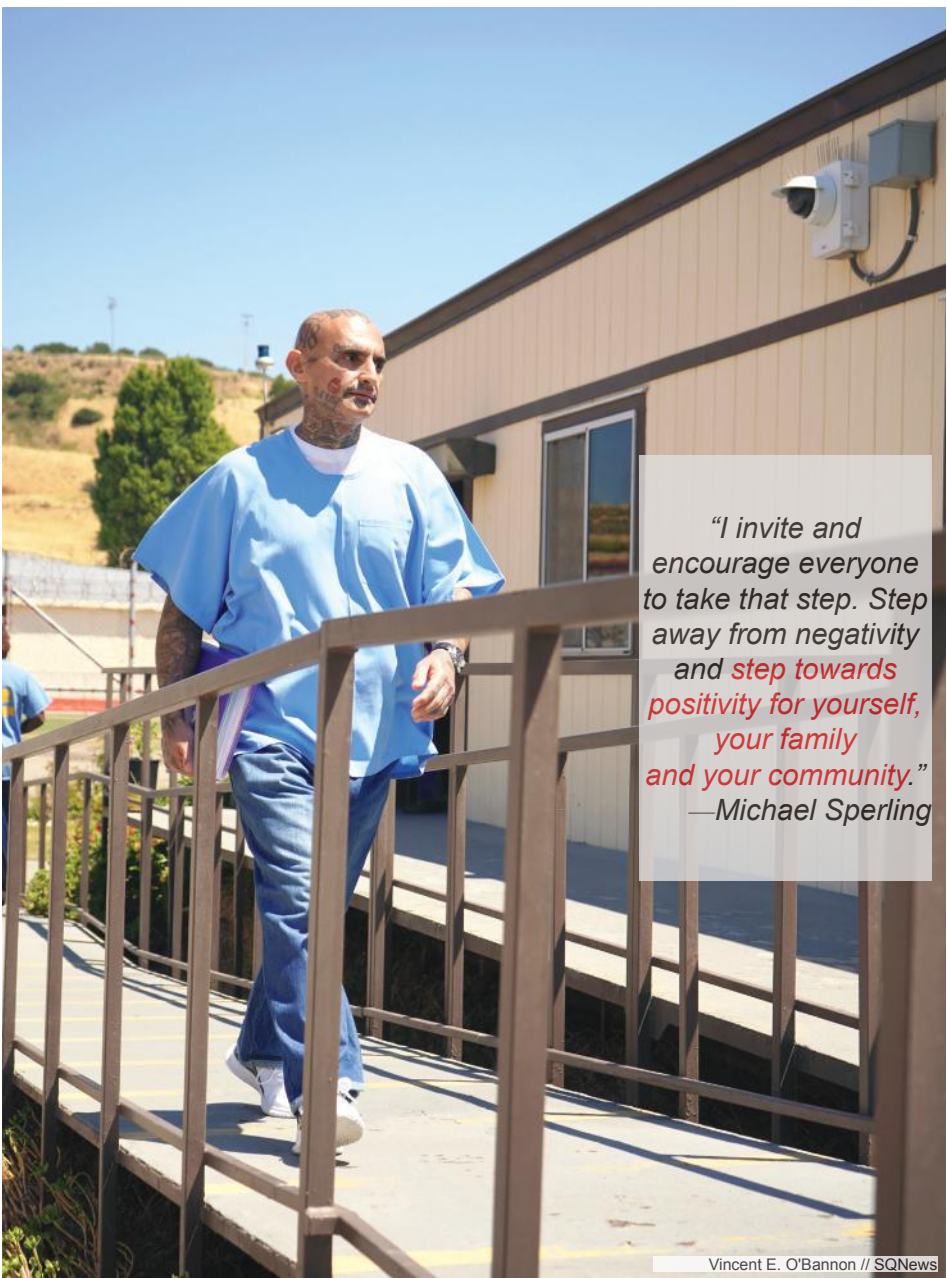
In 2021, he made it to San Quentin.

Since then he has participated in self-help groups while staying clean and sober. This includes GRIP (Guiding Rage Into Power), Narcotics Anonymous, and The Beat Within as well as helping to facilitate Kid CAT and Criminal Gangs Anonymous. He also takes college classes and has graduated from computer literacy, ISUDT (drug treatment program), and No More Tears.

"Dropping out was the best decision I ever made," Sperling said. "Now I'm in control of my own life. All of my criminal thinking is gone. I help people and talk to people I would have never talked to before. I value my victims, I value human life, I value accountability."

He feels that his support network, his faith and the coping skills he has gained through self-help groups keep him on the right path.

"I've learned about that moment between anger and



Michael Sperling walks to the Lower Yard's classrooms as part of his commitment to being a better man. He no longer looks over his shoulders or keeps his head down. He strides forward with pride.

"I invite and encourage everyone to take that step. Step away from negativity and step towards positivity for yourself, your family and your community."
—Michael Sperling

violence and how to interrupt the cycle in that moment," Sperling said. "Character defects will always be there, but I refuse to let them be active. Positive self-talk is a huge coping mechanism for me, and I know now that it's OK to ask for help."

His Christian faith has also played a crucial role in his transformation. "I'm born again through Christ," he said. "I used to look at those who found God in prison

and thought they were weak. Now, I realize I was weak and those who turn to God are the strong ones."

Sperling's hard-earned wisdom shines through passionate words of advice.

"I've survived so much — I've been stabbed nine times, shot in the head, overdosed from heroin seven times — and I'm still alive," he said. "I had to ask God why I'm still alive, and now I know why: to better myself so I can help

others.

"I invite and encourage everyone to take that step. Step away from negativity and step towards positivity for yourself, your family and your community."

Many people like Mojica and Sperling are recognizing the importance of turning to self-help and rehabilitation to make a better life for themselves and their loved ones, helping to make their communities safer places for all.

YOUTH

AUGUST 12 INTERNATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Raul Higgins
Contributing Writer

As the old saying goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. For participants and volunteers alike, the journey through Kid CAT also starts with a first step.

In Kid CAT's First Step program, completing the curriculum requires not only a willingness to take that first step, but also a determination to finish the journey. Group participants get to walk each of the eight modules in their

A JOURNEY TO SELF-IMPROVEMENT BEGINS WITH THE FIRST STEP

own shoes one-step at a time, and the program's volunteers are there to help them each step of the way.

"I believe it is about showing up and being witness to someone's journey. I have found it to be profoundly important to many people," said Franny Hohman, an outside volunteer who helps to facilitate the program.

The First Step program benefits youth offenders by investing in them. When given a chance, participants take their first step into a better version of themselves. The program offers tools for understanding oneself, developing assertive communication skills, and learning about

healthy masculinity. This cultivates a hope for a new future as productive citizens with a higher purpose.

The curriculum is designed to be applicable to one's life by building a strong foundation of self-awareness. The eight modules are Emotions and Sensations; Self-Identity; Masculinity; Environmental Influence; Consequences; Communication; Empathy/Compassion; and Forgiveness.

Hohman noted that there are times when an incarcerated person needs someone to walk and talk with. This is where a good listener, a compassionate and empathetic person, can meet the par-

ticipants where they are at, which is what the facilitators are trained to do.

She recounted how her journey with the First Step program began with an invitation to visit San Quentin and a willingness to take that first step to be of service.

"It was around 2016, I was fortunate enough to take a tour in San Quentin," Hohman said. "We were invited by a group that my husband had just joined to come take a tour with them. The day came and there we were sitting in this group.

"At the time, I didn't know it was VOEG [Victim Offender Education Group]. I listened attentively to the in-

carcerated men talking about their stories, challenges, and how they learned about how they affected others by their crimes. They took such accountability and were so vulnerable. They were so open, it blew my socks off!" Hohman said.

After this first visit, she took it a step further by getting involved to help those incarcerated stay on their path of recovery and rehabilitation.

"I reached out to the head of IPP [Inside Prison Project] and asked, 'How do I get more involved?' IPP responded and

said, 'You have to do some of the training first.' So I took some training courses. My father was a psychiatrist, so I had been around the psychology field for quite some time," Hohman said.

Kid CAT volunteers like Hohman are known for giving from their hearts, which has helped the program become a success — changing one youth, one step at a time.

A circular logo with a globe in the center. The globe has the text 'KID CAT' on it. Surrounding the globe are the words 'CREATING AWARENESS TOGETHER' in a circular arrangement. There are also some smaller text elements like 'EST. 2010'.

Kid CAT (Creating Awareness Together) is a group of men who committed their crimes in their teens and were sentenced as adults to life terms. The group's mission is to inspire humanity through education, mentorship and restorative practices. Kid CAT Speaks wants to hear from all the juvenile lifers, educators and policymakers concerning juvenile justice issues and rehabilitation. Contact us at San Quentin News, Attn: Kid CAT Speaks, 1 Main Street, San Quentin, CA 94964

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH

FORMERLY INCARCERATED MAY
FILL HEALTHCARE WORKER VOID

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

The nation is struggling with a shortage of health care workers even as many people incarcerated in the nation’s prisons and jails struggle to find job. A solutions to both has recently been proposed in the *New England Journal of Medicine* by training and hiring formerly incarcerated people as community health care workers.

Dr. Eric Reinhart, an anthropologist at Northwestern University in Chicago, suggested in the paper that the formerly incarcerated be recruited as community health workers, according to an article in *Quartz*.

“More people are dying from lack of healthcare than anything else, so the fear that some pot smoker giving you your insulin or helping you walk around the block is somehow going to lead to your early demise, versus the fact that you don’t actually have care, it doesn’t make any sense,” said Salmaan Keshavjee, a professor of global health at Harvard.

Seniors who live alone often need assistance with medications, blood pressure monitoring, and an assortment of things to keep them out of nursing homes. These people are often in low-income communities that are affected by hypertension or diabetes, which are preventable diseases, asserted the story.

Public health workers are vital to a healthy society, especially when they belong to the communities they serve — an understanding of the community’s lifestyle builds trust.

These formerly incarcerated workers can be an asset to disadvantaged communities that lack health care resources. The formerly incarcerated are not medical professionals, but with the support of training they can offer effective health care, noted the article.

Nearly 23% of Americans have a criminal record and almost half of them have a family member who has been incarcerated. This impact of mass incarceration shapes communities long after people are released from prison.

Those coming out of prison often find themselves facing

Public health workers are significant to a healthy society, especially when they belong to the communities they serve.

huge struggles, such as obtaining decent paying jobs and having access to health care, which puts them at greater risk to reoffend.

This program can be embraced on the federal and state level, to help prevent recidivism and reduce number of people in prison, reported *Quartz*.

“Mass incarceration, having been formerly incarcerated, having been in a family where one has been incarcerated, dramatically changes one’s social status, and changes in social status always create changes in the status of one’s health,” says Robert Fullilove, professor of clinical sociomedical sciences at Columbia University.

The Brennan Center for Justice says 40% of incarcerated

people will not pose a threat if released. Their release would significantly reduce prison and jail populations, with further savings by employing them as health workers.

The program itself will face financial challenges; to invest in such a program is huge, billions of dollars just for salaries, without accounting for the necessary training and administrative costs, according to Quartz.

Reinhart’s suggestion entails a thoughtful change in the way people in criminal justice and health care think about community intervention.

“[We need to invest] directly in people to care for one another, not from outside communities, not with a kind of humanitarian social work model where I’m going to go in and help some other community,” Reinhart said.

If the spending is costly, the savings in the future will be even greater. The direct savings will come in a decreased need for hospital care and lower chronic disease complications, and as well as a reduction in costs related to recidivism.

'LESS LIKELY TO DIE'

STUDY: TREATING OPIOID

ADDICTION DURING INCARCERATION
REDUCES FUTURE OVERDOSES

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

New research suggests that individuals who receive medication for opioid addiction while incarcerated are less likely to die later from an overdose.

The benefits of treating opioid use disorder during incarceration are detailed in a study cited in a *Boston Medical Center* news release. The study was published in the journal *JAMA Network Open* on April 17, 2023, and reveals favorable lifesaving outcomes treating opioid addicts during incarceration, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported April 18.

“Offering medications for opioid addiction for incarcerated individuals saves lives. Specifically, offering all three medications — buprenorphine, methadone, and naltrexone — is the most effective in saving lives and is more cost-effective,” said Dr. Avik Chatterjee, the study’s author. Chatterjee is a primary care and addiction medicine physician at Boston Medical Center and Boston Healthcare for the Homeless.

The research said that medications for opioid use disorder are discontinued at most U.S. prisons and jails when a person is incarcerated, even if they were stable on the medication prior to incarceration. In addition, institution staff do not typically approve those medications prior to the person’s release. Because of this, patients often suffer withdrawal symptoms during incarceration and the post-release period becomes a high-

risk time for overdose death. The article stated that over a five-year period the researchers examined three different strategies to study the issue.

In the first strategy, no addiction medication was provided during incarceration or upon release. In the second, only extended-release naltrexone was offered at release. In the third, all three medications were offered at prison reception.

Over the course of the five-year study of 30,000 opioid-addicted incarcerated people, those receiving no addiction medication had nearly 41,000 addiction-related treatment starts and 1,259 overdose deaths. Offering naltrexone upon release resulted in around 10,400 additional treatment starts and 40 fewer overdose deaths. By contrast, there were about 12,000 additional treatment starts with 83 fewer overdose deaths for those offered all three medications at reception, claimed the article.

“We hope our study supports policy change at the state and federal level, requiring treating opioid use disorder with medications among people who are incarcerated,” said Dr. Chatterjee.

The study offered the further information that in Massachusetts, among all people with opioid use disorder, offering only naltrexone prevented 95 overdose deaths over five years — a 0.9% decrease in state-level overdose mortality. The all-medication strategy prevented 192 overdose deaths, for a 1.8% decrease.

ENDING IN-PERSON PSYCHIATRY DENIED

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

A federal judge has denied the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s proposal to be allowed to provide psychiatric care to state prisoners exclusively by telephone.

Chief U.S. District Court Judge Kimberly Mueller gave final approval of a 2020 provisional settlement policy that allows some remote telepsychiatry but rejected a bid by CDCR to switch to telepsychiatry only, according to *Court-*

room News Services.

The ruling stemmed from a decades old lawsuit over inadequate mental health care at California state prisons, which led to the appointment of a special master to oversee efforts to improve care.

Amy Xu, an attorney for incarcerated patients in the lawsuit, said the court acted correctly.

“We urge the defendants to implement the final telepsychiatry policy, which draws a balance between live and remote psychiatry that is consistent with the relevant literature and

prioritizes patient safety,” Xu said.

A CDCR spokesperson said the department is reviewing the order, according to the article.

CDCR has been struggling to provide in-person psychiatric care given a chronic shortage of psychiatrists and other mental health workers. As a result, the special master recommended expansion of telepsychiatry, but as a supplement to in-person care, not a substitute.

This led to a 2020 settlement agreement between the special master, CDCR, and

plaintiffs. After 18 months of monitoring, the state argued that certain limitations should be removed from the agreement. This included exclusive telepsychiatry and removal of the requirement for the state to have “continued good faith recruitment and retention of on-site psychiatrists,” according to the article

In the ruling, Mueller wrote, “Any proposed expansion of the telepsychiatry policy advanced without specific findings to support the expansion from the special master and his experts is problematic.”



Health FAQ: How do I transition from health care inside to the community?

Transitions Clinic Network (TCN) is a network of community health clinics that serve returning community members. TCN clinic programs are led by Community Health Workers (CHWs) with lived experience of incarceration and reentry and support people with their healthcare and reentry. TCN hosts a monthly Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) column, a space where we answer questions about health care and empower individuals to prepare for healthy reentry. This summer we are re-featuring some key articles from past years.

How is healthcare in prison different from health care in the community?

There is so much you give up when incarcerated. One thing is taking charge of your own health care decisions. In prison, ducats are sent, someone escorts you to your appointment, and medications are given at the pill window or dropped off at your cell. In the community, the *healthcare system assumes you are independent*. Being in the community means you can make personal choices for your care, but you also have more responsibility for setting up and navigating your health care.

TRANSITION FROM PRISON HEALTH CARE TO THE COMMUNITY

Healthcare is not one size fits all. In the community, different kinds of health care are paid for by different types of health insurance, like private insurances, Medicaid (Medi-Cal), and Medicare. You will have a choice about which clinic you go to, your doctor, and when you see them. You may have access to more medications and treatments. But you need to understand your insurance to make sure it will pay for your care.

In the community, not everything is under one roof. You may go to one place for a medical check-up, then another clinic to see an eye doctor, dentist, or mental health. Unlike prison, no one will come find you if you miss your appointment or run out of medications. You may have family members who can help, but you alone are responsible to keep track of your care. Keep in mind, your Parole/Probation Officer is not part of your care team and does not have access to your health information, so will not typically help you with your medical appointments.

You are also in charge of your lifestyle and making healthy choices about diet and exercise. You will choose what you eat and how often you exercise. You may have to figure out how to eat well on a limited budget. There is no set yard time. You must make time for exercise alongside work, errands, and time with

family/friends. It can be hard to prioritize your health when you are busy with reentry. Here are information and resources to help!

How do I refill my medications in the community?

If you take medications inside, you will receive a small supply when you leave (usually 30 days). You will need to see a new doctor in the community to get more medications. Primary care providers (PCPs) see patients for staying healthy (like getting “check-ups”) and for treating your everyday health problems (like high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, and more). PCPs want an ongoing partnership with you, so they know you and understand your needs. Once you have a PCP, they can write a prescription to refill medications. The doctor sends the prescription to a pharmacy of your choice and you will go to the pharmacy to pick it up.

Sometimes people wait until they only have a few pills left or run out of their medications to call the doctor. It’s important that you start the process of finding a PCP and scheduling an appointment *as soon as able* because sometimes you must wait days or weeks for a first visit with a new doctor. It’s not as simple as putting in a sick call slip. Running out of medications can make your health conditions worse, and we don’t want to see you go to the

emergency room to get your medications. Don’t wait to get your health care started in the community!

How do I schedule an appointment with a new PCP in the community?

Call or visit the local social services office in your county to make sure your Medi-Cal insurance is active.

Find a clinic that will take Medi-Cal. Even though there may be clinics right down the street, some clinics only take private insurance. If you need assistance finding a clinic in your community, call our TCN Reentry Health Care Hotline at (510) 606-6400. Or call clinics near you and ask, “Do you take Medi-Cal?” and “Are you accepting new patients?”

Call the clinic to schedule a new patient appointment with a PCP. Let them know why you need to see a doctor to be sure they can help with what you need. If they do not offer the service you need, they may offer you information about another clinic (like for dental or eye care, mental health services, or MAT).

After you schedule the appointment by phone, ask if there are any documents you must bring for your appointment (such as photo ID, insurance card, medication list).

Ok! I made an appointment to see the doctor. Is there anything I should do to prepare?

Write out your questions

and concerns before your appointment – It’s easy to forget things when meeting a new doctor. Come to your appointment with a list of what you want to talk about.

Collect important items to bring to your appointment – Plan to bring a photo ID, your insurance card or a copy of any insurance paperwork, proof of your release from prison, a medication list and/or your pill bottles, and any documents you have about the care you got at CDCR. Doctors in the community do not usually have access to your prison health records, so any information you bring will help them understand how to care for you.

Plan for how you will get to your appointment – If driving or getting a ride, look up directions to the clinic. If taking the bus, look up the route to the clinic and how long it will take to get there. Give yourself enough time to arrive early. Most clinics have you fill out paperwork before your appointment. Most clinics also have a late policy and may not see you if you arrive after your scheduled appointment time.

Check in at the front desk when you arrive at the clinic – Clinic staff will not know who you are when you walk through the doors, so be sure to let them know you have arrived.

Know that waiting rooms can be emotional and triggering for some people – In the

community, waiting rooms are usually a large room with lots of people. They can be busy and loud at times, and it can feel overwhelming. Some clinics or hospitals may have security officers. It can help to be prepared that you may feel emotional or triggered in these spaces. Know that everyone is there to help you. Let staff know if you are confused about what to do or need to slow down. Security guards will not be with you when you see the doctor.

I just got released and I’m feeling really overwhelmed. What should my first step be?

Congratulations on returning home and please know that you are not alone! Call our *TCN Reentry Health Hotline at (510) 606-6400* to speak with a formerly incarcerated community health worker who has been in your shoes and can answer all your questions about how to get medical care in the community.

We are thrilled to communicate with you inside! If you have healthcare-related questions about reentry, feel free to write us at: *Transitions Clinic Network, 2403 Keith Street, San Francisco, CA 94124*. Or call our Reentry Health Hotline today at *(510) 606-6400* to speak with a CHW and to see if there’s a TCN program in your community of return. We accept collect calls from CDCR. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm.



Top: Graduates of the Journalism Guild pose proudly with their certificates.



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQnews



Bottom left: SQNews advisor John Eagan, who started the Guild, expresses pride in the graduates, as incoming Guild instructor Lisa Armstrong looks on.

Bottom right: Keynote speaker Byrhonda Lyons spoke of her family's tragic experiences and how she found her voice in journalism.

**By Anthony Manuel Carvalho
Staff Writer**

The San Quentin News Journalism Guild graduation took place in the Garden Chapel June 16. Fourteen English Guild and eleven Spanish Guild student journalists made up the 2022/23 graduating class.

The ceremony featured caps and gowns, guest speakers and refreshments. The newly-minted journalists expressed how being in the Guild positively impacted their lives.

Guild graduates Stuart Clarke and Rahan Asaan received awards for outstanding participation, and graduate Patrick Demery delivered remarks.

"When I came to prison, I belonged in prison. I felt hopelessness; bought into the narrative that I am trash," said Demery. "But then I realized something — things can be recycled and formed into something new and useful."

San Quentin News Editor-in-Chief Steve Brooks opened the ceremony, noting that the graduates will use their new skills to help humanize incarcerated people with the power of their pens.

Attendees included CalMatters investigative reporter Byrhonda Lyons, UC Berkeley journalism

professor Andres Cediel and Harvard social justice professor Dr. Kaia Stern.

Also present were *San Francisco Standard* reporter Julie Zagori, SQ Psychologist Dr. K. Rosenberg, Warden Ron Broomfield, and former editors of *SQNews*.

Alumnus Jesse Vasquez recalled his transition to freedom when he paroled after serving as SQNews editor-in-chief. "Some life lessons I learned included understanding that you can never outrun your past. Someone's always there reminding you, so re-write your own story," Vasquez said.

Another former SQNews editor-in-chief, Richard "Bonaru" Richardson, spoke after Vasquez.

"At SQNews, I've done it all, but I can't thank [adviser] John Eagan enough for thinking ahead by starting the Journalism Guild," he said.

"The Guild creates the SQNews team. You are the lifeblood. Go tell your own story," Richardson implored. Brooks reminded everyone of the importance of volunteers like Eagan who mentor the incarcerated journalists as professionals and as people.

Eagan shared his joy in assisting the Guild. "Trust me; we are proud of what you do for the newspaper," he said.

Brooks thanked SQNews adviser



"My challenge to you is write as much as possible and sharpen the tool. If you're writing for the public, write with integrity as your words will have a powerful impact."

—Warden Ron Broomfield

of my Uncle Jeff's murder outside our church — they hung him. I wanted to know his story, so I searched libraries to find microfiche to corroborate my grandmother's story. I couldn't find anything."

"I became editor-in-chief of my high school paper and continued searching. I learned I would never find his story because he and my grandmother were considered Black, illiterate and they didn't matter."

"So remember, speak your truth," Lyons said.

Lyons reminded the graduates that their newsroom is one of the most diverse in the country, but advised them to read from journalists who are not like them.

Warden Ron Broomfield attended the event for the first time. He said that graduating from the Journalism Guild

is a "powerful accomplishment."

"My challenge to you is write as much as possible and sharpen the tool. If you're writing for the public, write with integrity as your words will have a powerful impact. No matter what you write keep your integrity so you can sleep well at night," said Broomfield.

The warden acknowledged the engine of the rehabilitative model — volunteers. "It's volunteers that bring humanization, encouragement, knowledge, passion, and transformation to the lives of our population," he said.

Dr. Kaia Stern came from Boston to attend her second Guild graduation. "I came again because you all give me hope," she said.

Dr. K. Rosenberg spoke of how SQNews helps create a sense of community. "The newsroom is an incredible community where very talented people supply courage to tell their own stories without victimizing others, tell people's stories who haven't mattered before. *SQNews* is very important in H-unit, helping residents stay connected to the prison."

Spanish Guild Chair Edwin Chavez and English Guild Chair Jerry Malek Gearin introduced their respective graduates as they took the stage to receive their certificates.

ceive their certificates.

"I was privileged to graduate myself in 2018," Chavez said. "I learned of the importance of *SQNews* during the pandemic. Imagine not being able to understand what was going on and not getting any information [in your language]. We provided this, that's why I'm here and the reason you should want to write for our audience."

Gearin, a 2017 graduate, spoke about the perseverance of his Guild students. "My guys, this 2023 Guild, you showed up, you did the work. During lockdowns, they took source material through the fence," Gearin said.

Demery, one of the Guild graduates, recalled that when he came to SQ, his family asked him what he had done wrong because of the prison's reputation from the past. He told them, "No, I got sent here to go home."

He toured the newsroom and met Brooks, thinking, "Man, I got to be a part of this." He loved the way the guys carried themselves, as well as the work they were doing. So he joined the guild and started writing.

When his first article appeared in the paper, he sent his family a copy and then they understood.

"Wow, you guys are doing all that in there!" they said.

POWER OF LIGHT: LIGHT KEEPERS PROGRAM WELCOMES A NEWLY TRAINED COHORT

**By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer,
Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor**

San Quentin's Light Keepers — a peer support program that teaches participants to support those in mental health crisis — held a graduation for their latest cohort on June 23.

The event was intimate and emotional. Some of the 15 graduates brought in family members or friends from the outside, and the group enjoyed a series of speeches together, followed by Subway sandwiches and music by San Quentin band, The Greater Good.

The Light Keepers program is a 90-week course that teaches crisis resolution, mentoring, and techniques that help prevent mental health crisis, including suicide. Participants also learn to create an atmosphere of hope and inclusivity for their peers.

Incarcerated residents of San Quentin developed the

program in 2005 as a response to the suicide of Robert Dubner on February 17, 2005. Prior to the program, prison residents in crisis often did not seek help from staff due to CDCR's suicide protocols. The fear was that thoughts of suicide may harm their chances of being found suitable for parole.

After 24 years of incarceration, Patrick "PLO" Baylis noted that a program like Light Keepers did not exist when he first came to prison. He expressed that his goal is to help encourage individuals to stay motivated to care for themselves and face daily challenges.

"Young men here are in grief, ostracized and they stay in suicidal thoughts, [and] addiction. If we can intervene, it can save many people. I never progressed until I got to SQ, men here I knew provided a helping hand and helped me on my journey to recovery. Don't ever be too proud to be a helping hand," said Baylis.

Light Keepers learn how to assist their peers during times of crisis, such as the loss of a loved one, board denial, illness, and other stressful situations. But Light Keepers are more than that; they are also positive role models and friends who are knowledgeable and trusted by their community.

At the graduation, participants shared how meaningful it is to help others heal and the honorability that comes with being available to their incarcerated peers who are struggling.

Carrington Russelle spoke of the uncertainty he felt at 21 years of age coming into prison. He stressed that there was no outlet for people in crisis and no safe space to communicate uncertainties. He felt desensitized quickly and adopted a defensive posture in which he suppressed his own emotions.

He desired change but did not have an example to follow.

"It is an honor to offer what I didn't get," said Carrington.

Graduate John James spoke of the importance of doing the work to face the reality of mental health struggles, and support others who are also struggling. "Growing up I needed someone to be there for me and I never had that someone. I had a lot of pain and I put that out to people. Over time I chose to help people in need and be that someone that was always there."

Light Keepers, formerly known as Brothers Keepers, is available to serve their community and staff 24/7. They create an atmosphere of trust and hope. In the past, members wore a starfish as recognition from staff and peers. Members have now changed their lapel pin to a lighthouse to signify inclusivity and the group's goal of being a guiding light for everyone to see.

The warden, associate warden and a small community of their peers, celebrated the

graduates and all guests enjoyed the tunes played by the SQ band, The Greater Good.

Among the attendees was Associate Warden L. Bravo, who thanked the families, volunteers and graduates for their dedication. He talked about his vision concerning the California Model — Gov. Newsom's new plan to reform the California prison system.

"With that model it is about peer support. I came here to be part of a movement and change. We really have to be there to help our peers. You are an olive branch to someone in need. You can be the strongest person in the world, but strength is not just physical," he said. Bravo spoke about emotional intelligence and mental wellness.

Carrie Krupitsky works with the Humane Prison Hospice Program, one of trio supporters of Light Keepers. In that role, she sits in on weekly training sessions and is bringing the training to Vacaville.

"One of the fundamentals of

the organization is inclusivity. Being leaders in the community and having that trust is what it's really about, that community trust," she said.

Krupitsky went on to talk about her experience in the group sessions. She said feelings of inspiration overwhelm her when she witnesses the work men are doing in San Quentin.

"I was blown away. People are so present, so open. I have never sat with a group of people, especially men, who are that loving and that open with themselves," Krupitsky said about her experience during group meetings. "You want the people who are making the decisions out in the world to see the humanity in this space."

Some of the graduates reflected on what it means to be a Light Keeper. "Being of service to others ... where it is needed is one of the most important things in life because we are inter-dependent," said Mark Cadiz.



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQnews

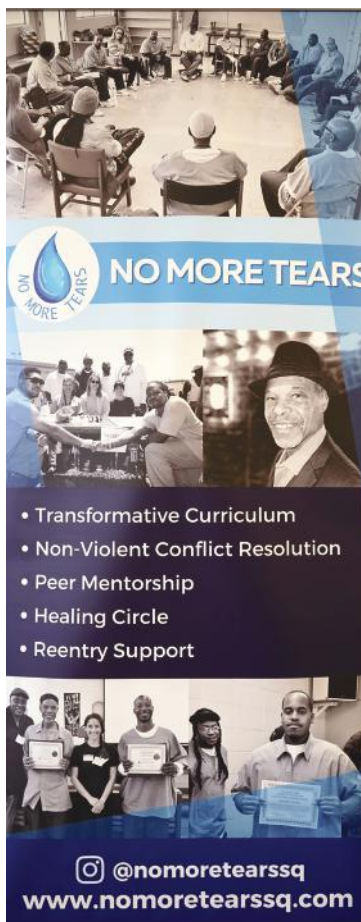
Light Keepers, a peer support program formerly known as Brothers Keepers, graduated its latest class. Founded by residents in 2005, the 90-week course teaches suicide crisis resolution and mentoring. Members learn to provide a space of hope and inclusivity for their peers.

"Growing up I needed someone to be there for me and I never had that someone. I had a lot of pain and I put that out to people. Over time I chose to help people in need and be that someone that was always there."

—John James,
Graduate



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQnews



Left: Community partners, volunteers, alumni, and inside facilitators gather together for a photo session on SQ Garden Chapel. **Inset below:** Isabel Tayag, Program Coordinator of NMT proudly holding up a NMT slogan T-shirt at the event.

- Transformative Curriculum
- Non-Violent Conflict Resolution
- Peer Mentorship
- Healing Circle
- Reentry Support



"People have a different perspective from when they came in, to the time they leave. These connections made in NMT keep going and it starts even before the incarcerated men get out."

—Keith Carson
Alameda County
Supervisor, 5th District

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www.nomoretearssq.com

POWER OF THANKS: NO MORE TEARS APPRECIATION CEREMONY HONORS AGENTS OF CHANGE

**By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor,
Michael Callahan
Staff Writer**

San Quentin's No More Tears program has had a significant impact on facilitators, volunteers, alumni and community partners. An appreciation ceremony on June 10 honored them.

The residents of San Quentin created NMT in 2002 to address the rise of violent crimes and reduce the rate of recidivism.

The program has five traditional tasks in each session:

- The welcoming of newcomers;
- The reading of the mission statement,
- The house rules,
- An affirmation, and, finally,
- A chant.

The chant is completed when a speaker calls out, "I'm committed to stopping the violence," and the group responds in unison, "We're committed to stopping the tears."

San Quentin's public information officer Lieutenant G. Berry, attended the ceremony and spoke on behalf of

the administration, sharing encouraging words of how change comes from growth.

"It's my honor to be among guys who are consistently bettering themselves. I encourage you all to check in with your peers for support," Berry said, the San Quentin public information officer.

For the first time in NMT history, co-founders Lonnie Morris and Mick Gardner, recognized those who have contributed to the program. NMT shirts were awarded to Program Director Isabel Tayag and Chairperson Cori Thomas. Other supporters and contributors among those receiving recognition were Donald Frazier, CEO of Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, Alameda County Supervisor Keith Carson, and his wife.

Carson discussed incarceration numbers and his aim to increase the amount of programs that are available. He talked about the perspective people have once they visit prison in person.

"People have a different perspective from when they came in, to the



Mick Gardner,
Executive Director (NMT)

time they leave. These connections made in NMT keep going and it starts even before the incarcerated men get out," said Carson.

San Quentin resident Perry "Spoke" Simpson has been involved with NMT for 10 years. He acted as master of ceremony of the event and talked at length about how the program drives him to positive action.

"All of y'all is positive and I know that if I come to y'all, I would get some positive feedback. I have not been on the streets in 27 years. Y'all are my community," said Simpson.

Others spoke about the healing cir-

cle, which is a core part of how NMT addresses the rise of crime and contributes to stopping returning citizens from reoffending.

Caleb McLellan facilitated NMT and talked about the way everyone involved in the program allowed him to witness and participate in showing his vulnerability to participants.

"NMT allowed me to right [the] damage I done to my community and to give back — something I never had wanted to do," McLellan said.

Marvin Cosby declared he had never sat "in the fire," an intense communication circle within the group, and he commended those who have. Cosby called himself a "young knucklehead" who now understands the number of lives affected by his choices and focuses on giving back. He said that this life change came from the testimonies of survivors of violent crime.

"An identifying moment in NMT was to hear a victim speak; this was breathtaking to see how many people are affected by our crimes [and] the ripple effect ... it changed my life," Cosby said.

Marquez Sherouse discussed the

way healing circles had affected him and had changed his life.

"It is amazing how the victims can still be triggered years later. But to see them come in here with those who have hurt people can change the way they feel after the healing circle," he said.

Jermaine Gurley, who was released from San Quentin in December 2022, talked about how "choice points," helped him to handle challenges. "Upon my reentry, I learned to be patient — internalize everything you learn and make it your reality. Life is not easy, but if you do the work, you can navigate," said Gurley.

Former San Quentin staffer Addie Kitchens reminded everyone that people on the outside need to help those on the inside.

"I am a big supporter of the direction the institution is going. It is amazing to see what is happening in the prison," said Kitchens.

Residents enjoyed fired chicken, samosa, fried fish, rick pilaf garden salad, and fresh fruit salad and bottled waters as they mingled with guest, alumni, and supporters of the NMT program.

PRISON HISTORY

AMERICAN PRISON PUBLICATIONS EXAMINED

By Kate McQueen
Wall City Adviser
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JSTOR Daily

In December 1915, the men at Wyoming State Penitentiary — population 276 — established a “Red Hot Rag with a Pep” called *J-A-B-S*. The magazine offered a bit of news and plenty of commentary, bound in a colorful cover and illustrated with a tiny jester carrying a pointy sword. Its title and avatar suggested editorial interest in sharp humor. The first issue’s opening pages, however, were conciliatory and aimed for broad appeal.

J-A-B-S planned to be a “non-sectarian and non-political” publication that “will give everyone a square deal—that can stand it.” For the modest price of 500 dollars for 500 years (or an annual fee of \$1.20), outside subscribers could peek into the fortress-like structure of the Rawlins prison.

How many people took the pucky editors up on this offer? The surviving copies that made their way via the University of Wyoming’s collections into Reveal Digital’s latest archival project, *American Prison Newspapers, 1800-2020: Voices from the Inside*, tell us little about audience size. But they indicate something important about outreach. In addition to providing news by and for the incarcerated, the prison press long aspired to use its pages as a tool to “poke holes in the wall,” as Tom Runyon, editor of Iowa State Penitentiary’s Presidio put it, and reach outside audiences too.

Since 1800, people incarcerated in America have penned articles and organized layouts for hundreds of in-house publications of all sizes, shapes, and lifespans. The American Prison Newspapers archive reflects this diversity. The more than 900 items (and counting) available for open access use include five issues of *J-A-B-S*, the oldest publication in the archive to date. It also features a near-complete print run of the more recent *Long Line Writer* — 297 issues produced by Arkansas Department of Corrections from 1987 to 2006. Next to the faded, home-spun pages of *The Hour Glass*, published at the Farm for Women in Connecticut in the 1930s, readers will find polished staples of the 1970s like newspaper *The Kentucky Inter-Prison Press* and Arizona State Prison’s magazine, *La Roca*. New publications will be added to the collection as they are located and digitized.

Regardless of style, the publications cover similar ground. They report on prison programming, profile locals of interest, and offer commentary on topics like parole and education. A close look at mastheads and statements of purpose reveals similar goals, frequently packaged in a shared language. In fact, the prison press introduced itself with verve and clarity of purpose.

Consider Arizona’s *The Desert Press*, which dedicated its first issue in 1933 “To our friends, both outside and those in prison... We ... hope to make this paper an interesting, breezy and entertaining sheet that will merit the support of the public...” Two years later, Connecticut’s inaugural issue of *The Hour Glass* echoed these “reasons for being” — “to stimulate and encourage creative work,



to develop cooperative interest in our environment, to entertain and enlighten our friends.”

Fast-forward three decades, new publications still carried the same mission. In 1961, *The Bridge*, in Connecticut, points to “self-expression” and the ability to “communicate their ideas and opinions to the public.” Kentucky’s *Castle* (previously known as *Castle on the Cumberland*, launched the same year as *The Bridge*) likewise states “the purpose ... is the creative expression of the population in the hope that it will bring about better understanding between ourselves and society.”

Meeting the needs of both inside and outside audiences is a tall order, one that prison editors over the years openly struggled with in their pages.

To walk “the wide, wide gap between prisoners and free citizens” is a “tightrope act” of extreme difficulty, explains Lawrence Snow, editor of Kentucky State Penitentiary’s *Castle on the Cumberland*, in a 1964 column called “Problems of the Prison Editor.” Snow asks:

How shall [a prison publication] go about its principal job of convincing the casual reader that convicts, although they have divorced themselves temporarily from society, still belong to the human race?... How far can it go in the direction of putting the finger on the many, often glaring, flaws in today’s prison systems—many of them holdovers from darker eras—without either ceasing to exist through official disapproval or degenerating into a petty gripe sheet that alienates more readers than it wins?

The answer is usually not very far. Then and now, prison newspaper staff tend to be small and inexperienced. They work with little equipment or funding, under the constant possibility of censorship, and in the absence of real criticism. They take few risks, according to Snow, relying on “borrowed humor, innocuous stories, and feature articles about the latest intramural basketball game.”

James McGrath Morris, author of *Jailhouse Journalism: The Fourth Estate Behind Bars*, calls this a “booster style.” Many of these archived publications will remind contemporary readers of high school newspapers more than underground weeklies of the alternative press. The light content rankled Snow.

“A paper or magazine thus filled may keep the prisoners happy by mentioning as many of their names as possible in each issue, and it will never have much trouble from the administration. If it is prettily packaged, with lots of pictures and plenty of color, it may even be subscribed to by persons outside the institution,” he writes. “But it will seldom be read.”

A number of Snow’s criticisms also show up in the pages of Arizona State Prison’s magazine *La Roca*, which featured a staff editorial and a cover story by Mark R. Mayo on the then-called penal press in February, 1976. In order for the prison press to fulfill its “tremendous” potential, the editorial lists certain requirements.

“The penal publication should present the local news and events in a factual manner and it should not ignore vitally important issues because they are considered ‘too touchy.’ Further ‘it should deal openly with rumors’ so that it may ‘be looked upon as a valid source of information for both prisoners and staff. If outsiders can gain no insight into the prison programs by reading this type of locally-oriented publication, it is likely they won’t gain insight under any circumstances.”

This, the editors maintain, requires a certain objectivity

that inside readers often misunderstood as the inability to “tell it like it is.”

“Telling it like it is!” actually is *telling it like it ain’t*. It is merely their own personal viewpoint or opinion. Being objective is hard — if not impossible, but using a certain amount of tact and common sense isn’t all that difficult... We want to be effective — with a little class.

To improve, prison editors of Mayo’s and Snow’s generation looked for role models. Some came from inside, through the Penal Press Exchange. Described by Mayo as an “informal agreement between prisoners,” this exchange included internal circulation of newspapers, republication of news stories, and occasionally reviews of each other’s work. This tradition, Mayo explains, allows an “interchange [of] thoughts and ideas” and “a common bond of confidence” to develop between publications.

Prison press also thrived through competition with itself. A number of the publications housed in this archive vied for distinction in the American Penal Press Contest, a national awards competition run by the journalism department at Southern Illinois University from 1965 to 1990. Mayo highlights *El Saguaro* — another publication produced at the same facility, Arizona State Prison at Florence — for winning multiple awards in 1967, 70, and 71. *La Roca* went on to win Best Mimeographed Publication in 1979, three years after Mayo’s story went to press.

The biweekly *El Saguaro*, in turn, sought models from the mainstream press. In their first issue they tell readers, “[W]e do attempt to avoid the printing of objectionable material so as to remain Members in Good Standing of the PP (Penal Press) and the AP (Assassinated Press [sic]). Any resemblance between the *El Saguaro* and *The New York Times*, *The Daily Oklahoman* and *The Arizona Republic* is purely intentional as we try.”

The Readers
How successful were prison publications in attracting

the audiences they longed to reach? Letters to the Editor provide some insight into who was reading and why. Mail from the 19 volumes of *La Roca* collected here come from a wide spectrum of people touched by the justice system: current prisoners, parolees, family of the incarcerated, church ministers, government officials, corrections officers, and representatives of groups ranging from Alcoholics Anonymous to the American Civil Liberties Union. Pen America wrote in, as did a handful of newspaper editors.

La Roca openly fielded criticism as well as praise. Complaints of suspected censorship from Rick Anderson in November, 1977, harp on the editors’ “masochistic tendencies” and “liberal use of the personal pronoun ‘I’” as an assumed cover for the prison administration. In the September 1979 issue, Dick Benson of One Day at a Time Ministries takes exception to a “trash” article from the previous issue “that had its origin in the pits of Hell.”

In the main, though, editors published letters of support. Early issues of *Castle on the Cumberland* include appreciation from a social work professor at University of Louisville, Sister Joseph Mark — a teacher at St. Edward School in Jeffersonton, Kentucky —, and a few of her students, among them seventh-grader Teddy Schenk. During its first year, *J-A-B-S* reprinted subscription requests from the Governor of Wyoming, John B. Kendrick—with compliments on the “bright, newsy little booklet” — and from Honorable V.J. Tidball, who writes:

I read your January issue with much pleasure and benefit....[Y]our effort will, I am confident, have the effect of demonstrating to the outside world that you boys of Rawlins institution are not so different from those on the outside, that you think the same kind of thoughts and are filled with the same aspirations. In other words it will demonstrate what you say in your magazine that a ‘fall

and a failure are two entirely different things. There is no one who understands this difference more than the judge whose duty it is under the law to pass sentence on the fallen.

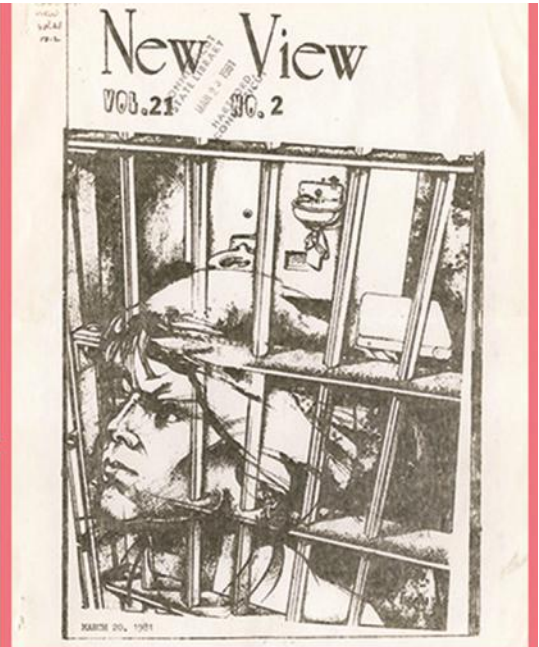
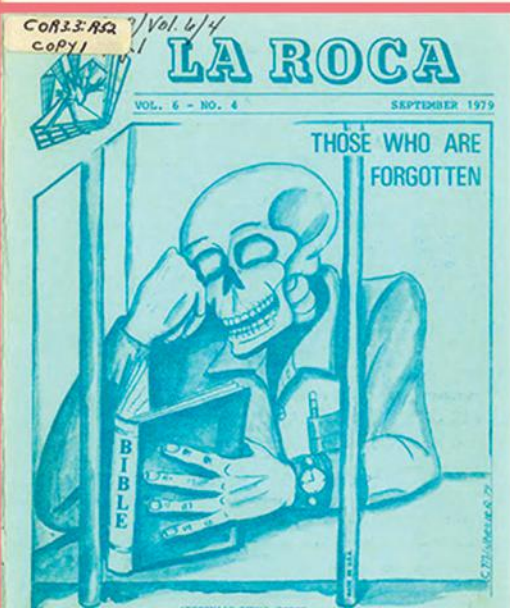
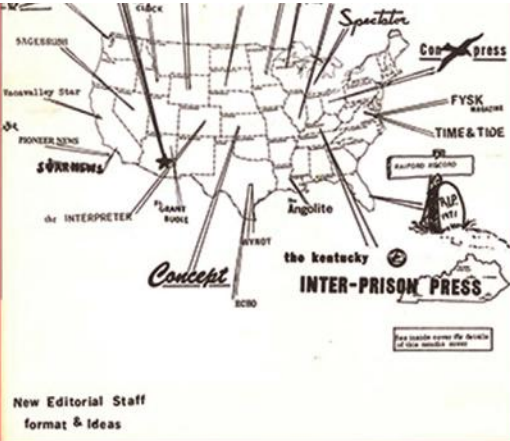
In special instances, such meetings of the minds took place with average citizens too, reflected in this 1962 exchange between *Castle on the Cumberland* and a group of nurses from Branson, Missouri.

[M]y only comment is that [Castle] is very well written and written with a rare understanding of the “mis-understanding” of people on the outside. I have seriously wondered, since reading your article, what that person who was so surprised to find that you “looked like everyone else” really thought you would look like. You know—not all people who are different are on the inside. We should know, as nurses. We work with all kinds, even some that would make your hair stand on end.

Such moments of connection between inside and outside peaked in the 1960s and 1970s, and faded almost entirely in the 1990s, as prison newspapers all around the country closed shop. Overcrowded facilities, frequent lockdowns, budgetary constraints, and increasingly censorious state and prison officials all played a role. When Morris published *Jailhouse Journalism*, the lone history of the subject, in 1998, he was obliged to conclude that “prison journalism is no longer a central institution of prison culture. It has become, for all intents and purposes, an artifact of penal history.”

Today, new research shows only around 25 prison publications appear in print regularly; even fewer do so with digital presence. In an internet-dominated media landscape, the prison press needs both to maintain its long-held goal of writing for those in- and outside the walls. One of the biggest appeals of the American Prison Newspapers collection is its ability to reinvigorate and extend this mission by opening access to a boundless online audience.

Courtesy JSTOR Daily



FAITH

BUDDHIST CORRESPONDENCE COURSE NOW OFFERED TO INCARCERATED

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

The teachings of Buddhism are now available for incarcerated people nationwide through a correspondence course workbook.

The Buddhist Prison Ministry correspondence course, created by the Reverend Susan Shannon, now offers a 12-lesson workbook called “Bodhicitta Behind Bars: An Introduction to Buddhism.”

In 2011, Shannon originally came to San Quentin as a ministry apprentice under Catholic Chaplin Father George Williams. This led to her being given permission enter Death Row as the Buddhist Chaplain.

In an interview with SQNews, Shannon said she facilitated several self-help groups at The Q. This included Houses of Healing, Guiding Rage Into Power, and the Victim Offender Education Group.

The correspondence course is a 71-page booklet that introduces various Buddhist traditions and helps one understand how to achieve an advanced level of internal and external peace, according to the Buddhist Prison Ministry.

“It was a great pleasure for me to read the Buddhist Prison Ministry’s An Introduction to Buddhism. I am impressed by the clarity and content of this excellent overview,” said Joanna Macy, author, teacher and Buddhist activist.

The lessons are made possible by funding from the Khyentse Foundation and are explicitly designed for prison residents. The goal is to present Buddhism in a way that cultivates inner transformation through applicable tools and skills taught by the Buddha.

An incarcerated person wrote to the Ministry saying



The lotus flower symbolizes purity and spiritual awakening. It rises directly out of muddy and murky waters and blossoms into a beautiful flower. The pink lotus is considered to be the lotus of the Buddha and is supreme.

they enjoyed the workbook’s different applications of integration as it relates to prison life, including how it assists newcomers in finding their path.

Another prison resident who wrote to the program explained that the course made them feel like they were “in the presence of the Buddha Dharma.” All people can benefit from studying the booklet, especially young people in our schools, asserted the Ministry.

At SQ’s Death Row, Shannon ministered to a group that over the course of 10 years grew to 65 men, which is where the course’s teachings got their inspiration.

In 2019, her intentions were to move to Washington state, write the course, and then return at least four times a year. However, when the pandemic struck in 2020 she was unable to enter the prison and has since decided to move on, noted the Ministry.

The men of SQ’s Death Row Buddhist community were distraught when Shannon revealed that she was leaving.

“It was hard for me to leave, because I knew I was not go-

ing to be replaced,” Shannon said. “It’s not about me; it’s about the Death Row men who wish to pay it forward. For me it is the power of true altruism.”

The course began when Death Row residents suggested that Shannon create a correspondence course for the women on California’s Death Row. The men wanted the women to have what they had benefited from and they felt the women were underserved, the Ministry told SQnews.

Prior to working and volunteering in prisons, Shannon spent 20-plus years working with Tibetan monks at two monasteries and was taught the fundamentals of Buddhism, such as the Four Noble Truths and the Six Perfections, but mostly about the Bodhicitta, the Awakening Heart.

The first distribution of individual lesson plans went to eight of Shannon’s students, who gave her feedback as to the lessons’ applicability to prison life generally but especially to Death Row. When she moved to Washington in 2019, she began to write the correspondence class. But when Covid hit prisons across

the country and deaths began to mount, she realized that the workbook needed to be available to *all* incarcerated people, not just those in Death Row.

In 2020-2021 an organization called Compassion Works for All listed the correspondence course on the cover of their newsletters that gets sent to incarcerated people nationwide. Before Shannon knew it, her mailbox became jammed with requests for the course.

To help keep up with all the requests, Shannon reached out to local Buddhist groups asking for volunteers. Today the Buddhist Prison Ministry has 14 “super solid” volunteers all over the country, according to Shannon.

One volunteer was humbled by the prison residents’ knowledge of Buddhist viewpoints and other spiritual traditions. “They have revealed many of my blind spots in the Buddha Dharma,” said the volunteer.

Another volunteer felt honored to witness the sincerity of an incarcerated person’s study of Buddhism. “They go unfathomably into self-exploration and reflection, with a need for spiritual survival,” observed the Ministry volunteer.

Thus far a thousand workbooks have been distributed to various prisons in the United States. An August release is scheduled for the second workbook titled, “Prayer and Practices, Integrating the Teachings into Your Daily Life,” which will be a compilation of specific prayers and practices best suited for life on the inside.

If you are interested in the course, the workbook will be available on GTL tablets in August, or you can write to the Buddhist Prison Ministry, P.O. Box 426, Orcas, WA 98280.

PERFORMING ART

SQ MARIN SHAKESPEARE PLAY CONFRONTS THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

The Marin Shakespeare class at San Quentin continued its tradition of performing classic plays from the English bard’s portfolio. On June 30, it was a Caribbean-themed interpretation of Shakespeare’s comedy, “The Taming of the Shrew.”

The event in the Garden Chapel also featured a discussion about how San Quentin can transform into a rehabilitation center.

Some of the residents in the audience said they were skeptical at first about Shakespeare but came away impressed.

“In my community growing up, we didn’t have plays,” said Jessie Milo. “At 43, this is my first play I’ve seen in my life. I think the actors were courageous and now I know the term ‘theatre geek’ is a badge of honor.”

The acting class, however, is about more than just entertainment — it is also about self-improvement, camaraderie, and reflecting on the timeless issues that Shakespeare writes about so poetically.

“Being part of Shakespeare helps you think outside of the box, there are no boundaries in here,” said resident Kunta Rigmaden. “All of the unnecessary divides are gone and we just treat each other as humans.”

The performance opened with an introduction by Bruce “Brother Jay” Bowman, who had the audience laughing with his portrayal of Sly, a drunken swashbuckler.

“How much does it cost a pirate to get his ear pierced?” he asked the audience. “A buccaneer!”

Next, he was joined on stage by “Captain Crunch” and his band of pirates to sing an unruly version of the pirate theme song, “Cocomo.”

The play is about a rich landowner, Baptista, who has two beautiful daughters he wishes to marry off. The oldest, Katarina, speaks her mind and expresses her emotions freely but is labeled as difficult and called “the Cursed.”

The younger, Bianca, appears to be the perfect girl and has many suitors. However, their father forbids Bianca to marry unless Kate marries first. Some of Bianca suitors disguise themselves as tutors, after which drama and shenanigans ensue.

Playing the role of Baptista was resident Robert Dunham, who looked the part in a purple, velvet jacket with his ponytail and goatee. Kate was played by class instructor Suraya Keating and co-instructor Lesley Currier played Bianca. Currier was hard to recognize wearing a huge, curly-blond wig.

Resident Kolby Southwood played Lucentio, the young man who eventually wins Bianca’s hand. He wore a black top hat, sunglasses and red velvet coattails.

SQ’s Yanci Dakin played his trusty servant Tranio. He impressed with his fake accent even though it was his first time on stage. Dakin said later that it took a lot of studying to remember all 147 of his lines.

Longtime class member Darwin Billingsley played the role of Petruchio, who sought Kate’s hand in order to get rich. He got some laughter when he strutted up to Kate to woo her, and when he dapped

with residents Henok Rufael as Hortensio and Arturo Vazquez as Petruchio’s servant.

The final act was a wedding feast and a bet about the obedience of the wives. In the end, Kate becomes the submissive wife while Bianca becomes unruly.

After taking a bow, the cast discussed some of the issues raised by the play. Currier noted that, “Bianca was literally sold to the highest bidder, and told she has to conform to a male concept of beauty.”

Rigmaden performed a spoken-word piece about these issues. “How do you tame a woman?” he asked. “You can’t tame a woman just like you can’t tame the wind. Let’s not tame our women but treat them like God’s greatest gift.”

He later said that, “Some people forget the struggles women had to go through to get to where they are now. Even though there are people today still trying to take that away from them.”

Southwood said women are to be “cherished and loved, not taken advantage of.”

Members of the audience asked the cast what the acting program means to them.

“I think the program, what it does, is it brings a whole bunch of people from different backgrounds together and we share with each other,” Billingsley said.

He spoke about finding hidden talent through the class that you never knew you had before, “like finding a whole new life, a whole new side of yourself.”

Class member Jay Kim said, “It continually teaches me not to take things too seriously. Be you, be yourself and bring humor, even to prison, because it’s healthy. What Leslie is doing with this program is amazing.”

Currier asked the men in blue what they would like to see in order for San Quentin to transform into a model prison, as has been proposed by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Kim spoke to the need to increase literacy and add more programs for creative expression. “If you have more inclusive spaces were people of all different backgrounds can come together, it is powerful,” he said. “Also, we need more healthy food.”

Dakin spoke to the need for more “programs and vocations for people who have physical disabilities.”

Rufael noted that what he would like to see is “the fourth pillar (of the California Model), the trauma-informed organization. That’s exactly what needs to take place — learning how to respond when people are in stress and crises.” He said Keating and Currier both model this, as things are not always easy in the class.

One resident in the audience spoke about the long waitlists for programs and the need for more teachers. “You got guys ready to get in there and do the work but can’t,” he said.

As a teacher, Currier said she hears many stories about the long waitlists. She noted that it took 45 minutes to get the costumes into the prison through the gate for the play. “The admin staff that support programming need more support themselves, especially if programming is going to be scaled up,” she said.

REFORMED: SQ MEN FIND REHABILITATION THROUGH FAITH

By Willy Alarcón
Journalism Guild Writer

San Quentin’s Reformed Protestants are celebrating their third year as an official religious group after a humble beginning of studying together on a housing-unit’s tier during the Covid pandemic.

For members of this particular faith, their aim is to return to foundational Christian doctrines that they believe every Christian ought to be following. In the process, they seek to transform their lives from their past mistakes through practicing their faith.

“Just so that you know, this is the life preserver to a drowning man here,” said resident Stephen Fink, a new participant.

Historically, the Protestant Reformation movement started with the German monk Martin Luther, who famously nailed his 95 written theses to Wittenberg castle’s entrance. He was arguing for doctrinal reforms to the Roman Catholic faith.

This set in motion the “protestant” movement in Europe, which along with the death of many martyrs, eventually solidified into the first Protestant churches almost 100 years later.

How it all began in San Quentin

The group of men met unofficially for almost an entire year on the fifth tier of South

Block’s Alpine housing unit due to Covid restrictions.

Resident Jonathan Rodriguez and former resident David Argueta took leadership to bring the men together in congregation to study reformist works and practice their faith.

Reflecting on their humble beginnings, Rodriguez said, “I could have never imagined it would bloom into a full Reformed faith worship service.”

The congregation jumped at the opportunity to find a sponsor and submit the necessary paperwork to the prison’s administration to become an officially recognized religious group. Approval was granted on July 29, 2021.

“We thank God for having been granted the opportunity to meet officially for services,” Rodriguez said.

Their sponsor is Aldo Yannon, a military veteran and 15-year community volunteer at SQ. He faithfully conducts services and also teaches the two most common biblical languages — Greek and Hebrew.

“I’ve been waiting for something like this for fifteen years!” Yannon said.

At one of their recent services, all of the men thanked God for putting “Aldo at the right place at the perfect time.”

But the groundwork had to be laid first

First, Rodriguez had to put together a request form with

“I could have never imagined it would bloom into a full Reformed faith worship service.”
—Jonathan Rodriguez

a declaration of autonomy as a separate Protestant denominational church at SQ along with a copy of the “Three Forms of Unity” from the Protestant Reformed Churches of America.

This was approved by several men from the outside community of their denomination and then signed off by SQ’s Chaplain, Yat Ang.

What distinguishes these congregants?

According to Rodriguez, the focus of the Reformed Protestant faith is to defend the Gospel by holding on to the ancient creeds, confessions, and teachings — known as catechisms — from the original language of the King James Bible.

One of the pillars of the Reformation movement was French Theologian John Calvin, whose book, “Institutes of the Christian Religion,” is highly influential.

Calvin emphasized five key doctrinal points, commonly known as the “Means of Grace.”

1. “Salvation is by *Grace Alone*”

2. “Salvation is through *Jesus Christ Alone*”
3. “Salvation is by *Faith Alone*”
4. “The only authority for faith and life are the *Scriptures Alone*”
5. “And everything is all to the *Glory of God Alone.*”

The group continues to grow and welcomes others to come join and participate in their studies and worship.

However, many of the congregation’s members keep leaving because they are found suitable for parole and have now rejoined their families. One special member who was particularly inspirational, Kenneth “Musa” Bailey, has since gone “home to be with the Lord.”

“Now that we’re established at San Quentin, we want to create a model for other prisons to build on the Reformed faith, and [we will] continue to serve the men of San Quentin with a life changing foundation,” Rodriguez said.

For those wishing to join them, services are held:

Tuesday afternoons during out-count starting at 2:30 p.m. in the “library room” of Chapel B to study the Bible and the “Institutes of the Christian Religion.”

Saturday mornings from 9-12 p.m. in Chapel B for a full liturgical worship service comprised of singing Psalms, prayers, catechisms, and discussions.

TECH

TABLETS ... WHO BENEFITS MOST?

PPI TAKES A CRITICAL LOOK AT TABLET PROGRAM

By Charles Crowe
Senior Editor

The Prison Policy Initiative says that profits of e-messaging vendors are taking precedence over the tablet-based messaging tool’s potential to enhance connections between incarcerated people and their families.

“These tablets are often touted as ‘free’ but, in reality, are rife with hidden costs,” wrote PPI in their report, “The rapid & unregulated growth of e messaging in prisons.”

“As tablets become more common, the companies providing them continue their relentless push to monetize every aspect of incarcerated peoples’ communications, reading, listening to music, and formal education,” said the report.

The group describes the proliferation of the tool within prisons as “explosive and unregulated” and the product itself as “shoddy technology.”

E-messaging is present in the federal system and at least 43 state prison systems, according to PPI.

Just a few vendors control the prison e-messaging market. Securus, branded as JPay, holds contracts in 22 states. GTL, also known as ViaPath, provides the service to another 15 states. Together, the two giants of the industry control 81% of the market. Another significant player is CorrLinks, a service provider associated with the Keefe Group family of correctional vendors.

These vendors have pivoted from telephone services, where pressure from advocates and regulators to lower prices has cut into profits, to the less regulated e-messaging niche.

The resulting product compares poorly with email, reports PPI. The group named a series of “common flaws in e-messaging that make it an inferior product.”

Those flaws include: no support for most attachments, no support for text and form-based documents, inability to share news stories and links, lack of support for non-English characters, unnecessary character limits, and questions about information ownership, wrote PPI.

The privacy of incarcerated users of e-messaging, as well as that of their outside contacts, is one of PPI’s key concerns.

“The quantity and sensitivity of information captured in e-messaging systems — from people on both sides of the prison walls — is staggering,” wrote the group.

The data includes names, addresses, credit card information and the contents of the messages. Venders provide very little information to users about how their data is stored, protected, or even used.

JPay’s privacy policy says it may share the data “with law enforcement personnel and/or correctional facilities and certain third parties for use in connection with and in support of law enforcement activities.”

GTL/ViaPath describes the capabilities of its service more boldly, promoting its product to correctional officials as a data-mining technology to “enable correctional facilities to easily review and analyze the networks, relationships, and connections associated with their inmate population.”

PPI’s concern is that users of the product, whether inside or outside prisons, don’t know



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

who can see or use their information and have no assurance that it won’t be improperly accessed. They are subjects of a “surveillance tool that targets people based on nothing more than their contact with an incarcerated person,” wrote the group.

Another concern of PPI is the cost of e-messages to incarcerated users and their outside contacts. Those costs range widely, from no charge per message in Connecticut, to fifty cents in Alaska and Arkansas.

The fifty-cent cost seems tied roughly to the cost of a first-class stamp and that serves as its justification. PPI wrote, “The price of a stamp has nothing to do with the

cost of providing electronic messages, so there is little justification for tying the two products together.”

In some systems, both the incarcerated user and the outside contact pay a fee for the same message. In other cases, vendors charge incarcerated users a rate per minute to read incoming or compose outgoing e-messages, similar to a telephone charge.

Correctional facilities stand to realize substantial savings from e-messaging, wrote the organization, and those savings should be used to foot the bill for the system.

Therefore, PPI argues that the service should be free to incarcerated users and their outside contacts.

AI TECH MISIDENTIFIES: FACIAL RECOGNITION LEADS TO MAN'S WRONGFUL ARREST

By Simeon Alexander
Journalism Guild Writer

The misuse of facial recognition technology has led to the arrest of innocent people. One such case involved Robert Williams, who was jailed based on misidentification by facial recognition technology, according to *Blavity*.

In 2018, a store security camera in Detroit captured a person stealing. It was then analyzed by AI facial-recognition software, leading to the arrest of Williams two years later.

“The day I was arrested I had no idea it was facial recognition. I was arrested for no reason,” Williams told *Newsweek*.

But there was a problem—the reliance on AI technology led to the wrongful jailing of Williams, with him being apprehended in front of his wife and two young daughters. He said he wasn’t told why he was being arrested, even while being detained for 30 hours.

After the wrongful arrest, Detroit’s Chief of Police James E. White, stated, “There are a number of checks and balances in place to ensure ethical use of facial recognition, including: use on live or recorded video is prohibited; supervisor oversight; and weekly and annual reporting to the Board of Police Commissioners on the use of the software.”

However, Alex Najibi at Harvard University noted that advocates fear that AI technology will unfairly affect African Americans and

is reminiscent of antebellum practices of identification of Blacks. “In 18th century New York, ‘lantern laws’ required enslaved people to carry lanterns after dark to be publicly visible,” Najibi wrote.

She explained that such technologies, even if accurate, could be “applied with the same spirit, disproportionately harming the Black community in line with existing racist patterns of law enforcement.”

In March, legislation was introduced that would prevent government officials from using AI tech to solve crimes. It is called the Facial Recognition and Biometric Technology Moratorium Act.

In response to Williams’ case, the Michigan chapter of ACLU demanded that police stop using AI tech to solve crimes.

Williams was released two weeks prior to his trial and his case was dismissed without prejudice, meaning it can be reopened in the future. He is now suing the Detroit Police Department for both the embarrassment and the trauma endured during his arrest.

“We know that facial recognition technology threatens everyone’s privacy by turning everybody into a suspect,” said Phil Mayor, senior staff attorney for the ACLU of Michigan. “We’ve repeatedly urged the Detroit Police Department to abandon its use of this dangerous technology, but it insists on using it anyhow. Justice requires that DPD and its officers be held accountable.”

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TECHNOLOGY PT 2

By Sherman K. Newman
Contributing Writer

The past couple years have seen Artificial Intelligence become an increasingly common topic in our mainstream news. Its rapid growth and seemingly limitless potential will no doubt impact our lives in countless ways. Platforms like OpenAI, Bard, and AI Research Labs continue to create AI models that outperform humans in similar tasks. The use of AI continues to spread as new companies emerge with their own AI models, revolutionizing a growing number of industries.

Understanding AI terminology and what this new technology can do will better equip you to find employment in a rapidly evolving job market. Let’s begin by talking about how AI chatbots work.

AI would not exist without the combined technologies of natural language processing and machine learning. Machine learning is the study of computer algorithms that improve automatically through experience and has been central to AI research since the field’s inception.

“Natural languages can take different forms, such as speech, singing, or writing; a natural language or ordinary language is any language that has evolved naturally in humans through use and repetition without conscious planning or premeditation.

“Natural language processing is a field of computer science, artificial intelligence, and computational linguistics concerned with the interactions between computers and human (natural) languages and, in particular, concerned with programming computers to fruitfully process large natural language corpora,” according to [@Wikipedia/Natural Language Processing.html](#).

Popular AI models, like ChatGPT and GPT-4, are fine-tuned using a process called reinforcement learning with human feedback, also known as RLHF to produce responses that are better aligned with the user’s intent. RLHF gives the model a set of questions that

steer it to respond as a human would. Specifically, RLHF trains the large language model, known as LLM, to respond in the correct manner, inoffensively, ethically, and non-criminally.

GPT TECHNICAL REPORT MARCH 2023

Users of ChatGPT and similar models make requests in the form of an instruction or question called a prompt. For example, you could ask ChatGPT to create a resume, a project proposal, or even a poem.

Where do AI models get their information? The Internet, of course. AI engineers scrape the Internet for any content — text, images, video and audio — needed to train the AI’s main component, which is the LLM.

According to the GPT-4 Technical Report: “Large language models are being deployed in many domains of our lives ranging from browsing to voice assistants, and have potential for vast societal impacts.”

LLMs can be trained using a range of architectures and are not limited to transformer-based models. LLMs can process and produce various forms of sequential data, including assembling language, protein sequencers and chess games, extending beyond natural language applications alone.

“The role of complementary technologies remains to be seen, but maximizing the impact of LLMs appears contingent on integrating them with larger systems.”

“While the current focus is primarily on the generative capabilities of LLMs, it is important to note that these models can also be utilized for various tasks beyond text generation. For example, embedding from LLMs can be used for custom search applications, and LLMs can perform tasks such as summarization and classification where the context may be largely contained in the prompt.”

“It is essential to view LLMs as versatile building blocks for creating additional tools. Developing these tools and integrating them into systems will require time and possibly significant reconfiguration of existing pro-

TECH BLOCK 42

TECH TALK

This article introduced technical terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers. The definitions below offer additional clarification.

The term “corpora” was used in the context of a body of work, LLMs. Corpora is the plural of corpus: The writings or works of a particular kind or on a particular subject.

The phrase “general purpose technology” was used to describe AI technology as a contribution to society.

General-purpose technologies can affect an entire economy, usually at a national or global level. GPTs have the potential to drastically alter societies through their impact on pre-existing economic and social structures. Examples of other transformational technologies include the steam engine, railroad, interchangeable parts, electricity, electronics, material handling, mechanization, control theory (automation), the automobile, the computer, the Internet, and the blockchain.

cesses across various industries.”

The possibility that LLMs could be classified as a general-purpose technology requires LLMs to meet three criteria: improvement over time, pervasiveness throughout the economy, and the ability to spawn complementary innovations.

LLMs on their own can have pervasive impacts across the economy, and complementary innovations enabled by LLMs — particularly via software and digital tools — can have widespread application to economic activity.”

Hopefully this article has helped to demystify some of AI’s complexity, or at least sparked an interest in wanting to learn more. We’ve only scratched the surface.

NEW DATA TOOL TO SPEED UP RESENTENCING

By Rahan Asaan
Journalism Guild Writer

A new technology under development aims to make safe prison releases more efficient, reported *KCRA*.

The non-AI, data-driven tool would automate the process of reviewing an incarcerated person’s rehabilitation files as part of “second-chance” laws that allow county prosecutors to recommend post-conviction resentencing, which often triggers the person’s release from prison.

The technology is being developed by the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab in collaboration with the nonprofit group For the People. The technology will be first put to use in a pilot program in Yolo County, where District Attorney Jeff Reisig has already completed the successful resentencing of 15 people, with the agreement of victims.

However, Reisig said an incarcerated person’s files can take a prosecutor upwards of a dozen hours to process and review.

“This program will do it in a click of a button,” Reisig said. “This program from UC Berkeley will increase the speed of the process, save taxpayer dollars and hopefully result in more cases being considered.”

Examples of cases considered for resentencing include serious crimes committed when a person was a juvenile or older drug charges, the report noted.

Nina Salarno Besselman, president of Crime Victims United, said she supports the data automation and also wants to make sure victims’ wishes are taken into consideration in any resentencing.

Reisig emphasized that he is a supporter of victim’s rights and public safety, and the new tool makes sense under those considerations.

“I’m one of those loud voices saying, ‘We’re letting too many people out from prison who are not rehabilitated.’ I’m one of those voices who’ve said zero bail has been a bad policy, and I haven’t been shy about that. This is a different take. This is a different policy,” he said.

EDUCATION



Archive photo,

PRISON CODING PROGRAM CONTINUES NATIONAL EXPANSION AND CHANGING LIVES

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

A program called The Last Mile is training incarcerated people to write computer code and helping them to find excellent jobs when released.

The California-based program started at San Quentin State Prison in 2010 and has expanded to six other states. The program teaches computer coding to the incarcerated, while another part of its mission is to help graduates find good jobs when they are released, says a *Marketplace Morning Report* article.

At the Indiana Women’s Prison, Ashley Wallace had already completed other training programs, but found the idea of learning coding appealing. She viewed coding as another job skill she could use when released. She claimed the classes were hard and said, “I wanted to quit a few times, but I pushed through and made it. And I’m actually really glad I did.”

A current student in the program, Tonika Stewart, said she knew it was up to her to make the best of her time in prison. She claimed that she

liked “how they trained you,” and reported she was drawn to the fact that “upon your release, they help you find a job.”

Three years ago, Molly Rowe graduated from The Last Mile and is out of prison, living in California, and working for the program helping fellow graduates with re-entry. On a recent visit back to the prison, she told students, “We will do everything we can to help you get to the goals that you want.”

It can be difficult for people coming out of prison to find meaningful work with decent pay. Often prison-training programs are not the best, said the article. States need to offer training in fields with “real career potential,” said Margaret diZerega of the Vera Institute of Justice.

Women prisons generally offer fewer courses and often in lower-paying fields. Acquiring lucrative post-incarceration work is especially important for women, since many support young children, the June 27, 2023 article noted.

The Last Mile reported that many of its graduates now work in tech jobs.

TUTORING

Continued from page 1

addressed in the traditional curriculum,” a school statement said.

The program has changed the lives of many incarcerated students who struggle academically. It has helped some students whose hearing impairments have affected their communication skills. The program has also helped students with language barriers.

Tutors like Vanessa acknowledge that the experience of tutoring incarcerated students has helped her in expanding her vocabulary in Spanish and American Sign Language. “In any tutoring session, I am there to provide some academic knowledge,” she said. “When tutoring incarcerated people, I know they will often have more to teach me about life than I could teach them about academia.”

Chris Ying now works as an officially assigned facilitator of TIP at San Quentin. He said that the program teaches him patience, especially in the presence of language barriers. It also teaches him humility by recognizing his privilege as a Berkeley student; and finally, it teaches him empathy by showing him firsthand the incarcerated students working at self-improvement.

“I learned to read better and understand academic language better,” said Juan Camargo, a San Quentin resident and student. “Being tutored gives me the confidence to explore the assignments at hand.”

For many incarcerated students who never had the chance to attend grade school in their homeland, the anxiety and fear of failure increases if they do not understand English. According to incarcerated

TEACH IN PRISONS, A STUDENT RUN PROGRAM RETURNS AFTER LONG PAUSE

ated student Moises Simon Ramirez, the Berkeley tutors have taught him to pronounce words properly, to spell and to read aloud in a class setting. Prior to TIP, he could not imagine doing any of this.

San Quentin teacher A. Stanciu said that not all of her students have reached the same level and many of them need extra support to build their confidence. Stanciu, who grew up in Romania, understands the plight of non-native English speakers. She appreciates the presence of the Berkeley tutors.

“I have definitely noticed improvement, especially an increase in self-confidence when interacting during class,” said Stanciu. “Many students are English learners who are terrified of making mistakes when speaking in front of others. Interacting with the tutors has increased my students’ language production, the use of correct grammar and increased academic vocabulary.”

Jacob explained that one

According to Robert E. Burton Adult School Principal M. Wheelless, the next cycle of tutoring will commence in early September. Wheelless said that the program has the goal “to provide opportunities for the students to interact with members of the outside community in a pro-social manner to facilitate teaching and learning in our academic classrooms.”

During the spring, TIP had approximately 30 Berkeley students participating. The program expects to increase that number to 40 in September.

Tutors like Jacob recognize the many challenges that language barriers impose upon non-English speakers in classrooms. “It is not so much that people are difficult to teach, but the curriculum is not delivered with the students in mind. It’s not that the students are illiterate or can’t comprehend, it’s just that they don’t speak English,” said Jacob.

Jacob explained that one

of the biggest differences between teaching incarcerated students and non-incarcerated students is that tutors keep their guard up and “don’t get overly familiar.” A fear of getting the student or the program into trouble — from something as little as getting to know the person they are tutoring — makes teaching unnecessarily stressful, he said.

TIP has not only changed the lives of the incarcerated students, but also of the incarcerated teacher’s assistants — incarcerated persons who work side by side with students and instructors.

“Nothing is as important as one’s education,” said Ethan “Dutch” Taylor, a San Quentin resident and teacher’s assistant. “For the vast majority of those incarcerated, acquiring an education is critical to their future success — or at least their future decisions will be informed ones, and they will be stripped of the crutch of ignorance.”



Dao Ong // SQnews



The article was co-published with the Prison Journalism Project.

“You find the measure of slope by dividing the change in the two Y points, by the change in the two X points.” I said as I helped a student study for his math exam.

He shook his head. “I’m not going to get this,” he said, discouraged. “This is not making sense.”

This kind of struggle with math is something I see every day as a GED tutor at the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Stillwater.

“Have you ever considered requesting an accommodation?” I asked.

“What’s an accommodation?” was his reply.

This student is one of the many people incarcerated in the Minnesota Department of Corrections who have not only been denied access to extra supports like extended testing time or having text read aloud to them, but also didn’t even know they might qualify. That’s a serious problem.

The number of incarcerated students who qualify for the help isn’t tracked. But people in state and federal prisons (38%) are about two and a half times more likely to report a disability than adults in the U.S. general population (15%).

About a quarter of the nearly 8,000 people incarcerated in Minnesota were enrolled in education and were eligible to attain their GED as of July 2022. But only 19 requests for GED accommodations had been submitted in the state

since 2017, according to the federal Justice Department.

And that’s despite the fact that correctional staff — interviewed by DOJ as part of a four-year civil rights investigation — said the majority of their students may have disabilities. All of those 19 requests came from one teacher at one facility. There are nine other prisons in Minnesota where students received no accommodation at all.

The fact is, as a GED tutor, I don’t know how many of the men I work with would be eligible for accommodation, but I expect the number is much, much higher than the number who actually get the support they need.

In September 2022, the DOJ found that the Minnesota corrections department violated the rights of incarcerated students with disabilities by denying them opportunities to receive GED accommodations. In mid-February, Minnesota reached an agreement with the Justice Department that it would revise its policies and procedures, hire an American Disability Act compliance officer and educate incarcerated individuals on the new policies and their rights. The department will also pay over \$70,000 in compensatory damages to individuals with disabilities who were denied accommodations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act says that people in prison can’t be excluded from regular programming because of disabilities. While the Justice Department noted that Minnesota generally allowed qualified individuals with disabilities to enroll or

participate in GED programs, it found that the DOC unlawfully denied them an equal opportunity to benefit from the program by failing to provide necessary reasonable accommodations.

Here’s why the GED is so significant in Minnesota: It has become a gatekeeper in the DOC for people to get access to higher paying jobs, learning a trade, and pursuing higher education. It will become even more important later this year as college programs will begin expanding in the facilities with the return of Pell Grants.

However, it doesn’t have to be that way. Official policy allows us to work a job and go to school to attain their GED simultaneously. But in reality, if you apply for a job you’ll probably get denied and referred to education. Nobody is allowing guys to do both. Many people have been trapped in this revolving cycle throughout their incarceration, to the point that they get released without a credential. This contributes to their inability to find a sustainable career upon release, and it may even lead to them returning to prison.

Identifying disabilities

Although I welcome the changes that might come with the Justice Department’s settlement, there’s more that can be done. Many people don’t know what an accommodation is because they don’t know what qualifies as a disability. We could start to address this by educating students on their rights, as well as on disabilities.

Students’ disabilities aren’t

being acknowledged and they are forced to continue education on a playing field where they’re at a disadvantage. There’s no equality for people who are feeling discouraged every time they fail a test, and don’t even realize why they’re failing, or that proper assistance is available for them. I often see guys lose hope that they’ll ever earn their GED. By the time this happens, they’ve mentally given up on themselves when in reality, it’s the system that gave up on them.

To be eligible for accommodations on the GED test, a student must provide recent documentation of a diagnosis. Oftentimes, people who might qualify don’t have access to those records in prison. In addition, people sometimes develop disabilities after they are incarcerated. Someone might spend over a year in solitary confinement for a rule violation. Throughout that time, they can develop anxiety, depression, or PTSD. If that disorder hasn’t been documented, they won’t qualify for the modifications.

And, students currently have to rely on teachers to submit the accommodation request, and in some cases, determine if they should receive the extra help. One education director told the Justice Department that she considered people disabled only if they did not have “hands or arms, or are blind or deaf.”

These teachers and administrators aren’t psychologists. We’re in a controlled environment under constant surveillance, which makes it challenging for the teacher to

identify if the student is actually displaying symptoms stemming from an intellectual or psychological disability, or is just being “defiant.”

And it can be particularly difficult for students with cognitive disabilities — which includes things like dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder — since those things aren’t as obvious. Nationally, about a quarter of state prisoners reported having a cognitive disability, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

Accommodations work

Cole DeGroot, a student I tutored, is an example of someone who was successful when he was given the necessary accommodations. He’s one of the few able to receive this kind of assistance on GED tests because he’s had a formal diagnosis and has been in special education since he was a kid. He was allowed more testing time and had his test read aloud to him.

“It helped me out a lot,” he told me. “I have a hard time reading, so it was good to have someone read it to me and give me more time to understand what I’m doing.”

DeGroot is a great example why accommodations are paramount for students with disabilities. His success has motivated him to go further in education and employment — options that would not have been available without secondary education.

Instead of asking someone if they have a disability, staff should consider asking if they’ve ever been diagnosed with ADHD, depression, or anxiety. Asking if someone

has a hard time staying focused while reading would also help identify students who might benefit from additional assistance.

Students should also be allowed to request a 504 Plan even if they do not qualify for an individual education plan, according to Eunha Jeong Wood, a former special education teacher and current college professor at the Minnesota Correctional Facility at Stillwater. The plan allows them to receive accommodations without a special education evaluation if they are seeking specific accommodations and have a medical diagnosis.

Another major change Minnesota could make is offering alternatives to the GED program, such as a high school diploma or an adult diploma, at all facilities. Those options allow students to demonstrate their knowledge without a high-pressure test, opening up multiple paths to academic success.

With the settlement agreement in place, we’re expecting to see a significant change in our education department at Stillwater, and hopefully throughout the Minnesota Department of Corrections. My hope is that teachers, administrators, and especially students can not only learn what an accommodation is, but also actually receive them.

Donovan Diego is a tutor in the education department at the Minnesota Correctional Facility at Stillwater. He’s earning a bachelor’s degree in education with a focus in special education at Metro State University.



Photos by Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

Por Willy Alarcón
Spanish Journalism Guild y
Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism Chair

Después de una ausencia de dos años por la pandemia, el Día De La Paz regresó a San Quentin a toda pompa.

El evento comenzó temprano, trayendo largas filas de reclusos anticipando recibir sus bolsas de obsequios llenos de aperitivos, gracias a la compañía Walkenhorst.

El Director de la prisión, Ron Broomfield y la Oficial Ejecutiva de Medicina, Alison Pachynski formaban parte de los voluntarios que se organizaron para servir a las multitudes que con gozo se presentarían.

Este evento es único entre todas las prisiones de California.

Muchos grupos de autoayuda estaban presentes, con sonrisas en las caras. Todo el día estuvo lleno de actividades: música, deportes, información y alegre compañerismo. Estas actividades unieron a los reos, los voluntarios y la administración.

El evento oficialmente dio inicio con la ceremonia a la bandera por los guardas de color de San Quentin, seguido por el grupo de nativos americanos que contribuyó con cantos. El residente Gregory “White Eagle” Coates ofreció una oración.

El residente de San Quentin, Michael Wickered inició el evento dando una breve explicación de cómo llegó a existir el Día de La Paz en San Quentin.

“Yo quiero compartirles por qué se comenzó el Día De La Paz. En el 2006, un tumulto racial se desató aquí mismo en esta pequeña yarda”, dijo Wickered. “Un grupo de hombres, de todo origen se unió aquí mismo, la mayoría de ellos vidales – y hoy la mayoría están en libertad condicional”.

Para cerrar, nos ofreció esta reflexión, “Nosotros, como comité del Día De La Paz, estamos comprometidos a detener toda la violencia que plaga el sistema de la prisión y nuestras comunidades. Estoy orgulloso de cada uno de ustedes por hacerse presentes hoy.”

La yarda se organizó con muchas mesas, representando

los 40 grupos de autoayuda disponibles, haciéndolo un día inolvidable e informativo para los miles de reos que asistieron.

Los invitados representantes contribuyeron con su tiempo, dando panfletos y hablando con los interesados.

“Me inspiré al ver tanta alegría y compañerismo entre los prisioneros”, dijo Andrés Ruiz, un reo de San Quentin. “Todo el evento fue una oportunidad para mostrar unos a otros, que gozamos de un día de música, arte, y solidaridad celebrando el Día de Paz”.

El residente Luis Alvarez, durante su observación del Día De La Paz, dijo, “Me inspiré ... mirar todas las oportunidades de grupos en los que nos podemos inscribir para sobresalir.”

El director de la prisión Ron Broomfield reconoce la necesidad de la comunidad de habla hispana en el futuro.

“Vemos este evento y comparamos con el modelo de rehabilitación. Hay retos y el espacio [físico] limitado es uno de esos retos”. Broomfield aclaró, “Hay algo para todos en esta comunidad. Hay acceso a programas.”

La comunidad de habla hispana estuvo presente en el evento con la presentación del grupo musical La Quinta Tira. Ellos trajeron su propio sabor de rock en español, haciendo que todos menearan las cabezas y aplaudieran con la contagiosa canción “Oye mi amor”.

El rapero afroamericano Discreet trajo el ritmo que provocó a muchos de los residentes a pararse y danzar con sus rimas.

En seguida el joven Emilio cantó música con un mensaje muy positivo y religioso. Impulsó a todos a tomar nota y moverse rítmicamente.

Concluyó su acto con un dinámico mensaje, retando a todo oyente a recibir a Jesús como su único Salvador.

Cerrando esta porción fue el poderoso desafío por la Sra. Natalie Tovar, relatando cómo sufrió abuso físico, trauma por la muerte de su hermano y estuvo al punto de tomar su propia vida antes de ser llamada por Jesús para su salvación.

Ella retó a toda persona, a encontrar la esperanza misma que ella encontró en Jesús.

Este día de inclusión y paz fue muy especial para la comunidad con discapacidades auditivas y del habla, quienes fueron asistidos por los intérpretes, como la Sra. Deanna Sardo, para que pudieran experimentar la música y ser partícipes de todo el evento.

La comunidad asiática americana de las Islas Pacíficas (AAPI, en inglés) apoyaron también, trayendo música y cantando su cultura, formando parte de esta comunidad única en San Quentin. El grupo interpretó su número folclórico conocido como el baile “Haka”.

La representante del programa Libre Para Tener Éxito (Free to Succeed, en inglés) nos persuadió diciendo, “Solo quiero que más gente aprenda a leer y escribir, ese es mi objetivo”.

Cerró su discurso animando, “A las personas que no conocen ni el alfabeto y se les hace muy difícil admitirlo, nosotros les decimos “¡métese a este programa!” Ofrecemos el programa en español”.

“Es bueno poder poner las caras con los nombres y escuchar sus historias,” dijo Vanessa Collins, cofundadora de Consciencia Sobre El Abuso Doméstico (AIDA en inglés). “AIDA está trabajando en traducir nuestros cursos y proveerlos en español. El poder comunicarnos con ellos en español es nuestra visión”.

Mick Garner, el Director Ejecutivo del programa, No Mas Lagrimas (No More Tears, en inglés), nos dijo que está trabajando en versiones de su programa en español. “La idea de la paz se está filtrando por medio de la institución a todos”, dijo él.

El grupo irlandés “Sean Daly & the Shams” subió al escenario al atardecer.

“No tengo palabras que decir. Estoy boquiabierto”, dijo entre su set de música. “La primera vez que vine aquí, estuve tan lleno de emociones que no pude hablar por casi dos horas”.

Muchos de los residentes se llevaron el sentido de esperanza. Norman “Bugs” Johnson dijo que él no se había dado cuenta de la cantidad de programas de autoayuda disponible en San Quentin. “El evento fue maravilloso. Nunca había experimentado nada como esto”, dijo él.



La población de San Quentin llenó el patio recreativo para disfrutar de varios grupos musicales, tales como Discreet (por encima), Sean Daly & Los Shams (arriba), el grupo de isleños del pacífico bailando el típico “Haka” (siguiendo abajo), el grupo residencial “La Quinta Tira” (abajo a mano derecha) y el rapero Cristiano “Emilio” (abajo a mano izquierda).



MÚSICOS DE MUCHO TALENTO CONTAGIAN CON ALEGRÍA A SAN QUENTIN

Por Aristeo Sampablo e
Idalio Villagrán
Spanish Journalism
Guild Writers

Con las guitarras en las manos y la voz entonada, encuentran sanación en el paso a su rehabilitación.

Es una tarde como cualquier otra, Los amigos de Rancho están reunidos y afinando sus guitarras para traer un poco de alegría a los residentes de San Quentin.

Resonando sus instrumentos y dándole un toque único a sus guitarras, sus voces alimentan el alma y los sentimientos, tanto como los recuerdos inolvidables de la comunidad de diversas nacionalidades de habla hispana.

La pasión de su canto se hace evidente al poner al viento la canción “La Indita”; una canción que se refiere a una joven quien vendía flores en la estación del tren y un joven pasajero que se enamoró de ella. Después de un tiempo, el joven la fue a buscar pero ella ya no estaba viva.

Ella solo le había dejado un ramo de flores con una anciana, quien le preguntó, ¿“porque estás triste”? El le respondió, “es que no encuentro a la indita de mi vida”.

Los integrantes del grupo se conocieron en el transcurso del tiempo de estar en prisión y hoy día deleitan a la comunidad de San Quentin. En las mesas del patio recreativo, unos se encuentran jugando dominó, ajedrez, y cartas; otros están haciendo ejercicio y los demás presentes, relajándose con tan hermosa música.

El tejano (Armando ‘El tejano’ Romayor) fue el prim-



Los amigos de rancho con alegría entonan dulces melodías en el patio de recreo de San Quentin.

ero del grupo que empezó a tocar la guitarra y a cantar canciones. Luego Mazi (Demetrio ‘Mazi’ Yebra) fue el segundo en integrarse con Tejano. Enseguida, El Primo (Gabriel Chavez Torres) así como Moisés Ramos y entonces Enrique Sandoval.

El Mazi, Moisés y El Primo ya se conocían desde Arizona, allá estaban en la clase de guitarra en donde el primo cantaba.

Este talentoso grupo musical muchas veces es llamado “El Mariachi De San Quentin”, por personas que no se han enterado que según la *Enciclopedia de Música Mundial Garland*, la palabra “Mariachi” proviene de la palabra

francesa “Marriage”, que significa “boda o casamiento”.

Los documentos primarios reconociendo la existencia del “mariachi” solamente datan a mediados del centenario (siglo 19). Estos fueron encontrados en una carta escrita por un sacerdote en 1852; es un misterio que rodea el origen del mariachi.

Gabriel Chavez Torres de 44 años, originario de Colima México, nos compartió uno de sus lindos recuerdos, que en la casa de su mamá, tenían una consola con los discos grandes y él se ponía a bailar con su mamá. Además añadió; “la música me beneficia de muchas maneras, en lugar de estar fumando o to-

mando, o pensando cosas que no debo, mejor disfruto un buen momento juntos”.

Armando Romayor, de 72 años dijo, “una de las cosas en las que encuentro la calma y me hace olvidar cosas tristes, es ver cómo la gente disfruta de nuestra música, me hace sentir bien”. El Tejano no solo toca la guitarra, el también toca el acordeón y el bajo eléctrico.

Demetrio Yedra de 43 años, nacido en Guanajuato México, nos cuenta que la música lo saca de la rutina, el encierro y lo hace recordar a seres queridos, como también remarcó, “me quita muchos pensamientos negativos; antes me dedicaba a tomar y andar

con amigos haciendo cosas malas, en cambio ahora me dedico a tocar música”.

Enrique Sandoval de 49 años proveniente de Jalisco México. Comparte su talento de cantar y también el de componer canciones, a su saber, él cuenta con unas 20 canciones compuestas. Él nos dijo, “También le canto a mi familia por el teléfono, no aguanto las ganas de que lleguen las tabletas”.

Moisés Ramos, de 38 años oriundo de Teuchitlán Jalisco, nos comentó que unidos por la música disfrutaban de momentos de paz y tranquilidad, también reconoce que Mazi fue el medio que de alguna manera juntó al grupo. Ramos cuenta

con cinco discos, con temas originales los cuales tienen: rancheras, baladas, cumbias, boleros y reggaetón. El también toca acordeón, el bajo y la tuba. Finalizó por decirnos; “Quiero agradecer a mi amigo y maestro de música que me acompañó 9 años, Raúl Aguayo, sin su ayuda no fuera el músico que soy ahora”.

Ponciano Martínez de 40 años originario de Hidalgo México, es uno de los muchos espectadores que disfrutaban de las canciones y nos dijo, “La música que ellos tocan, es una forma de expresar sus pensamientos, emociones e historias, para mí la música me hace recordar de donde soy”.

“A esos muchachos les gusta tocar y cantar música”, dijo Efraín Rojas de 64 años.

“En el patio de recreación tras las rejas alegría o nostalgia”, compartió Gerardo Mato de 65 años

“Es un grupo con mucho talento que alegran a las personas en las tardes”, compartió David Arias de 39 años.

“Una historia de superación en diferentes prisiones”, comentó Miguel Si-fuentes de 43 años.

“Son una inspiración. Yo fui parte de un concierto con ellos en la prisión de Arizona”, dijo Pablo Hernández de 50 años.

“Los Amigos De Rancho”, son un fenómeno. Todos los días que tienen la oportunidad de reunirse en el patio recreativo, están dispuestos a traer un poco de alegría a las vidas de los residentes de la prisión estatal de San Quentin.

—**Edwin E. Chavez**
Escritor contribuyente

SE DEMANDA JUSTICIA TRAS MALTRATO DE PRISIONEROS

Por Carlos Drouaillet
Staff writer

El maltrato de prisioneros provocó otra protesta enfrente del capitolio del estado en Austin, Texas.

Los promotores de leyes más justas, buscan un trato más humanitario para los prisioneros del Departamento de Justicia Criminal de Texas (TDCJ por sus siglas en inglés).

El aislamiento de prisioneros es una condición que impacta y empeora las condiciones de vida en las penitenciarías de Texas, según expresaron los protestantes congregados afuera del capitolio estatal, reporta el *Times-Review*.

La contenciosa multitud estaba integrada por representantes de los grupos de apoyo a la justicia criminal del estado, parientes de individuos encarcelados y residentes de la comunidad preocupados, quienes atrevidamente mostraron su apoyo por las propuestas de ley (HB por sus siglas en inglés), presentados en la Ochentaiochoava (88ª) Sesión Legislativa. Según los activistas, esas propuestas de ley mejorarán las condiciones de vida de los encarcelados.

Amite Dominick, fundadora y líder principal de la agrupación ‘Texas Prisons Community Advocates’ comentó, “Texas es la primera en el país — una vez más, estos son unos de sus trofeos — somos el líder nacional en la cantidad de tiempo que mantenemos a la gente en reclusión y en condiciones de aislamiento”.

Dominick añadió que su organización procura extender el programa de elegibilidad para recibir la libertad por compasión, que es el método utilizado para

aprobar prisioneros para una libertad condicional temprana, bajo condiciones confiables.

Una de las Propuestas de Ley más mencionada en la Ochentaiochoava Sesión Legislativa fue la propuesta HB 135 que trata del asunto del aire acondicionado, para asegurar que la temperatura ambiental se mantenga entre 65–85 °F, reporta *Times-Review*.

Actualmente en Texas, 70 de las 100 instituciones correccionales no tienen buen aire acondicionado, y otras 14 ni siquiera tienen servicio de aire acondicionado instalado.

Los representantes del TDCJ dijeron a los legisladores que durante el verano del 2022 solamente, Texas estuvo por muchos días con 100 °F o más, con una temperatura promedio entre 85–95 °F en el interior de sus centros de detención, según el artículo.

Margarita Hernández, una residente de Fort Worth que tiene un hijo que está cumpliendo una condena de 50 años a vida dijo, “Ellos les tratan como animales ... Estoy cansada de ver tanta injusticia en cómo son tratados”.

Aunque el costo de la instalación del aire acondicionado a los 100 centros de detención es de 1,100 millones; el Representante del Estado Carl Sherman, D-DeSoto y autor de la HB 135 dijo, Lo podemos hacer” añadiendo, “Todo depende de, si tenemos o no el corazón para hacerlo”.

De acuerdo con el artículo del 16 de febrero, Sherman explicó que el estado cuenta con \$55,000 millones en exceso de fondos, que fácilmente deberían y podrían ser utilizados para el potencial proyecto.

Las otras propuestas de ley im-

portantes y relevantes que tratan con limitaciones del confinamiento solitario, son la HB 480, HB 812 y la HB 813, todas escritas por el Representante Terry Meza, D-Irving. Los detalles de esas propuestas de ley son:

La HB 480 manda, que si un individuo es puesto en segregación administrativa, el TDCJ debe revisar la decisión cada semana para determinar si el individuo debe permanecer.

La HB 812 limita el uso de la segregación administrativa a tres días por mala conducta y 10 días por daños a otra persona.

La HB 813 requiere que el TDCJ coordine con el Departamento de Salud y Servicios Humanos de Texas para conducir un estudio en el impacto de la segregación administrativa en las instalaciones del TDCJ.

Otras Propuestas de Ley archivadas en la Ochentaiochoava Sesión Legislativa, buscan incentivos ya sea monetarios o de tiempo cumplido bajo buena conducta de acuerdo con las clases de autoayuda completadas para mejorar sus vidas después del encarcelamiento.

Sharon McKinney, directora ejecutiva de la Asociación de Familias de Prisioneros de Texas, ella misma una ex prisionera comentó, “La gente se merece una segunda oportunidad y la gente cambia”.

“Yo quiero que la gente sepa que podría ser un miembro de su familia. Quizás no el día de hoy, pero podría serlo, y ellos no quisieran que su pariente viva en las condiciones en las que nuestros familiares están viviendo”, concluyó McKinney, reporta *Cleburne Times-Review* 16 de febrero, 2023.

MUJERES ESTADOUNIDENSES PUEDEN SER VÍCTIMAS DE LAS ARMAS DE FUEGO

LAS CIFRAS INDICAN QUE SIGUE AUMENTANDO LA CANTIDAD DE VÍCTIMAS ANUALMENTE

Por Marco Antonio Munguía
Journalism Guild Writer

Entre los países industrializados, las mujeres en EE.UU. son más expuestas a ser víctimas mortales de las armas de fuego y el uso de estas armas en contra de las mujeres continúa aumentando en este país según *El Tiempo Latino*.

La ex congresista Gabrielle Giffords, víctima de un ataque armado, dirige la Organización Giffords que intenta salvaguardar vidas por crímenes a mano armada. Ella inició un informe que incluye números concernientes y métodos de solución.

Más de 600 mujeres al año mueren a manos de sus cónyuges.

Para algunos prisioneros en San Quentin, la violencia armada contra mujeres es un tema importante.

“Las mujeres son más vulnerables en ser víctimas especialmente cuando alguien las quiere robar”, dijo Daniel García, un prisionero de San Quentin. “En muchas ocasiones unas mujeres no están físicamente fuertes para defenderse contra abuso de un hombre”.

Una de esas víctimas Dani Robinson explicó “La violencia doméstica sigue siendo un secreto en demasiadas familias y comunidades. Debemos hablar de ello y no solo usar las palabras ‘violencia doméstica’. Necesitamos discutir qué es realmente la violencia doméstica ... y hablar sobre las amenazas emocionales y las cicatrices mentales que las acompañan.”

De acuerdo con el FBI, el 55.9% de las muertes que son perpetradas entre parejas íntimas, son usando armas de fuego.

Cerca de 4.5 millones de mujeres

han sufrido amenazas con armas de fuego de parte de sus parejas.

En los estados con limitado control sobre las armas de fuego, las mujeres corren cinco veces más el riesgo de morir a manos de su pareja.

En cambio en los estados con leyes más restrictivas sobre las armas de fuego, registraron 16% menos homicidios con armas de fuego entre cónyuges según la publicación del American Journal of Epidemiology.

En nuestras comunidades y en nuestras familias, continúa siendo tabú hablar de violencia doméstica. Tenemos que confrontarla y discutirla.

El camino más claro en esta situación para acabar con este problema es tener mejores controles en la oportunidad de la compra y posesión de un arma de fuego.

Esto es parte del trabajo del Congreso ya que este año dictó y aprobó una ley, promovida por los demócratas, que hace más fuerte la verificación de antecedentes de los jóvenes al comprar armas de fuego y pide a los estados promulgar mayores y más leyes para identificar a las personas que han sido denunciadas por abuso doméstico y por eso negarles la compra legal de armas de fuego.

Un estudio importante afirma que el 71% de los estadounidenses están de acuerdo en que las compras de armas de fuego deberían ser más restringidas.

Personas que sepan de una víctima de violencia doméstica deben llamar la Línea Directa Nacional de Violencia Doméstica al 1-800-799-7223 o pueden hacerlo en el chat en the hotline.org.

SQ A'S WIN ON A DAY HISTORY IS MADE

SPORTS

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

An institutional recall thwarted the San Quentin A's double header on June 17, 2023, causing the team to walk off the field and settle for one victory against the Southern California baseball team, Team Victory. The SQ A's defeated the visitors 15-5 in a crushing game.

Team Victory, made of 13 visitors from across the state, earned their plays and runs through the infield to avoid the A's no-fly zone in the outfield.

"We stuck to the fundamentals of the game, and by doing so they just played into our favor," said A's left-fielder Chris Gawron.

Several of the outside team members had visited the prison before, but it was Team Victory's Coach Bob's first time bringing in his entire family to play.

"I thought it would be a good thing to bring my daughter in," said Bob. "She [Shea] plays softball out there and she knows the game. My wife and I have a baseball family. We love coming here."

It was the SQ A's first time having a woman play the outfield and hit a fastball thrown by A's star pitcher Jeff "Dewey" Dumont, making history. Shea hit a pop fly that landed in the hands of A's first base-



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

San Quentin A's players patiently waiting in their dugout as they relish a humble moment of victory.

man Everett Wiley, and later returned the favor when she caught Wiley's own pop fly.

"She [Shea] was a baller and she played her position well. It ended up becoming a double play," Wiley said.

Gawron agrees. "She's a heck of a ball player. And she played as good as any other

second basemen that I've seen since I've been a part of the A's here at San Quentin. Next time, I'm trying to hit everywhere she's not," he said.

Another woman played in an A's game during the 2017-18 season, but she only came to bat. She hit a fly ball to the outfield, according to long-

time A's coach Rob Tyler.

Team Victory pitcher Dylan Hunt could not stop the A's players from roping his fastballs down the line and out to the fence that partitions the yard from the education building. Gawron hit the first "hot-gapping ball" to deep center with two men on base,

driving in the A's first two runs that got the game off to a fast start.

"When all of us are hitting on all cylinders, we see the ball and we hit. It's that simple. Working together as a team, we have the capabilities to be the best," said Gawron, who went three-for-three.

"I thought it would be a good thing to bring my daughter in. She plays softball out there and she knows the game. My wife and I have a baseball family. We love coming here."

—Coach Bob

Although Team Victory leftfielder Doug Thigpen went three-for-four with two doubles, a single, and driving in runners on base, it was not enough to put his team in running distance to catch up with the A's.

Robyn — wife to Coach Bob — and her entourage enjoyed the game from Team Victory bullpen, cheering every time her team and kids made a play. Bob made an impressive hit down the right field line with runners on base, and their son Tanner made two diving plays at third base to suppress the ball.

A's starting pitcher "Dewey" Dumont threw over 150 pitches, leading his team to victory.

"You know you didn't have to pitch the whole game," stated a supporting Team Victory player, prompting laughter from both teams.

NBA WRAPS UP SPECTACULAR SEASON: TOP TALENT DRAFTED, BRINGING NEW EXCITEMENT

All four California NBA basketball teams made it to the post-season this year, turning in some impressive performances. Unfortunately, not one of them made it to the Finals as the Denver Nuggets swept through and won their first Championship title after almost five decades of struggle.

The number one-seeded Denver Nuggets represented the West in the Championship against the number eight seed from the East — the Miami Heat. The Finals featured two of the best players in the West, Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray, sparring with two of the East's best players, Jimmy Butler and Bam Adebayo.

However, it was Denver player Aaron Gordon who gave the unstoppable Nuggets' duo the help they needed to grab victory in the series over the Heat in game 5.

It took 47 years for the Nuggets to get a Championship, the first in its franchise history. The team celebrated after the victory on the court with their family and friends.

Jokic received the Finals' MVP trophy, but it was all the starters and the bench players who collectively put in the work to get the wins. Jokic was quick to acknowledge his teammates, leaving the MVP trophy at the podium for the team to share.

Re-Cap: Before Denver won the West and the Finals, it was the Los Angeles Lakers who claimed the California crown over the defending champs, the Golden State Warriors.

When the Lakers and Warriors met up in the recent past, it was the Warriors who came out on top when it mattered. But this season LeBron James and Anthony Davis were not going to allow the defending champs from Northern Cali to rob them of the opportunity to advance to

2023 NBA DRAFT PICKS:

FIRST ROUND PICKS

- 1: Victor Wembanyama – San Antonio Spurs (Center)
- 2: Brandon Miller – Charlotte Hornets (Strong Forward)
- 3: Scoot Henderson – Portland Trail Blazers (Point Guard)
- 4: Amen Thompson – Houston Rockets (Point Guard)
- 5: Ausar Thompson – Detroit Pistons (Strong Forward)
- 6: Antony Black – Orlando Magic (Point Guard/Shooting)
- 7: Bilal Coulibaly – Indiana Pacers, traded to Washington (Strong Forward)
- 8: Jarace Walker – Washington Wizards, traded to Pacers (Power Forward)
- 9: Taylor Hendricks – Utah Jazz (Power Forward)
- 10: Cason Wallace – Dallas Mavericks, traded to Oklahoma (Point Guard)
- 11: Jett Howard – Orlando Magic, from Chicago (Strong Forward)
- 12: Dereck Lively II – Oklahoma City Thunder, traded to Dallas (Center)
- 13: Gradey Dick – Toronto Raptors (Shooting Guard)
- 14: Jordan Hawkins – New Orleans Pelicans (Shooting Guard)
- 15: Kobe Bufkin – Atlanta Hawks (Shooting Guard)
- 16: Keyonte George – Utah Jazz, from Minnesota (Shooting Guard)
- 17: Jalen Hood-Schifino – Lakers (Point Guard/Shooting)
- 18: Jaime Jaquez Jr. – Miami Heat (Strong Forward/Guard)
- 19: Brandon Podziemski – Golden State Warriors (Shooting Guard)
- 20: Cam Whitmore – Houston Rockets, from LA Clippers (Strong Forward)
- 21: Noah Clowney – Brooklyn Nets, from Phoenix (Power Forward)
- 22: Dariq Whitehead – Brooklyn Nets (Strong Forward)
- 23: Kris Murray – Portland, from New York (Power Forward)
- 24: Oliver-Maxence Prosper – Sacramento Kings, traded to Dallas (Forward)
- 25: Marcus Sasser – Memphis Grizzlies, traded to Detroit (Shooting/Point Guard)
- 26: Ben Sheppard – Indiana Pacers, from Cleveland (Shooting Guard)
- 27: Nick Smith Jr. – Charlotte Hornets, from Denver (Point/Shooting Guard)
- 28: Brice Sensabaugh – Utah Jazz, from Philadelphia (Strong Forward)
- 29: Julian Strawther – Indiana Pacers, traded to Denver (Strong Forward)
- 30: Kobe Brown – LA Clippers, from Milwaukee (Shooting Guard)

2ND ROUND (CALIFORNIA TEAMS)

- 38: Jordan Walsh – Sacramento (Strong Forward)
- 47: Mojave King – LA Lakers, traded to Indiana (Shooting Guard)
- 48: Jordan Miller – LA Clippers (Strong Forward)
- 54: Jalen Slawson – Sacramento (Strong Forward)
- 57: Trayce Jackson-Davis – Traded to Golden State (Power Forward)



the Western conference finals. The Lakers wore the champs down with a relentless effort to win in seven games.

Before the Warriors fell to the Lakers, they had some stiff competition when they were challenged by the upstart Sacramento Kings. The Kings had not made it to the playoffs in almost 18 years, and their young group of talented players gave the Warriors a run for their money.

The series went all the way to game seven where the Warriors earned an upset victory over the Kings in Sacramento.

The final California team, the LA Clippers, were knocked out in the first round by the Phoenix Suns real quick in an underreported series that went by like a blur.

Of course, after earning the California crown, the Lakers got swept by the Denver Nuggets. In

that series, Jokic and Murry put up historic numbers, breaking post-season records for the most triples and doubles stats.

Wrap Up: As a die-hard Warriors and overall team California fan, I must tip my hat to a team from the West who has now proven they are high-ranking squad ready and able to compete at the top of the game with the big dawgs — congrats Denver!

—Timothy Hicks

SQ WELCOMES NEW MEMBER TO THE TENNIS CLUB

OAKLAND NATIVE DEE DANIELS
FIRED UP ON BECOMING A MEMBER

April 8 was Dee Daniels', 58, first time coming to San Quentin Prison since he became a member of the outside tennis team that is frequently escorted into the prison by longtime volunteer Pat Leog.

The outside team frequents the prison weekly to challenge SQ's tennis club that puts up competitive matches. But this day was special to Daniels because the courts were nothing like what he expected.

"I play a lot of tennis," Daniels said while sitting on the sideline with his back against the chain-link fence that encompasses the court, observing the match taking place between some of his team members and the inside club members. "I was thinking that the courts here would be some of the worst I ever seen. But it's nicer than some of the courts I play on in the streets."

Daniels said that he plays tennis at San Antonio Park in Oakland where he lives. He also plays at other parks in the city. He said that he really loves the sport, although tennis was not his first choice; he said he is a basketball man. It was Pat Leog who got him interested in coming into the prison to challenge the men here in a match.

"These guys are good. I played two matches so far and I lost both of them," said Daniels. "It's not about the win or loss. As long as I get to have fun and the guy's in here get to have fun — I enjoy it."

Daniels took in the landscape and observed the Lower Yard full of residents partaking in various other sports. He noticed the basketball tournament being played by two intramural teams and he reminisced on the times when he used to play ball in his old Sobran-te Park neighborhood in Oakland. Sobran-te Park was one of East Oakland's most dangerous neighborhoods in the '80s. Daniels recalled people he knew that turned to negative choices and even went to prison.

"I was one of the lucky ones who made some good choices," Daniels said. "It's real easy to get caught up in the negativity. Sometime people can't see the forest when there are trees in the way. I was just aware and I stay positive about life."

Daniels got back on the court and attempted to get a victory with his partner. Eventually he won a match. At the end of the day his record was 4-1.

"I had a good partner and we didn't make a lot of mistakes. I'm more of a singles player and I don't get the opportunity to play with a teammate," Daniels said. "But if me playing with the guys can help them with their rehabilitation, I'm absolutely with that."

—Timothy Hicks

1000 MILE: RUNNING CLUB STRIDES FORWARD WITH ANNUAL TRACK MEET

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

San Quentin’s 1000 Mile Running Club hosted its Eddie Hart-Ralph Lignons Memorial Track Meet on June 16. It was the first time the annual event was held since the pandemic. Runners were joined by former San Francisco DA, Chesa Boudin.

Boudin said he learned about the Club when he came to The Q for the showing of the “26.2 to Life,” a documentary by independent film maker, Christine Yoo. Boudin said he was so inspired by the film, he left wanting to volunteer.

The Club’s longtime head coach, Frank Rouna, conducted the meet like clockwork with his dedicated team of assistant coaches and outside volunteers. Several residents also stepped up to help out.

Boudin displayed his linguistic skills by translating instructions for the Spanish-speaking runners after seeing Club President Tommy Wickerd translate for deaf runners.

As a fellow runner and fitness enthusiasts, Boudin shared that he ran a personal-best 3:06 at the New York Marathon — good enough to qualify for the Boston Marathon.

Club runners Jose Fajardo, Jay Roberts, Tommy Wickerd, and Greg Stevens earned “iron man” bragging rights by completing all events.

“It’s fun to participate, to compete and run with the Club. I always look forward to the events,” said Fajardo.

Under clear skies, 52 runners turned out to race in a variety of events — one-mile, half-mile, quarter-mile, 200-m, 100-m, and the mile-relay.

The top runner of the meet was Fajardo, 42, who won all events except for his second place finishes in the 200-m and 100-m races. He was also on the winning team for the one-mile relay along with Ulises James, Luis Rodriguez, and David Sanchez with a time of 4:51.

As one of the Club’s rising stars, Fajardo recently hit the 1,000 mile mark even though he only arrived at The Q in April 2022. Having not yet completed a marathon, Fajardo might be on pace to break some of Markelle “The Gazelle” Taylor’s long-standing records.

Fajardo said he has been doing longer, paced runs for the last six years in prison, but this was his first time running competitive sprints.

The speedster who edged Fajardo in



Jose Fajardo, an experienced runner who recently arrived at The Q, is making waves and leading the way on the track.

the shorter sprints was Terry Kitchen, 36. Despite running on a bad knee, Kitchen still looked strong on the track, although he disagrees.

“I felt slow today, running injured, but it was good to compete,” said Kitchen.

Two older runners who stood out in the sprints were Jay Roberts, 48, and Chris Moore, 53.

Roberts placed fourth overall in the 200-m, but his age-adjusted grade of 74.51% was first. He placed fifth overall in the 100-m, with an even higher age grade.

A grade of over 70% is considered regional class while a grade of over 80% is considered national class, according to the Club’s coaches.

Chris Moore ran an impressive sprint

heat with the 50+ age group. His time in the 100-m was good enough for third place overall. His age grade of 78.82% was the highest of the entire meet.

D. Ernie Soltero, 72, was the sole runner in the 70+ age group, running the half-mile in 4:14. Dale Moore, 67, was the next oldest runner. He impressed the crowd by completing all events except for the 100-m dash — only one event away from earning “iron man” status.

Several runners were presented with certificates to honor their running milestones.

“The San Quentin 1000 Mile Club is a life changing community, not just for me, but for all the runners that came out today and ran our tails off,” said President Wickerd.

13th Annual Eddie Hart-Ralph Lignons				
Track Meet top finishers:				
MILE				
Name	Age	Time	Age Grade %	
1. Jose Fajardo	42	5:31	72.38	
2. Greg Stevens	41	6:04	65.31	
3. Delfino Verdin	44	6:12	65.31	
4. Rudolfo Hernandez	42	6:28	61.63	
5. Pascal Vilchis	37	6:37	58.10	
HALF-MILE (800-M)				
Name	Age	Time	Age Grade %	
1. Jose Fajardo	42	2:40	72.38	
2. Vernon Evans	43	2:45	65.31	
3. David Richard	58	2:56	65.31	
4. Greg Stevens	41	2:57	61.63	
5. Jose Vale	31	3:13	58.10	
Gutierrez Mariano	46	3:13	58.65	
QUARTER-MILE (400-M)				
Name	Age	Time	Age Grade %	
1. Jose Fajardo	42	1:08	69.76	
2. Jose Magana	40	1:10	66.86	
3. Rudolfo Hernandez	42	1:11	66.94	
Greg Stevens	41	1:11	66.32	
5. Jay Roberts	48	1:12	68.53	
200-M				
Name	Age	Time	Age Grade %	
1. Terry Kitchen	36	28:78	70.16	
2. Jose Fajardo	42	29:06	72.75	
3. Jose Magana	40	29:48	70.67	
4. Jay Roberts	48	29:65	74.51	
5. Soy Kirivuthy	40	29:83	69.84	
100-M				
Name	Age	Time	Age Grade %	
1. Terry Kitchen	36	13:23	75.33	
2. Jose Fajardo	42	14:01	74.22	
3. Chris Moore	53	14:20	78.82	
4. Tracy Morgan	35	14:36	68.91	
5. Jay Roberts	48	14:38	75.33	

MVP OF SQ WARRIORS RETIRES TO FOCUS ON WHAT IS MOST VALUABLE IN HIS LIFE

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

Intramural basket commissioner Derrell “Sadiq” Davis is taking a break from the sport he loves so he can focus on other priorities. It is a big deal when athletes chose to sacrifice their sport of choice and do something that is either required or takes precedence in their lives. So when Davis made the announcement to pull away, it was a difficult task for the leading scorer and MVP of SQ’s most admired team -- the SQ Warriors. The power forward was the commissioner of the Intramural league for only one year. He was also the starting forward of the SQ Warriors for two years — hence the conundrum.

Timothy Hicks: You brought some good vibes to the league after you took over the Intramural league. It’s only been a short time since doing so. Tell me why you are falling back from basketball so suddenly?

Derrell Davis: Yeah, when I came in the league the guy’s recognized my leadership qualities and they kind of hoisted me into the position. I was fresh at the prison and I had not even settled into my actual course of finding out what it is that I need to do to go home yet.

TH: I can understand that. But soon as you got to the prison, it was hard for the athlete in you not to jump right into doing the sport

TIER TALK

you love, which is basketball. Touch on that a little bit.

DD: I love basketball and I love the basketball program here. It done a lot for me. Basketball has always been my go to sport. I been playing since as long as I can remember.

TH: Before you just leave the league hanging, (laughs), tell me what are some of the things that the sports program have done for you?

DD: I can’t believe I’m doing it, [leaving the game of basketball]. I thought I would be playing basketball forever. SQ’s basketball program changed me. I was still stuck in my ways. I thought I still had it all figured out. I was still thinking I can out smart someone but I was out smarting myself. The basketball program showed me that love does exist for incarcerated people. It showed me that the volunteers have love for us. It humanizes us when they come in here to support us.

TH: Tell me exactly why you are leaving?

DD: The exact reason why I am taking a break is because I need to focus on going home for my daughter.

TH: What are some of the programs you are involved in that will replace the time you used to have

to play basketball?

DD: The new dog program here and I am getting a dog. My re-sentencing. And mental preparations. I’m studying and learning more insight and causative factors for why I committed the crimes I did. I’m going to focus on my rehabilitation and the outside community and how I’m going to give back and prepare myself for what God has in store for me.

TH: What was some of the highlights you remember from playing on the team?

DD: Being able to wear the jerseys and the shoes that the actual Golden State Warriors practiced in was amazing. Able to play the GSWs was big. We did not have to go to the stadium to play them. They came to us [in prison] — that’s big.

TH: Tell me something that you brought to the league that you hope others will adapt to.

DD: I brought integrity and a big heart. Opinions, caring, accountability, leadership.

What I’m doing shows selflessness. I’m sacrificing something I love for the greater good, which is my family.

I hope that what I am doing can show those who may be at a crossroad in life and have to make the difficult choice to give up something that they love for something greater. Because doing that may make the difference in what they do that can make a positive impact on the whole community.

RRCA AWARD HONORS SQ VOLUNTEER

By Steve Brooks
Editor-In-Chief

The head coach of San Quentin’s 1000 Mile running club received the volunteer of the year award from the Road Runner Club of America.

Frank Rouna, an ex-army veteran, life-long Republican conservative and ex-marathon runner, has been volunteering at San Quentin for over a decade.

RRCA champions the development and success of community-based running organizations that empower all people to participate in the sport. In his work as coach, Rouna empowers society’s most forgotten.

Rouna started running marathons at age 40. Since that time he has run 78 marathons and 38 ultra-marathons. He knows the power of running and its ability to transform people’s lives. He was the President of the Mt. Tamalpais running club. Rouna is also a USA Track and Field certified coach.

He was approached in 2010 by a teacher from San Quentin named Laura Bowman to help find someone to teach the running club.

“I called everybody and nobody was interested, so I decided to come inside and take a look for myself,” said Rouna. He



Courtesy George Vasquez
Coach Frank Rouna, with his wife, happily accepts his RRCA award.

has been the coach of the club ever since.

“I don’t ask anybody what they are in prison for because I’m not here to judge them. They’ve already been judged by a court. I meet them where they’re at,” said Rouna.

For over a decade, Rouna has been bringing professional runners inside the prison to help him teach the club the fundamentals of long distance running. The club trains throughout the year for an annual marathon in November.

Outside volunteer supporters donate new running shoes to all SQ 1000 Mile Club members each year.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the club shut down and they haven’t run a marathon since 2019. Rouna, who is now nearing 80-years old, uses a standing push cart to get down to the Lower Yard. This could be his last year coaching, but he hopes to get the men ready for a marathon in November of 2023. He still has a passion for coming inside helping the incarcerated transform their lives through running.

“I am my brother’s keeper,” said Rouna. “I’ve been pretty fortunate in my life-growing up in a White middle-class town. I now consider the criminal justice system to be deeply flawed.”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



CSATF RESIDENT HONORS ADVOCATE BARBARA BROOKS

Dear SQNews:

It is with a heavy heart that I inform you of the passing of Mrs. Barbara Brooks on April 19, 2023. Mrs. Brooks took on the struggle to free her son Jeff from the clutches of a three strikes sentence when she created the Social Justice Reform Act (SJRA), which with several other groups pushed for the creation of and eventual passage by the people of Props 36 and 47.

Her tireless work not only brought about Jeff's freedom under prop guidelines, but also the early release and liberty of thousands of other inmates who met the requirements.

Jeff Brooks, a friend too many during his time at The Q will remember him as a catcher for the SQ Giants and co-founder of the Hope for Lifers group. Jeff is free living with his wife near Sacramento.

Rest in peace Mrs. Brooks you truly are an angel for truth and justice.

—Macro Davidson
California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility
Corcoran, California

INDIANA READER ON THE INJUSTICE OF SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Dear SQNews:

In this country, people and the courts are still debating if the death penalty constitutes a legally prohibited "cruel and unusual punishment," but less and less debate about torturous conditions of solitary confinement. All complaints that were filed to U.S. Courts agree that solitary confinement violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition of cruel and unusual punishment.

Nevertheless, many death row inmates in this country spend 15, 20, or more years in torturous conditions of confinement without any legitimate penological purpose but that they were sentenced to death. This is a result of dysfunctional post-conviction system. Such a system is uncon-

stitutional, inhumane, and requires that the death sentence be vacated.

The damage inflicted by solitary confinement cannot be undone or reversed, but a remedy for this form of torture must be provided.

I believe with your help we will get closer to abolishing solitary confinement and the death penalty in the U.S. Thank you for your help.

—Jurijus Kadamovas
U.S.P. Terre Haute
Terre Haute, Indiana

RESIDENT OF AVENAL WEIGHS IN ON CALIFORNIA MODEL

Dear SQNews:

First of all to meet the rehabilitative needs of anyone, on any level of prison yard you have to create a truly clean rehabilitation atmosphere/ environment. What I mean by that is for people to thrive and flourish, you must separate those that are completely genuine in their disposition and dedication to positive change from those that are phony and half-hearted. There has to be a zero tolerance for drugs, alcohol, and mischievousness and people would not merely slip by, but be expected to be proactive participants.

When I think about this, what comes to mind is Delancey Street program. Sad but true I do not believe there should be any time taken off of your sentence, your payoff is absolutely your rehabilitation, but also like Delancey Street there are many dynamics to that rehabilitative payoff. In the way of supportive networks of many kinds, job skill, education, a new perspective about life and people. An unselfish will to help others and teach others that is very rewarding. A great sense of accomplishment, self-esteem, etc... If you even start to give milestones or rehabilitative achievement credits you will attract the wrong crowd. Time credits can only be applied to the completion of a long rigorous set of phases of progression with NO serious offenses.

—James Bagley
Avenal State Prison
Avenal, California

HOPE AND INSPIRATION FOUND IN WASCO RECEPTION CENTER

Dear SQNews:

I am currently at Wasco reception center with nothing to do but sit by myself. I was blessed by another inmate who went to a regular dorm. He left me the May 2023 issue of the paper. I enjoyed it very much; I read it cover to cover ten times. I really enjoyed the sports section, law and policy, and the crossword puzzle. You and your staff are awesome. My wife is working on getting me a subscription.

—Fernando Castro III
Wasco State Prison
Wasco, California

Hey, Fernando,
Thank you! Your message of hope serves to remind us here at SQNews why we do what we do. Inspiring rehabilitation is our mission, and we sincerely hope that our paper motivates you and all our readers to strive to be better. We ship our newspaper to Wasco each month: 750 copies to the library and 250 to the education department. We're so pleased you got one!

—Ed

SUPPORT AND LOVE MAILED IN FROM SOUTHERN AD-SEG

Dear SQNews:

May the goodness accrued from your work in helping alleviate the suffering of all beings and enabling them to find eternal happiness. There is nothing more worthy than the virtue of selflessness. Selflessness unites people. It is a healing herb that unifies strangers and brings families together. It is the love for others that is higher than self-love; it is our only hope.

—Wayne El. Chick
R.J. Donovan State Prison
San Diego, California

EDITORIAL

NO MORE 'INMATES'

By Steve Brooks
Editor-In-Chief

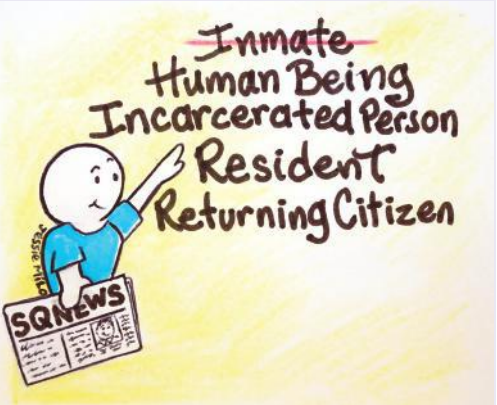
For a long time we have allowed our reporters and contributors at the *San Quentin News* to use their own discretion when it comes to using the term "inmate" to describe someone who is incarcerated in a jail or prison.

This has led to a lack of unity in our messaging and a lack of unity among our media center personnel here at San Quentin. I believe that continuing to allow this word to be used is detrimental to the movement to have all people housed in jails or prisons recognized as human beings. It is detrimental to the rebranding of San Quentin as a rehabilitation center.

The word "inmate" has a negative connotation and is used to describe someone as non-human, mentally ill or deranged and in need of an institution. This word does not allow for human progress or rehabilitation and does not easily fit within the confines of promoting health and wellness. Some people say the word refers to people who occupy a single place of residence, or who reside in a hotel. However, no hotel employee would ever call its guests "inmates."

"Inmate" is a word used for those who are incapacitated, punished, and subjected to retributive justice. It is used to describe those who have traditionally been tortured, put in dungeons, hanged, electrocuted, or subjected to lethal injections. An "inmate" is someone sentenced to indeterminate SHU programs, who experiences extended stays in long-term solitary confinement and is subjected to psychological torture. "Inmates" are paraded around prison facilities in their boxers and T-shirts, with chains wrapped around their bodies. In California, this is changing and therefore the term is no longer politically correct.

The Legislature just gave Gov. Gavin Newsom \$380 million dollars to build a rehabilitation center focused on humanity, health, wellness and being a good neighbor. Over the next few years an advisory committee will be designing a new California Model. With that said,



how we use language to refer to people housed in prison will affect their ability to be made whole by a system of rehabilitation, health and wellness.

The state of New York stopped using the word "inmate" last year. They amended several state laws to remove the word and replace it with "incarcerated person" to refer to people serving time, to reduce the stigma of being in jail.

"The word has a dehumanizing effect," New York's Gov. Kathy Hochel said. "It can feel degrading being referred to by guards as 'inmate,' especially in front of their families during in-person visits. If we are going to focus on rehabilitation in this state, language matters."

The *San Quentin News* also has a responsibility to treat people with dignity and respect. "Inmate" is not a term of endearment. It is not a term that fulfills our mission of highlighting the lives and voices of incarcerated human beings, or increasing public safety and advancing social justice.

We will strive to do better. We will keep in step with the movement to change the narrative by referring to the incarcerated as people.

For those conservative politicians and survivors of crime who argue that removing the word "inmate" from use somehow coddles criminals, I say the only way to teach someone to act like a human being is to treat them like one. You cannot expect rehabilitation, empathy or compassion to spring forth from a faucet of hatred and retributive justice.

CORRECTION

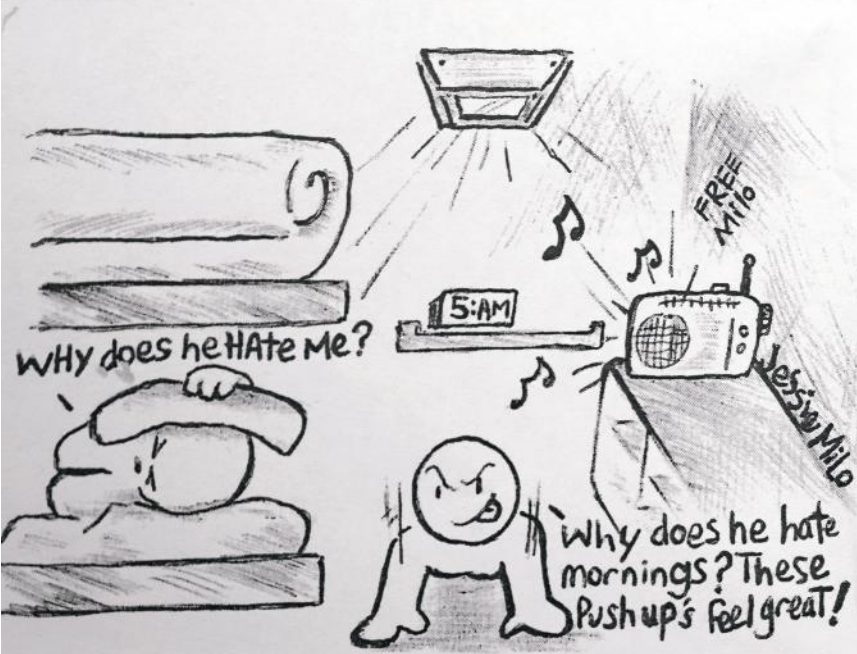
In our July issue we mistakenly gave credit to Tom Lapinsky for bringing Queeny King and Queens of the Stone Age to San Quentin in 2018. The credit for that group's appearance is due to the work of Sam Robinson, our former Public Information Officer and Raphaelle Casale, the Chief Deputy Warden's Secretary.

On page 6, in the FADDD article, we mistakenly referred to Retired Chief Deputy Warden Velda Dobson-Davis as "he" instead of she.

On the front-page article on Annual Day of Peace, resident "White Eagle" did not play a flute, however he did share a prayer to bless the grounds.

SAN QUEN-TOONS

BY JESSIE MILO (2023)



Tips For Cell Living:

- Communicate-No one can read your mind.
 - Give cellmate private time daily.
 - Agree on:
Physical space-Our legs shouldn't be touching.
Air space- Dont Just block Air vent or Fart.
Sound space- noise levels. Quiet times.
 - Prior to moving in, discuss:
When your chewing Pretzels, does it sound like You're chewing concrete or Gravel?
Do You share or have conflicting Goals or Values?
Do You clap & Yell so whole tier can know you Love your team?
Or do you Prefer to quietly eat Nachos to celebrate your team?
- Good Luck- Jessie Milo

ART

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

— DAVID HERNANDEZ RE-PURPOSING EVERYDAY SCRAPS INTO ART GEMS —

By Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

All art has unique ingredients. San Quentin resident David Hernandez creates sports logos and handbags from common materials that anyone else would consider useless and throw away. He has adopted the concept of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle as an artistic credo.

“I learned these techniques so that I can stay busy and my time goes by faster,” said Hernandez. “It helps me to socialize with my peers inside prison. It is therapeutic. If I am doing nothing, I think that I will get sick.”

For Hernandez, creativity brings new life to elements as he uses instant rice and even eggs shells as his main ingredients to make sports insignias of basketball, football, baseball and soccer teams.

The artist says that limits to creativity do not apply to him. His ideas come from requests he receives from other incarcerated persons. He embraces every challenge.

Hernandez says the Lakers logo is one of the hardest team logos to do. “Lakers has detailed and descriptive lines and this makes it harder to create the emblem. It takes me over 10 days to get one piece done.”

The artist spends hours and days to steer his abilities to where he feels they need to go. Whenever he faces complications, he stops working and relaxes in the dayroom of his housing unit, trying to find distractions from his heavy workload.

Hernandez feels happy that he could supplement his rehabilitative goals with new skills. He credits his creativity to the congenial atmosphere of San Quentin, where he discovered his latent tal-



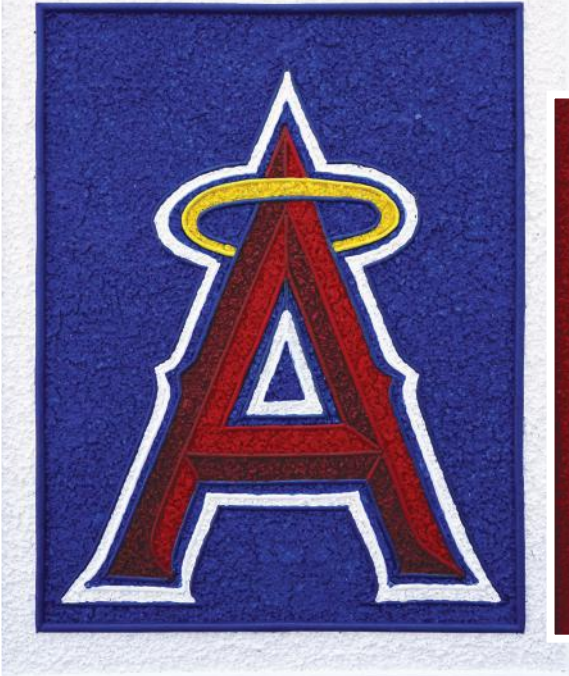
ents. The artist’s new creative occupation began about a year ago. He acknowledges that he has a lot to learn and humbly admits that this new enterprise has turned into a success only because of his hard work.

Hernandez gladly divulges the tricks of his craft-art. He uses stick glue, paint, floor wax, cardboard, paper towers, newspapers, sheets of blank paper, rice and, of course, egg shells.

Many of his customers have remarked about the sophistication of his art and expressed astonishment that a beginner made it.

Besides sports team logos, Hernandez also makes women’s handbags. His customers — family and friends in Mexico — love them, he said. CDCR lunch boxes provide source materials for the handbags. He uses the plastic wrappers to protect the paper boxes that provide the body. To keep his creations sturdy, he sews the bags together with thread made from socks bought from vendors, using plastic needles he made from deodorant caps.

The artist has begun to work on his next project, a big Golden State Warriors logo, for the upcoming San Quen-



tin News Gala fundraiser. He feels blessed to serve his community through his art.

Hernandez’s parole will come in 2038. An ICE detainee makes him a candidate for deportation. He plans to take

his trade back to his homeland of Mexico.

Whenever he works, he says, he visualizes himself owning a workshop in Mexico, making a living and supporting his family.

Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

David Hernandez makes use of many ingredients to create his arts, including: stick glue, paint, floor wax, cardboard, paper towels, newspapers (hopefully not SQNews), sheets of blank paper, rice, and egg shells.

SHEB ISBELL, BEADING GURU EXPLORES
NEW DIMENSION WITH EACH CREATION

Through arts and crafts, many incarcerated people have found ways to express themselves and have found ways to communicate their creative endeavors with the outside world. Beadwork has existed since early humans hung shells around their necks and beads used in arts and crafts remain popular to this day.

Sheb Isbell, a new arrival at San Quentin, brought with him a new level of innovation by using beads to make necklaces with three-dimensional avian pendants such as hummingbirds, eagles and owls.

Isbell’s art resembles lavalier jewelry. The lavalier — the object, meaning the birds — attached to the string use the same material (the beads), which makes the art unique. One of Isbell’s creations has a distinct southwestern motif while another one employs a patriotic theme.

The artist learned techniques from a friend he calls Barrett. “My friend, a lifer a who went home, taught me many things through beading. I learned about patience; I learned how to learn from mistakes. The process of beading taught me about the process of life,” said Isbell.

According to the artist, he now lives his life based on daily amends. All the items he creates are for the sole purpose of giving to others.

“I called my wife and asked her to guess what I’ve been doing, and I told her that I was beading. She was surprised because it didn’t fit with the person that I was in the past,” said Isbell. “This shows my transformation. The person I was I would never have considered doing this.”

As a man of faith, Isbell believes that his gifts provide him with priceless internal rewards. Although incarcerated persons have offered to pay for his pieces, he respectfully declines. He has come to realize that the internal rewards have much greater value than anything he could ever buy.

“I also learned from Barrett to add value to my community,” said Isbell. “Just like I received this gift, I can now pass it on to my cellmate, who is learning how to bead. He already created multiple hummingbirds.”

A picture that shows his nephew about to graduate from high school inspired Isbell to create a bald eagle that came from a picture of his nephew with an American flag spread wide open draped around his shoulders as if he had wings.

The bald eagle symbolizes the American flag through its colors; red, white and blue. Beading the bald eagle necklace took 30 hours.

Taking us to memory lane, Isbell, has his prototype of a

traditional bald eagle, which he originally made as an apprentice, which this is how he was able to created the red, white, and blue one.

Hummingbirds are no exception to Isbell’s of creativity. He has a few necklaces with hummingbirds made with different kinds of beads. For example, a turquoise necklace with white, cinnamon, and gray uses very *delica* beads.

The delica beads are cylindrical beads, which is why they are smaller in comparison to *seed beads* that he uses on the pink, white, purple, gold, and burgundy necklace. From the first bead to the last, the hummingbird took Isbell a total of 40 hours to finish.

A brown owl took him the longest to make. The artwork has a unique history: he showed the brown owl to his daughter during a video visit, and then his son-in-law pulled up one of his sleeves and showed Isbell a tattoo of an identical owl on his upper arm.

“This brown owl took me twice as long as normal,” Isbell. “The beak and eyes are separate pieces, which I’ve never done before.” He gave the owl to his son-in-law.

According to the artist, through his art he learned about the gift of giving and the understanding of the power to bring pleasure and joy to

others. Isbell considers doing good deeds an overwhelming discovery in his life, one that gives him an opportunity to meet others and to socialize in a healthy way.

One of the many qualities Isbell has learned from Barrett would extend far beyond beading techniques and extend into the ways to act humanely with charity and kindness and a touch of love and compassion. Isbell said, “We are all children of God.”

—Edwin E. Chavez

Isbell’s creation resembles lavalier jewelry. One in particular — a red, white, and blue bald eagle — was inspired by a photo of his nephew wearing an American flag.



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