

San Quentin News

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NATIVE HAWAIIANS, ROOTS RAISING FUNDS FOR MAUI WILDFIRE VICTIMS



Courtesy Wikipedia // Creative Commons

By SQNews Staff

In August 2023, the Hawaiian island of Maui was hit hard by wind-driven wildfires, causing widespread damage and destroying the town of Lahaina. The devastating fires have taken numerous lives, destroyed homes, properties, forced evacuations and displaced thousands of residents.

In solidarity with the people of Hawaii, ROOTS and the Native Hawaiian Religious Group at San Quentin are holding a month-long fundraiser and hygiene drive to assist the victims of the fires.

Those who wish to donate can contribute new, unopened hygiene items, or submit a trust account withdrawal slip (minimum \$5 donation) to the Trust Office.

Hygiene donations will be collected in the housing units by incarcerated volunteers from ROOTS and the Native Hawaiian Religious Group on Fridays. All donations will be final on October 27.

Thank you for your support and contributions!

RON BROOMFIELD TAPPED AS NEW DIRECTOR OF ADULT INSTITUTIONS

By SQNews Staff

Ron Broomfield will no longer be the warden of San Quentin State Prison. He has been appointed director of the Division of Adult Institutions at CDCR.

Although his new position requires senate confirmation, he is almost certain to get it and his promotion is well deserved.

Broomfield has been warden at San Quentin since 2021. He has an impressive record of service, beginning as a correctional officer in 2001. Since that time, Broomfield has climbed the ladder to executive positions as correctional captain, associate warden, chief deputy administrator and warden.

This year, Broomfield was also appointed to co-chair Gov. Gavin Newsom's advisory council for the design and implementation of the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center and the California Model.

The stage is now set for Director Broomfield and CDCR Secretary J. Macomber to create a new rehabilitative model based on four pillars: dynamic security, normalization, peer support and becoming a trauma-informed organization focused on the health and wellness of both staff and the incarcerated population.

Congratulations to Mr. Broomfield from the San Quentin News team. Good luck and much success in your new role!



Courtesy CDCR

BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN

ON JULY 28, SAN QUENTIN'S GARDEN Chapel became a focal point of frenetic energy as final preparations were made to honor more than 100 graduates of Robert E. Burton Adult School's combined academic and Career Technical Education programs.

As grads were being fitted with traditional black caps and gowns, their visitors and guests began trickling in, one family at a time.

Jane Wallace and Jan Divine made the trek from Pasadena and Reseda, Calif., to see their friend, incarcerated computer coder Scott Lardizabal, receive his core certificate in Computer Related Technology. A first-time visitor, Wallace looked overwhelmed as she crossed through the massive iron threshold and took in the Garden Chapel and Peace Officer's Memorial. Spotting Lardizabal waiting expectantly in the courtyard, she hurried toward him with her arms thrown open wide and her eyes already wet.

"Am I allowed to hug you?" she cried. After a quick embrace, they separated and Wallace offered a sweeping gesture at the garden setting. "This is beautiful ... Wow."

Wallace had just been through an exasperating, tear-inducing dress-code issue that nearly kept her from entering the prison, but she was determined not to miss this for the world. In recovery herself, she knows the power of change and personal transformation.

"I don't think I've ever been so moved in my life," she told SQNews later. "I'm so proud of my friend, Scott, and everyone who is graduating today. They didn't come here on a winning streak, but they're changing their lives."

PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

In 2019, CDCR's Office of Correctional Education created its Distinguished School Award. Robert E. Burton Adult School was recognized as its very first recipient, graded on factors including school culture, professional learning, and student support.

At that time, there were 35 prisons in California, each with its own accredited academic program. Yet even Ralph Diaz,

FAMILIES, LOVED ONES OF THE INCARCERATED ATTEND SQ EDUCATION DEPARTMENT'S FIRST GRADUATION SINCE 2019



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Robert E. Burton Adult School's recent graduation honored more than 100 graduates of its various academic and trade programs, including Michael Tirado, who received his high school diploma. Tirado's family was one of many who traveled — some from great distances — to celebrate their loved ones' hard-won achievements.

By Andrew Hardy
Staff Writer

then-secretary of CDCR, was unsurprised that it was San Quentin's education department, under the leadership of Principal Michael Wheelless, that earned the honor.

That year's commencement ceremony saw many graduates praising Wheelless' approachability and crediting their instructors' encouragement for their accomplishments.

A few short months later, the coronavirus pandemic shut the world down from coast-to-coast, hitting San Quentin especially hard. Prison administrators and educators struggled to deal with the deadly virus while somehow continuing to provide some kind of educational programming to prison residents who were unable to venture forth

from their cells.

On the fly, they designed a new system to provide some ongoing educational instruction through the mail, offering encouragement through handwritten notes to students, keeping their minds on-track and occupied as everyone in the prison wrestled with fear and grief.

The reopening of the Burton Adult School for in-person learning was a process of fits and starts as Covid kept rearing its ugly head, forcing repeated quarantines. It's been four years since the school was able to hold a commencement ceremony, but in that time, through sheer perseverance and dedication, more than 350 students have earned certificates, diplomas, equivalencies, and college degrees.

It is a testament to the changing focus of California corrections, to a less punitive

See GRADUATION on pg 12

SUMMER BLAST CONCERT BRINGS FAITH, HOPE, AND HIP HOP TO THE Q

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Residents and volunteers gathered on San Quentin's Lower Yard to enjoy hip-hop music and messages of faith through lyrical performances as part of the Summer Blast Concert.

The August 12 show featured finalists from an earlier talent contest who performed mostly original songs on stage to a gathered crowd of hundreds.

Using poetic skills and lived-experience, incarcerated artists and outside rappers demonstrated their talents in a connecting and unifying way, with faith and fellowship.

The event was sponsored by the Prison Fellowship Academy, one of the largest nonprofits that serve the incarcerated community across the country. They have been spreading their message of hope in prisons for 47 years.

At San Quentin, Pastor Eric Nobles leads the fellowship academy for the community. He opened the concert by sharing a prayer with the crowd. He also thanked the administration — Warden



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

Incarcerated artists Rhashiyd Zinnamon, Mesro Coles-El, and B. Raheem Ballard perform in the first Summer Blast Concerts, held on the Lower Yard.

See CONCERT on pg 4



HONORING
INCARCERATED
WORKERS ON
LABOR DAY

—STORY ON PG 15

MT. TAM
CELEBRATES
ALUMNI WITH
'FREEDOM WALL'

—STORY ON PG 17

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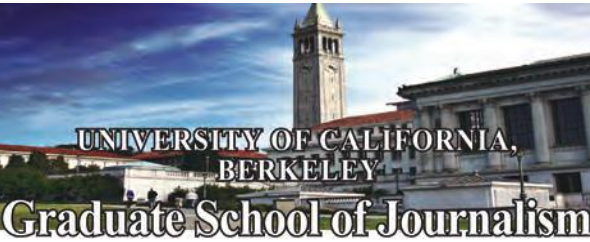
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PROFILE

GLIMPSES OF HUMANITY THROUGH THE LENS OF PHOTOGRAPHER PETER MERTS

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

A local photographer is working to change public perceptions of incarcerated people. In the process, he’s hoping to inspire compassion and empathy.

For 20 plus years, Peter Merts has taken photographs of artists and their creative artworks in California’s prison system. Through his work, he wants to change public opinion by providing a holistic view of the incarcerated, reported the *Insider* magazine.

“It seemed to me that there was a lack of empathy or compassion, and I began to think about this and I realized that the general public has a pretty negative view of people who are incarcerated,” Merts said.

His inspiration for his photo series began in 2006 at a San Quentin after a California Arts in Corrections instructor requested Merts take pictures of the art class. Merts instantly felt the energy of the incarcerated artists.

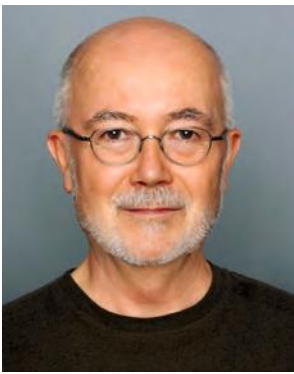
Merts’s expressive camera-work allowed his relationship with the art rehabilitation organization to expand beyond The Q and spread throughout the state. Instructors from other institutions began inviting him to shoot their art classes.

Merts works primarily with the California Arts in Corrections — the only statewide correctional arts program offered in the U.S. The organization focuses primarily on the emotional and social well-being of incarcerated people through art.

Several states have rolled out pilot programs similar to California’s model. A 2014 study by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice found such programs could lead to more self-confidence, intellectual flexibility, and better time management.

The photographs Merts takes inside California prisons are not always received with an open mind. At times, there is hostility by some people in the public when he shares his work. Some people complain about art resources being provided to incarcerated people when children lack art classes in public schools.

To help alter these perceptions, Merts changed his approach to taking photos. He began focusing on the hands of the incarcerated people producing the artwork. His initial fly-on-the-wall ap-



Peter Merts, photographer extraordinaire: Merts is using his skills and his craft to spread empathy and compassion for people in prison. “I realized that the general public has a pretty negative view of people who are incarcerated,” Merts said.

proach left Merts feeling disengaged from the pride the artists exhibited in their work. He found the best way to capture that accurately was to become an active member of the environment — to connect and interact while they created the art.

Rather than focusing on the finished artwork, Merts found that photographing the process of creating the piece was more real. The spontaneity came during the rehearsals and the crafting of the art, not so much in the final product.

“That is part of why I try to work in close and get faces and expressions and interactions between people, cause I think it shows people’s nature, their personality, their authenticity, and I think that’s the best way to engender empathy for the folks inside,” Merts told *Insider*.

In his work, Merts also highlights the work the artists are in the process of making. He noticed many of the artists turn to their heritage, religion, and culture when looking for ideas on what to make. Others depict the landscape, the environment, or elements of nature.

The relationships Merts has established doing this work goes beyond the prison or their arts program. Due to prison regulations, Merts is unable to share his photos with the incarcerated artists directly. Instead, he sends families the photos so they can send them to their incarcerated loved ones.

In his time in California prisons, Merts has encountered incarcerated artists who have held onto his photos of them.

In one such instance, Merts saw an incarcerated artist for a second time at another fa-



Classical guitar student, Sierra Conservation Center, 2019.



Hip-hop dance class, Ironwood State Prison, 2016.



Theater student performance, Ironwood State Prison, 2018.



Theater class, Old Stone Chapel, Folsom State Prison, 2018.

cility years after Merts had first photographed him.

“He had transferred, but he heard that a photographer was coming this day. He thought it might have been the same photographer ... so he brought this photograph that his family had sent him, which was really touching to see that,” Merts said.

Merts has a book of his

photographs called, “Ex Crucible: The Passion of Incarcerated Artists.” He hopes his audience will look at the incarcerated artists with feelings of empathy and compassion.

“I would love for people’s preconceptions of incarcerated people to soften, to become more realistic,” Merts said.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MIA BONTA BELIEVES IN REHABILITATION

By Timothy Hicks
Staff Writer

California State Assemblywoman Mia Bonta (D-18th District), who represents Oakland, Alameda, and Emeryville, visited San Quentin with Gov. Gavin Newsom and other VIPs when he announced the transformation of the prison into the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center under the California Model.

The group came to pronounce the governor’s vision of reimagining the prison as the new face of rehabilitation.

“Ask yourself, what condition do you want them to rejoin our communities,” said Bonta, referring to the incarcerated people once they make parole.

Bonta came into office after defeating Janani Ramachandran in a 2021 special election.



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

The Assemblywoman, with her husband, California Attorney General Rob Bonta, came into their respective offices with a mission to help reform the prison landscape. They also both employee formerly incarcerated people, helping to shatter stigmas and stereotypes.

At San Quentin, Bonta stated that she will work with the governor and legislators to

ensure that when the incarcerated parole, they will have the rehabilitation, training, and resources they need to not return to the carceral system again.

Bonta was inspired to become a public servant in college. She has a bachelor’s in Psychology from Yale, a master’s from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a law degree from Yale Law School.

Bonta is also the CEO of Oakland Promise, a nonprofit that provides a cradle-to-college support program focused on the city’s low-income students. In 2018, she was elected to the Alameda School Board.

“When you think kind of larger on what’s happening across the state of California, that’s why it’s incredibly important for us to have more [Black women in public of-

fice],” she said, reflecting her values of inclusion.

Bonta is a member of the Black Caucus and is the first Black Latina to serve in the California legislature.

“We know our stories, we have a commonality of experience, we have a perspective that is not held here,” she added. “We know what it’s like to be undervalued and overlooked, and we bring that to these halls. I think it makes us very uniquely qualified and positioned to be able to do the work of this state.”

At the press event at San Quentin, Bonta talked with residents and stood with the governor and others who share her ideas about rehabilitation.

“To transform such a place from despair into one of hope and promise is the kind of vision we want to realize,” Bonta said.

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Photography

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PROGRAMS

The Greater Good Ensemble offered a live performance at the Alive Inside event at San Quentin's Garden Chapel. Below: The Feelings Parade (Scott Ferreter, left, and Morgan Bolender) have appeared regularly at Alive Inside events, performing original music about pain and letting go. Bottom: Hagerty spoke about vulnerability, then played his harmonica in bluegrass style.

'ALIVE INSIDE' EVENTS GIVE SAN QUENTIN RESIDENTS OPPORTUNITY FOR MEANINGFUL EXPRESSION

**By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor**

Residents of San Quentin shared vulnerabilities through creative and spontaneous expressions of music, spoken word, poetry, storytelling and silence at July's Alive Inside: Open Mic event. The community-involved series is organized by Scott Ferreter, Chelsea Coleman, Morgan Bolender and Ned Buskirk:

Residents used this intimate space to explore what it means to grieve and honor what and whom they've loved or lost. Buskirk invited the audience to share whatever was on their heart, assuring them they "don't have to cry, because I am going to cry for all of us."

Many audience members shared parts of themselves in that vulnerable space. Resident Paul Stauffard read a poem about his spiritual walk. Nicholas "Hippy" Hagerty played a unique bluegrass piece using a harmonica, and Robert Cole talked about the young love and the loss he felt when his love died from an aneurism. "I saw love come into my life, and I saw love vanish," he said.

Ferreter and Bolender, known

on tour as The Feelings Parade, played three songs onstage. The first, "The Tides," mused about having a safe space and the continued support of a loved one. The second song, "A Lot to Hold," explored letting go of pain and grief.

Coleman performed the third song, "Let My Heart Be Broken," which she wrote on her way to visit a female prison facility in Ohio. The words resonated with the incarcerated people in the room as she sang:

"Let my heart be broken by all the love that wants to break free. Let my heart be broken, for all the walls between you and me. Let no chains be squandered, to set each other free. Carving out the valley, where I can rest with ease."

At this point, the band exited the stage and residents came up to perform.

Dante D. Jones performed a rap about life and love. Jay Kim didn't expect to participate but felt inspired, so while sitting and listening to the others, he wrote a poem about himself being a kid with low self-esteem. Alex, who did not give his last name, read a poem about his past struggle with reading and his newfound service to help others with the same struggle.

Photos by Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

"Now that I am a teacher's aide, I love to help people in any way I can," Alex said.

To close out, The Feelings Parade retook the stage and asked the audience to yell out a word and they would play a song from that word. "Resilience" was chosen.

The song started off with Ferreter playing the guitar and Bolender singing. As they played, the incarcerated band stepped up to the stage one-by-one to participate in unity and community building.

The series is tentatively scheduled to run through November 21.

**Richard Fernandez
Staff Writer**

SAN QUENTIN LIBRARY LAUNCHES NEEDLEPOINT CRAFTING PROGRAM

A new needlepointing program at San Quentin is offering residents a chance to express their creative side through the craft.

Prior to the needlepoint program beginning, incarcerated staff and librarians at the prison's library wanted to start offering crafts for patrons. They wanted to create a space where residents could channel their energy into something positive and rewarding. Crafts such as needlepointing, which is similar to crocheting, allow one to find a sense of calm and accomplishment while developing a new skill. This can facilitate self-improvement and mental well-being.

The first crafting class at the library began several months ago with the creation of Mothers' Day cards. Supplies, materials, patterns, and examples were made available to participants, and beautiful Mothers' Day cards came to life and were mailed out.

On Friday, July 14, the new needlepoint class began, providing more opportunities for creative expression and personal growth among the participants.

Librarian Charlotte Sanders introduces new students to the technique by having them practice with a mesh doodle pad. They learn a continental stitch, and once they can handle this basic technique, their first project is to needlepoint a cover for an eyeglasses case, personalized with

assorted colors of thread, names, or initials.

"What's nice about needlepoint is that it is very meditative, you can make your own design or copy patterns," Sanders said. "You can listen to music, or even hold conversations while you do needlepoint. Sometimes it takes a lot of patience, yet it is much simpler than knitting, with a much lower learning curve. What's rewarding is the finished product. Something you can keep or give away as a gift. Everything you stitch is handmade and personalized. I still have things from my grandmother."

"It was resident and library worker Ronell Draper that spearheaded the idea of starting the craft classes, and funding support was made available by the Friends of the San Quentin Library, a recently formed nonprofit that supports the San Quentin Library," Sanders said.

Ronell "Rauch" Draper said, "I've been given the opportunity to work on the advisory board with the Friends of San Quentin Library, exploring the gift of books and all the possibilities they hold, but we also wanted to expand the library's offerings with craft programing."

One historical figure who serves as an inspiration to many aspiring needlepointers is Mary, Queen of the Scots, who spent nearly two decades in captivity

Salvador Joaquin // SQTV

under the custody of her cousin, Queen Elizabeth I of England. Despite her circumstances, Mary found solace in needlepointing and poured her creativity into creating stunning pieces during her imprisonment, some of which are displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Many of the participants of the program find a deep connection with her story, realizing that art can be a powerful means of comfort and expression, even in the most challenging situations.

Rosie Grier, a former NFL player, gained fame on the field and in his own time found an

unexpected passion — needlepointing. Grier even authored a book, "Rosie Grier's Needlepoint for Men," which encouraged many other men to embrace the craft. Grier's story serves as a reminder that creativity has no boundaries and crafting can be embraced by everyone.

Participants are grateful to the Friends of San Quentin Library for providing all of the supplies, which they can take back to their living quarters to continue working on their projects. The needlepointing program meets every Friday at 8:30 a.m. in the library and drop-ins are welcome.

CONCERT

Continued from page 1

FAITH, HOPE & HIP HOP: PRISON FELLOWSHIP ACADEMY HITS THE YARD



Broomfield, Lt. Berry, and Lt. Gardea — for working together to help make the hip-hop concert a reality, which will hopefully be an annual event.

He spoke of how the concert was a way to uplift the incarcerated population and show love and faith in action. “People talk a good game, but we are here to show our care, love and connection because we are all made in the image of God,” Nobles said.

Hoping to inspire performers to use their platform for positive messages, Nobles proposed the idea of a “Summer Blast” rap concert to Dante D. Jones of SQNews and Rhashiyd Zinnamon of Ear Hustle — and they ran with it.

“I think it’s great that we’re having this event today, especially while the world is celebrating 50 years of hip-hop. The culture is alive and well,” Jones said.

Brian “Be the Truth” Harrison opened up the concert with an old school, hip-hop feel by performing his song “Make the Choice.”

With a commanding stage presence, SQ resident Maurice “Face The Nation” Buckley was one artist who pumped up the crowd with his high energy. He performed two Christian rap songs — “Bible” and “Crazy.” The crowd enjoyed

his lyrics, especially the chorus when he sang, “I’d rather have a Bible than a gun in my hand.”

“God is always in my music, this gave me the opportunity to dedicate my craft to Christianity,” Buckley said.

Talent contestant Robert “Bobby-O” Ojeda said he loves music and has been chasing the dream since he was 18 years old. He is presently working on an album and was grateful for the chance to perform on stage. “My music is based on my life and is centered on Christ, who died for us,” Ojeda said.

However, the chance to perform on stage was nothing new for many of the artists. Jamal “Journal” Davis appreciated the opportunity to show the new him with his personalized song, “San Quentin Problems.”

“Sometimes it is just a matter of shaking off some cobwebs. I am bringing the new me to everybody. I can talk about what I want to talk about,” Davis said regarding how his rap is spiritually driven now.

The other incarcerated performers were “Famous Amos,” Steve “Tre” Wright, Michael Mackey, William “Divine Rival” Harrison, and a trio known as the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen —

consisting of Rhashiyd Zinnamon, B. Raheem Ballard, and George “Mesro” Coles-El. Their lyrics carried a message of truth and passion.

Outside guests who came in with the Prison Fellowship Academy included some talented Christian rappers and hip-hop artists. Artists such as Mustafah the Hood Priest, Young Preach, Wild, and Uthanasia shared their music and positive vibes with the San Quentin community. With one accord, their message was that “God is good” and that by His grace you can make a change no matter where you are.

“I used to be lost without faith,” Mustafah said, reminding everyone how good God is after sharing his experience being in county jail fighting a serious case.

Facing a 25-year sentence, he said a group of people came into his jail preaching the Word. It was there that he told God if He let him go, he would always ride with Him.

“The people in here can make a change right where you are,” Mustafah said.

He shared how humbling the experience is to perform in prison, allowing him to pay his debt and give back. “It means [even] more to come into prison and perform. I am the fruit of giving back, and

there is another me in here,” he said.

Praying for revival before entering The Q for the first time, Mandon “Wild” O’Neal shared how the Spirit does the talking when he steps on stage.

He declared that he is a “prisoner to the Lord only made alive in Christ.” O’Neal takes pride in using his talents for good. “It’s a blessing to take something God has given me and give it away,” he explained.

For O’Neal, music is the vehicle to take the gospel to the world. He said when his music really started to take root in the Word, it activated the Spirit. “It means a lot to bring the gospel, to preach Christ,” O’Neal said.

Leading up to the concert, Nobles, Jones, and Zinnamon used concepts from “America’s Got Talent” and “The Gong Show” to design a talent competition to select which residents would perform. Dozens of candidates competed in a series of elimination rounds for two months in the prison’s Garden Chapel. Pastor Nobles, Jones, and fellow

peers judged each round of presentations.

“This is like in Genesis, the beginning of big things in the future,” said Nobles as he expressed his hope for more such concerts to come.

To start the competition, Nobles threw down a challenge for performers to change their lyrics and music to a “call of a higher anointing,” expressing themselves without any vulgar language.

In the first round, Jones played the role of the “Sandman”, eagerly waiting to hook somebody off the stage if the audience called for it.

In the final round of the competition, Mustafah blessed the community as a guest judge.

Lt. Berry attended the expressive hip-hop concert and shared that she believes in the power of music to inspire. She added that there are definitely more musical events to come in the future. “It is good to see how religious services tie into one’s incarceration,” Lt. Berry said.

Three years after retiring from CDCR, Ralph Diaz sits on the board of the Prison Fellowship Academy. He shared how there is more to be done with this rehabilitative model and that we need to bring the power of love. “It is love that sustains us,” Diaz said.

Some of the Prison Fellowship Academy personnel at the concert were visiting San Quentin for the first time. Nathan Hale, visiting from out of the state, was impressed with the rehabilitation going on within the prison as well as the musical talent on the stage and the positive vibes from residents.

“When somebody says it ‘doesn’t feel like prison,’ that’s God’s doing,” Hale said.

Luis “Young Priest” Caraballo of the academy had some memorable lyrics. “I had this greatness in me but my flesh was weak,” he rapped. His energy on stage was lively, and between songs the formerly incarcerated artist preached. “You don’t fight with these,” he said, holding up his fists. “You fight on these,” he said as he knelt on the stage.

FOR THE PEOPLE WORKING TO BRING PROSECUTORS INTO SAN QUENTIN

HILLARY BLOUT, STAFF ATTORNEYS VISIT SQ MEDIA CENTER FOR ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

Hillary Blout, founder and executive director of For the People, is leading an effort designed to bring district attorneys inside of California prisons to get a closer look at rehabilitation in action.

The organization helps people in prison with prosecutor-initiated resentencing, as well as educates prosecutors nationwide about the benefits of this approach. Prosecutor-initiated resentencing gives prosecutors discretion to recall prison sentences. Since its founding, For the People has helped facilitate the release of many incarcerated people with inordinate sentences who are now living successful lives in the outside world.

Blout and For the People staff attorneys Cassie Gazipura, Rhona Taylor and Puja Bhatia visited San Quentin’s Media Center in August to discuss the effort.

“I am here because the San Quentin News is basically

the birthplace of this idea [of prosecutor-initiated resentencing],” Blout said.

She shared that former Editor-in-Chief Arnulfo Garcia had been serving an unreasonably long sentence under the Three Strikes Law before the Santa Clara County District Attorney fought to secure his release through resentencing. The kind of intervention was unheard of at the time and ultimately inspired Blout to begin working to promote prosecutor-initiated resentencing.

Assembly Bill 2942 first codified prosecutor-initiated resentencing into California law, making it the first-of-its-kind law in the nation. AB 2942 allows prosecutors to ask a court to revisit past sentences, determine whether further confinement is “in the interest of justice,” and facilitate a prison release when appropriate.

Troy Dunmore was released from San Quentin in October 2021 under a prosecutor-initiated resentencing thanks to For the People’s efforts.

“For the People has been with me since I paroled,” Dunmore shared. “I had a re-entry person check on me, and I could call them if I needed any assistance. I [feel] like they had my back to this day.”

Dunmore said that when his mother passed away his parole officer was giving him a hard time about going to her funeral. With no hope left, he contacted Blout. Her organization made sure he could go and pay his last respects to his mother.

“Next thing I know, my parole officer showed up at [my] transitional house and handed me some papers authorizing me to go,” he said.

Since then, Dunmore has been working with the For the People to help convince more district attorneys that it’s worthwhile to review the past sentences and rehabilitative achievements of incarcerated people through prosecutor-initiated resentencing. He would still be in prison serving a 38-to-life term without the intervention of Blout and her team. Instead, Dunmore is living free and working as an alcohol and drug counselor during the day while attending college at night.

In 2021, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed legislation that

included a three-year, \$18 million dollar investment to expand prosecutor-initiated resentencing throughout the state. Nine counties signed up to participate in the pilot program — Los Angeles, Santa Clara, San Francisco, Riverside, Contra Costa, San Diego, Yolo, Merced and Humboldt. Gov. Newsom provided an additional \$8 million in funding for 2023.

“We would like to bring in as many prosecutors that are a part of this pilot so they can see what these programs look like, what rehabilitation looks like,” Blout told SQNews.

“Prosecutors see people on their worst day when they are at their lowest,” said Blout, who noted that some prosecutors don’t consider how people can change while serving time. “But the prosecutors’ job is to make sure they’re upholding justice.”

Blout believes that all prosecutors will eventually warm to the idea of prosecutor-initiated resentencing. She herself became a prosecutor in the hope of making a positive difference.

For The People will be bringing prosecutors from pilot counties inside San Quentin later this year to see what rehabilitation and transforma-



Top: Executive Director Hillary Blout talks about prosecutor-initiated resentencing with the incarcerated. Below: Staff attorneys from For the People take copious notes during their recent visit to the SQ media center.

tion looks like.

“We believe that most incarcerated people can be rehabilitated and that every person in prison deserves an opportunity to have their case reviewed,” Blout wrote in their December 2021 handbook

for prosecutors, adding that these opportunities shouldn’t only be given to offenses categorized as “non-serious” or “non-violent.”

“We know the possibilities of rehabilitation and redemption transcend these labels.”

EVENTS

By Jerry Maleek Gearin
Journalism Guild Chair

On July 19, approximately 150 staff, volunteers, formerly incarcerated people and currently incarcerated people gathered in San Quentin's Garden Chapel to process the meaning of freedom. Greeted with Starbucks coffee, herbal tea and marshmallow treats, the visitors came as part of the nonprofit Enneagram Prison Project, which first came to SQ in 2016.

An enneagram (pronounced any-a-gram) is a geometric figure that maps out personality types of human nature, according to the book "The Wisdom of The Enneagram," by Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson.

The EPP's mission statement is "freeing people all over the world, from the prisons of our own making." The project is international with representation in Belgium, Australia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States.

According to EPP, personal growth occurs when a person identifies their personality type and can begin to understand their strengths and weaknesses. There are nine different fundamental enneagram types. They are: The Reformer, The Helper, The Achiever, The Individualist, The Investigator, The Loyalist, The Enthusiast, The Challenger and The Peacemaker.

Susan Olesek founded EPP

ENNEAGRAM HOSTS COMMUNITY GATHERING FOR PRIOR STUDENTS



Ron Broomfield sits among current and formerly incarcerated Enneagram participants, program staff, and outside volunteers. The global program first came to San Quentin in 2016. Its purpose is to help participants understand the personality types they have developed to protect themselves from early-life traumas and to identify the roots of their strengths and weaknesses.

in 2012 and joined the SQ gathering as host for the third time.

"It feels like a family reunion," Olesek said. "I am a lover of all humanity."

Olesek asked Dustin Bald-

win, an EPP board member, to lead the group in a grounding meditation. She invited Warden Ron Broomfield (prior to his promotion to the director of Adult Institutions) to the stage to share his thoughts about the

program.

"As the warden, I get credit for all you do — it's the work the volunteers and the incarcerated people do that makes me want to be in this space," Broomfield said.

Olesek called on some of the people who have experienced the program to explain what freedom means to them.

"Being able to come in and give back to the people in blue that helped me — this is what

freedom is like," Troy Phillips, a former SQ resident, told the audience. "I was not scared to walk through the gate today, because I'm able to walk out."

EPP graduate and resident Patrick Demery said that freedom allows him to be vulnerable. "My life has been consumed in fear of being vulnerable. It allows me to ask for help," he said.

"The idea of freedom is not to listen to that voice that says I am not good enough. I do not have to do everything good, but to the best of my ability," said resident Terry Hall, who has recently received a parole date. "I now can show people what hope and change looks like."

Next, Olesek asked the audience to break into small groups to process what freedom meant to them. About 10 small groups worked together for 40 minutes.

At the end of the afternoon, Olesek asked participants to gather in a circle along the walls of the chapel. She asked everyone to say, in one word, what they were taking away from the event.

The most frequent words were love and connection, along with family, understanding, trust, unity, gratitude and loving-kindness.

FILM FOLLOWS REHABILITATIVE EFFORTS OF FORMER GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

Mohammed Bin Nahif Rehabilitation Counseling and Care Center is "the world's first rehabilitation center for terrorists," according to the documentary, "Unredacted Film."

Former Guantanamo detainees were transferred to the rehabilitation center to complete a quarterly-phased program that generally takes up to 18 months to complete, teaching interpersonal skills and art as a form of rehabilitation.

The recreational center allows liberties similar to the free world, offering Ping-Pong, a sauna, gym, and a pool.

Teaching prosocial skills, emotional intelligence, and financial literacy keeps detainees focus on life after punishment.

Fear is normal and those released spoke of the shame they experienced over killing people and how it wasn't something to be proud of. Seeking forgiveness for what they did, they talked about their successes after rejoining society.

Independent film producer Meg Schaffer, Public Information Officer Guim'Mara Berry, Mount Tamalpais's Jody Lewen, and nearly 100 residents gathered in the Protestant Chapel for the documentary film showing men from Yemen and Saudi Arabia who participated in the program.

The film brought out the humanity of participants, in stark contrast from their life trajectories that led to their choices prior to incarceration. Khalid, a program participant who used to create bombs, now makes car alarms and key remotes for cars.

Participants talked about wanting to fight injustice and the systemic torture of being in Guantanamo. The goal of

the program is to have the incarcerated ready for reentry at the end of the program. Some participants are sent back to prison if they don't show certain signs of reform.

This was filmmaker Schaffer's first visit to San Quentin. She discussed her experience as a firefighter in New York City prior to the 9/11 attacks. She realized the messages about Islam and the Middle East on mainstream news contradicted what she saw.

"I didn't know what to believe. I had all these questions; I started watching the news furiously. Mainstream [news] was not reporting what was being represented," she said.

Schaffer decided that she needed to tell the story of such individuals outside of what was being shown on American television. She moved to Yemen and studied Arabic and Islam and started traveling around the world speaking directly to those who were being talked about on American television.

When the men are released from the Mohammed Bin Nahif center, they cannot be in contact with anyone currently at the center, or other graduates. This is in contrast to when someone is released from San Quentin, as people released from SQ can hope to have a support group of formerly incarcerated individuals to assist them.

In an effort to change the negative stigma of those incarcerated, former terrorists shared examples of humanity and what it means to meet someone important that cares about you.

Schaffer said that her motivation for the film was to view offenders from a victim-holistic angle and share perspectives not explored in mainstream media.

"They're not psychopaths. They're human beings with a life trajectory that led to their choices," she concluded.



Vincent O'Bannon // SQNews

IJ COLLABORATES WITH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT GROUP TO EMPOWER LEGISLATIVE ACTION

By Juan Haines
Contributing Writer

When Lee Gibson walked into San Quentin State Prison on June 28 as a formerly incarcerated person, he recalled memories about his time behind bars. The "crashing clang and secure click of the iron gates ... sent tingles down my spine," he said.

Gibson is now the community advocate manager for Initiate Justice, a community-based criminal justice reform organization. Initiate Justice has more than 45,000 incarcerated members. Joining Gibson on the visit to San Quentin were Executive Director Antoinette Ratcliffe, Communications Manager Michelle Cárdenas, and Policy Analyst Sarah Rigney.

Gibson said that he was excited to meet with members of the prison's Civic Engagement Group. The incarcerated-led group meets once a week to discuss issues and workshop ideas of interest to the incarcerated population.

The meeting between the

groups was held in San Quentin's library. Ratcliffe, Cárdenas, and Rigney each gave a presentation about their role in the organization. They also shared that they have family members who have been directly impacted by incarceration.

"Visiting San Quentin served as a critical reminder of why we do this work," said Ratcliffe after. "It gave me the opportunity to put faces to the names of some of our powerful inside organizers and members, which was priceless."

Jesse Milo, a member of the Civic Engagement Group, said, "The work we do can be discouraging at times. But it is vital to creating a healthier California."

Adding a personal note, Milo said, "As someone who harmed his community 21 years ago, I feel I have a duty to help fix it."

The chair of the Civic Engagement Group, Steven Warren, said, "Building bridges to outside organizations like Initiate Justice is inspiring. This collaboration gives us

incarcerated Californians a chance to be heard through sharing lived experiences, also influencing legislation for all carceral impacted."

Referring to the workshop, Gibson said, "The guys were attentive and inquisitive, which shows dedication. It was refreshing to see how politically informed ... they were. The questions and answers were like a Ping-Pong match that had us mentally stimulated and excited to be in the space with them. We look forward to returning and continuing to push the pendulum further to not needing prisons in the first place."

Ratcliffe added, "The work we do is hard and sometimes feels impossible, but our visits inside are a critical reminder of why we continue to do it."

Rigney said, "Visiting San Quentin and participating in the Civic Engagement Workshop was an incredibly powerful and meaningful experience."

She told the group how powerful stories are for changing hearts and minds. Cárdenas

agreed, adding, "Most of us have very similar stories."

Cárdenas, who seeks to end the use of dehumanizing language to describe incarcerated people, said, "Using dehumanizing words gives connotations toward the person. So, changing the language to humane terms reminds listeners that we are people."

She said that she "refuses to be a part of the culture that perceives incarcerated people as anything other than who they are."

The Initiate Justice staffers said they are committed to returning to conduct more workshops with the Civic Engagement Group.

"The most meaningful part was learning from the brilliant insights that were shared during our workshop," Ratcliffe said.

The Ella Baker Center supports the Civic Engagement Group. The Ella Baker Center for Human Rights is a community-based organization that advocates for legislative policies geared at equity and fairness.

PROGRAMS

RETURN OF SAN QUENTIN COOKS

H-UNIT'S POPULAR COOKING PROGRAM TURNING UP THE HEAT AGAIN AFTER TWO-YEAR COVID PAUSE

By Joshua Strange
Senior Editor

The head chef inspected the knife work of his sous chefs, checking to make sure the mint was minced finely enough and the onions were all diced the same size. The kitchen bustled with activity — everything from cooking handmade pasta from Naples, Italy, to slicing fresh green beans for the traditional Nicoise salad, to carefully folding the prosciutto ham and basil leaves to garnish the melon fruit salad.

Appetizing aromas filled the kitchen, a preview of the three-course meal under preparation.

While you might think this scene was from a fine-dining restaurant at an upscale location, it was taking place in H-Unit’s cafeteria kitchen as part of San Quentin Cooks. The popular program is finally back up and running again after a two-year pause due to the pandemic. No one is happier about this than the new cohort of students.

“Before I was incarcerated, I was cooking every morning,” said deaf student Matthew Hamm through a translator as he paused from slicing garlic cloves. “Now, I feel like I’m getting my muscle memory back, my identify back, that feeling of being a whole person again, of being a human again. It’s a little taste of freedom and it helps get me ready to go back home.”

Student Willie Alarcon recalled that he almost cried when he was slicing ripe mangos during the first class. It was the first time in five years he had eaten the distinctive tropical fruit.

“I’m broadening my horizons and expanding my repertoire. I’ve learned quite a bit. I’m picking up so much,”



Skylar Brown // TV Specialist

Left: Head chef Adelaar and volunteers Rich and Hannah pose with chefs-in-the-making in the H-Unit kitchen.

Above: A three-course meal made with fresh ingredients, herbs and garnish that seems a shame to serve on paper plates.

said Crawford, another student.

Crawford explained that on the outside he had to create his own jobs because nobody wanted to hire him because of his criminal record. He said he can’t wait to apply the new skills and recipes he’s learning to help restart his soul-food catering business when he gets out. Crawford gave credit to the program’s volunteers.

SQ Cooks is a nonprofit organization with a small budget for ingredients, but all of the instructors are volunteers.

One of those volunteers is Adelaar, the head chef for the class, who has decades of experience in the restaurant industry. Besides running a diversity of fine-dining restaurants — everything from American, French, Italian and even Oaxacan cuisine — Adelaar now works at a

chefs’ supply warehouse.

His passion for cooking and teaching is clear as he circles around the kitchen, giving tips and encouragement to his incarcerated students.

“I think that for me, not cooking professionally anymore, this really scratches that itch,” Adelaar said. “We treat this just like a real restaurant. And I love seeing the guys grow. Seeing the progression in their skills is really, really fun.”

One such student is Vinh Chung, who said he is going to surprise his family when he comes home because he never cooked before and was never in the kitchen. Yet now he already has expert chopping skills, which were on display as he minced the fresh peppermint.

“He got the magic tongue,” said student Raymoan Powe about Adelaar’s sense of taste.

“It’s amazing how just a little bit more salt or a little bit of this or that can make all the flavors pop. I got my notebook out, writing everything down I’m planning on putting to use for my family; especially all the vinaigrette sauces he be showing us how to do.”

Another one of the volunteers is Rich, a former chef who now works with Adelaar and helps procure ingredients.

“I love doing stuff like this,” Rich said. “I know good food and what it can do for you and how good you feel after eating it, so when the opportunity came up through Adelaar, I jumped into it.”

Part of the secret to fine cooking is having top-quality ingredients, which were on display at SQ Cooks. On the menu for the day were traditional Italian spaghetti Bolognese topped with burrata

cheese, along with the melon salad and the Nicoise made from tuna, blanched green beans, heirloom tomatoes, cooked baby potatoes, olives, and dressed with homemade vinaigrette infused with fresh herbs and shallots.

“Now I know you gotta buy the good ingredients if you want the good flavors,” Powe said.

Adelaar teaches them the importance of professional plating, too.

“Imagine guys, that we’re doing a catering. We’re going to plate, but at the last minute we’re going to set it with the herbs and prosciutto,” Adelaar said about the melon salad as he drizzled a sample plate with high-grade “finishing” olive oil. “Remember, you eat with your eyes,” he added.

“Y’all be really challenging my palate,” said student Steve Warren. “Food is never going to be the same for me — the vibe, the colors, the smells, the flavors, the aesthetic. It’s like a rave in your mouth!

Now I understand what quality really means.”

Warren and Powe talked about how it would be great if The Q can get a healthy grocery program going as San Quentin transforms into a rehabilitation center. They emphasized the need for residents to access more healthy food, observing that if SQ Cooks can make such fine meals in H-Unit’s kitchen, then the institution can, too.

Hannah, a first-year volunteer who worked at the world-famous Chez Panisse in Berkeley, agreed with their sentiment.

“Prisons and hospitals are places where nutrition should be the most important, but it’s the last places to get the attention and the funding for good food. That’s so weird to me,” she said.

As the three-hour class came to close, the students sat down with the program’s volunteers to enjoy the fine meal they had created together — a meal full of color, flavor, nutrition and a taste of hope.

TWO BARBERS FIND FRIENDSHIP AND COMMUNITY IN THEIR CRAFT

By Idalio Villagran
Spanish Journalism
Guild Writer

Edgar J. Rodriguez cuts hair while his apprentice, Manuel Mena, sweeps the shop. The client in the chair beams with delight as he looks in the mirror at his exceptional haircut, making him look and feel good, ready to succeed.

These two barbers, the teacher and the apprentice, are full of enthusiasm and passion for what they consider a blessing from God — their talent to perform top-notch haircuts and help people on a deeper level in the process. The teacher and the apprentice are residents of San Quentin’s Alpine housing unit.

“Nowadays you can find many good barbers, but these two barbers go deeper than just cutting someone’s hair, they see this as a tool to reintegrate in society,” said Aristeo Sampablo, one of their customers.

Rodriguez said that when he was 15 years old, “I was ignited with the interest in the barber world. I wasn’t very good at first, but I was always observant when I got my hair cut at the local barbershop.”

He recalled how he started cutting his brother’s hair, then his dad’s, and before he knew it, he was cutting everyone’s hair in the neighborhood.

Rodriguez’s skill and techniques are self-evident. While he does not consider himself a perfectionist, others may think otherwise.

“Above all, my motivation is

to be very good at what I do, but most importantly, staying humble,” he said.

Usually his clients ask him to cut their hair, but sometimes he starts that conversation. “I can’t see a peer looking like a cave-man,” he joked.

In order to stay organized, Rodriguez has a notebook with dates and times so his clients can set an appointment. Once in his book, no one escapes without a haircut.

The most popular hairstyles are razor fades, tapers and comb overs. However, he likes to push the limits, such as when he performed a faux-mohawk, razor blend with a swift design on each side for one of his fellow residents in Alpine.

“When you look good, you feel good,” Rodriguez said about how his skill helps the rehabilitation of his fellow residents. “A good haircut has the power to boost someone’s confidence, self-esteem and motivation. They tend to be more inclined to conquer [their challenges] and have an outlook of success.”

He is always open to having a good conversation with his peers when they sit in his barber’s chair.

“My barbershop is a place where everyone is welcome. I find myself [being] expressive when I cut my clients’ hair. Frequently I am the one that learns a lot from the people around me, which helps me grow as a real man,” he said.

Rodriguez feels that cutting hair is also therapeutic for him.

“When I cut hair ... I am no longer in prison, I’m in my community,” he said.

Rodriguez would love to see a barber certification program here at San Quentin, like the one they have at Valley State Prison.

According to him, this program would open many doors for countless residents of San Quentin who would benefit from such vocational training and certification. This would give them legitimate tools to assist in their successful reentry back into society. He has faith that the vision and transformation of San Quentin into a true rehabilitation center can soon make this wish a reality.

One person that Rodriguez is helping to give such skills to is his apprentice, Mena.

“Early in my childhood, I used to listen to stories from my grandfather’s friends, about [how] he used to cut their hair and I [would] think that I wanted to be like him,” Mena said. “I thank God for answering my prayer by bringing Edgar to my life, so he could teach me how to cut hair. Now I can be like my grandfather.”

When Mena sees his clients with unkempt hair, he recommends a haircut and makes himself available anytime during the day. His policy is “first come, first served.”

He enjoys how his clients feel when he finishes cutting their hair, because they tell him, “It came out very good. I think I have a new barber now.”

Mena said his favorite hair-



Teacher Edgar J. Rodriguez (above) and apprentice Manuel Mena (below) take pride and joy in having their clients looking and feeling good.

cut is the “comb-over fade.”

He likes his patrons to look presentable for their pictures so when their loved ones come to visit, they will find them handsome without the wrong kind of surprise.

Mena would love to be able to get his barber license or certificate so he can work as a barber when he returns to the community. “There are two barbershops that are offering me a job, but they want me to have a license or certificate,” he said.

Until that day comes, Mena and Rodriguez will continue to hone their skills and help their peers’ journey to rehabilitation be a bit smoother.

—Adan Arriaga
contributed to this story.



LAW & POLICY

BRINGING FAIRNESS
TO THE COURTS

BILL WOULD REQUIRE JUDGES TO
CONSIDER RACE AS A MITIGATING
FACTOR DURING SENTENCING

**By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief**

A new California bill is proposing that judges consider a criminal defendant’s race when determining prison sentences.

Assembly Bill 852, introduced by Assembly Member Reggie Jones-Sawyer, is being proposed in an effort to rectify the historical racial bias deeply engrained in the criminal legal system.

The relatively unknown bill passed through the Assembly in May and is now under consideration in the state Senate, according to Jones-Sawyer, who is the Democratic chair of the California Assembly’s Public Safety Committee.

If it eventually becomes law, the proposed bill will amend the California Penal Code to require judges to consider a convicted person’s race as a factor in mitigation when determining a prison sentence, if judicial discretion is allowed in the case.

The legislation was inspired in part by Gov. Gavin Newsom’s Reparations Task Force, which aims to address some of the harm from the legacy of slavery.

“The Legislature intends to rectify the racial bias that has historically permeated our criminal justice system as documented by the California Task Force to study and develop reparations proposals for African Americans,” the language of the bill reads.

The bill emphasizes that when judges exercise discretion in determining appropriate sentences, they must consider the disparate impact on historically disenfranchised and system-impacted people.

This legislation comes on the heels of the passage of Assembly Bill 256, the historic Racial Justice Act for All, which began taking effect January 1 of this year as part of a phased rollout for incarcerated people who qualify.

Assembly Bill 256, sponsored by Assembly Member Ash Kalra (D-San Jose), retroactively applies Kalra’s previous Assembly Bill 2542 passed by the Legislature in 2020 “to ensure equal access to justice for all.”

Based on Kalra’s bills, Section 745 of the California Penal Code now reads, “The state shall not seek or obtain a criminal conviction or seek, obtain, or impose a sentence on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin. A violation is established if the defendant proves by a preponderance of the evidence, that a judge, district attorney, law enforcement officer expert witness, juror, etc., uses racially discriminatory language, bias, or animus, whether explicit or implicit.”

Like the Racial Justice Act, proposed Assembly Bill 852 has its critics.

“[O]ur justice system is intended to focus on accountability for behavior without racial considerations,” said Republican Tom Lackey in

arguing for “race-blind” policies. “The voice of victims and any potential repercussions for public safety should be our highest consideration when making decisions that directly impact California communities.”

However, in California studies show that Blacks and Latinos are sentenced under the state’s Three Strikes Law at far higher rates than their White counterparts.

According to a 2014 report by the American Civil Liberties Union, Blacks constitute only about 13% of the U.S. population but as of 2009 constituted 28.3% of all lifers, 56.4% of those serving Life Without Parole, and 56.1% of those who received LWOP for offenses committed as a juvenile. As of 2012, the ACLU’s research shows that 65.4% of prisoners serving LWOP for nonviolent offenses were Black.

“These racial disparities result from disparate treatment of Blacks at every stage of the criminal justice system, including stops and searches, arrests, prosecutions and plea negotiations, trials, and sentencing,” the report stated. “Race also matters at all phases and aspects of the criminal process, including the quality of representation, the charging phase, and the availability of plea agreements, each of which impact whether juvenile and adult defendants face a potential LWOP sentence.”

According to a 2018 report from the Judicial Council of California titled “Disposition of Criminal Cases According to the Race and Ethnicity of the Defendant,” race and ethnicity had a significant impact on conviction, level of conviction offense, and sentencing. The report was required under Penal Code Section 1170.45.

Blacks make up 19.5% of all felony defendants but 5.7% of the total California population, according to the Judicial Council’s report.

Assembly Bill 852 seeks to reduce the harmful effects of racism. It will require California courts to actively combat racial bias in the criminal court system by exercising a form of reverse damage control. This will be done by allowing a defendant’s minority racial status, such as being Black, as a mitigating circumstance during sentencing rather than an aggravating one, which as statistics show has been done throughout California’s history.

The legislation aims to ensure fairer outcomes for Blacks and other minorities by adding a new section to the Penal Code. If the bill passes, that Penal Code section will read, “Whenever the court has discretion to determine the appropriate sentence according to relevant statutes and the sentencing rules of the judicial council, the court presiding over a criminal matter shall consider the disparate impact on historically disenfranchised and system-impacted populations.”



Stock image

ADVOCATES POINT TO FLAWS
IN PAROLE BOARD PROCESS

**Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor**

Gov. Gavin Newsom’s decision to veto the parole granted to Leslie Van Houten of the Manson “family” in 2020 was reversed by California’s 2nd District Court of Appeal this past May, exposing flaws within California’s parole process, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1969, Van Houten was involved in the murders of Rosemary and Leno LeBianca. She was 19-years-old at the time.

“Her explanation of what allowed her to be vulnerable to Mr. Manson’s influence remains unsatisfying,” Newsom wrote regarding his 2020 veto, which came after Van Houten’s prison was experiencing a Covid-19 outbreak.

The appeals court recognized that Van Houten’s admirable record while incarcerated demonstrates “speculation” on the part of the governor, and that state law requires that the governor’s decision to veto parole “be supported by some evidence, not merely by a hunch or intuition.”

California is one of two states that allows the governor to veto parole recommendations, which risks giving power to political agendas.

The veto process was introduced by legislators in 1988 and only allows the governor to veto parole recommendations, not denials. The California Department of Corrections only recommended parole in 20% of cases in 2019, reported the *Times*.

A 2008 decision by the California Supreme Court states that parole boards cannot deny a person parole based only on the seriousness of their crime and instead must show that a candidate poses a risk to public safety to be denied parole. This requirement is often sidestepped by boards and governors, who use vague or unclear language in their decision-making, keeping the process opaque.

The *Times* reported that Newsom agreed to release just 8,000 people during the pandemic, even though many people serving life sentences faced serious health risks and death due to Covid-19 and posed little-to-no risk to public safety.

“No matter the outcome, [Van Houten’s] journey raises serious questions about the gubernatorial veto. Do we truly need an extra layer of political considerations to assess danger to the public — or should we trust the professionals appointed by the governor, mostly from law enforcement backgrounds, to do their job?” the *Times* asked.

In an op-ed for the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, California Innocence Project staff attorney Claudia I. Salinas wrote about the problems faced by innocent people seeking parole. She noted that innocent parole candidates must either argue their claim of innocence or admit responsibility, meaning they either have to perform a “mini trial” requiring additional evidence in favor of the candidate or falsely admit to a crime to perform remorse.

“I hope for more favorable case law to emerge to help him and many like him navigate the contradictions in the parole suitability process,” Salinas wrote of one of her innocent clients navigating parole. “Otherwise, innocent individuals remain in this burdensome dilemma of accepting responsibility for something they have not done in efforts to simply regain their freedom.”

THE UNCHECKED POWER OF THE PROSECUTOR

**By Vincent E. O’Bannon
Staff Writer**

The notion of equal justice, symbolized in the statement “justice is blind,” is a fundamental principal in American democracy. In a court of law, the judge has the supreme authority to enforce this standard and supervise justice.

However, some argue prosecutors have the most control over what takes place over a defendant’s effort to adjudicate criminal charges against them and how justice is served, more so even than judges do.

“A prosecuting attorney’s sworn duty is to protect the rights of victims and to seek justice for crimes committed,” said Terrell Threet, a prisoners’ rights advocate who was formerly incarcerated, in a phone interview with San Quentin News. “However, in order to achieve one objective, that does not mean neglecting the other, which is fairness to those being prosecuted.”

The authors of an opinion piece in the *Brookings* publication wrote, “The credibility of our justice system, the public’s faith in our institutions, and the stability of marginalized communities are directly tied to prosecutorial discretion.”

The June 2023 *Brookings* article, authored by Howard Henderson, Kiana Henley, and Tri Keah Henry, was titled, “Reforming our prosecutorial system is no longer just a proposition — it is an urgent imperative.”

Prosecutorial discretion, an obscure yet profoundly influential aspect of America’s criminal justice system, has had a spotlight shined on it by recent high profile indictments, the *Brookings*’ article said.

An increasingly troubling facet of prosecutorial decision-making, and a major concern for advocates of social justice, is the potential for misconduct in using such discretion. Such behavior can include a prosecutor withholding exculpatory evidence that would absolve a defendant of guilt — a practice prohibited under the Brady Act known as a “Brady violation.”

There is also the practice of unduly influencing witnesses or pushing them to exaggerate or even fabricate testimonies. Prosecutors may also blur lines in their statements by misleading a jury with false statements, according to the article. The latter is protected under the doctrine of absolute prosecutorial immunity.

Since 1989, 60% of exonerations in the United States have been linked to prosecutorial or police misconduct, the authors wrote.

“In an era when calls for justice transparency have reached the highest level, we can no longer overlook an element that silently sways the justice landscape, shaping case outcomes and sacrificing members of low-income, Black, and brown communities,” the authors of the article wrote.

Threet agreed, saying, “Where justice is concerned, the blindfold that connotes equality and fairness has left many of the system’s most impacted communities adopting the ideology that the criminal justice system is inherently White. [It’s] an ideology adopted by Black and Latinx communities.”

A fact that Threet says lends credence to this view is that Whites primarily run the country’s jails, prisons, and immigration detention facilities. “When society thinks about crime and punishment, it’s in terms of black and white. Not in the sense of Black and White people. Rather, ‘you commit the crime, you do the time,’” he said.

The authors noted that more than 90% of cases in federal and state courts are resolved through plea bargains, generally sidestepping the courtroom and judges, which further increases the power wielded by prosecutors. How they wield that power is shaping the landscape of justice across the country — for better or worse.

According to the authors of the *Brookings*’ article, the power held by prosecutors goes nearly unchecked. They added that within the judicial system, critics question whether this power is wielded too selectively and relentlessly, which serves to undermine the right to a fair trial, fosters mass incarceration, and erodes what is left of the public’s faith in equal justice.

Prosecutors have a large reach in America given that more than 2.3 million felonies and ten million misde-

meanors are handled by 2,300 individual prosecutor’s offices each year, the authors note. These cases occur “within a labyrinthine legal framework, armed with the threat of lengthy mandatory-minimum sentences.”

“It is in the sanctum of the criminal justice system where true change in reforming an unjust system must begin,” said SQ resident Calvin Williams Jr. “Not in the legislative branches, not in government’s abundance of laws, but in the humanity phase of a prosecutor’s duty.

“Laws were enacted for punishing crime,” Williams said. “The end to that means does not need to be compounded by adding a less humane approach, such as prosecutorial misconduct, systemic racism in prosecutions, disproportionate sentencing of minorities, and outdated draconian-sentencing laws.”

Williams agreed with the authors that prosecutors’ authority often goes unchecked. He said justice for a crime committed, and punishment of the accused, can be accomplished with the intent to be a humanitarian, adding there can never be true justice if racism plays an integral role.

“There can never be true justice in and on an uneven playing field unless the more dominate team adheres to a strict code that entails recognizing that one’s position over the less dominate does not mean that total domination is the best approach,” Williams said.

VIRGINIA

CIVIL WAR-ERA LAW USED TO PROTECT VOTING RIGHTS FOR FORMERLY INCARCERATED

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

A lawsuit says a Civil War-era law setting restrictions on Virginia's constitution should protect the voting rights of people convicted of certain felonies. The plaintiffs argue that any subsequent laws that further restrict such voting rights, violate the commonwealth's constitution.

In June 2023, a coalition of advocacy groups that included the ACLU and the prestigious law firm WilmerHale, filed a lawsuit against Virginia Governor Glen Youngkin and other state officials. At issue is the claim that Virginia violated the 150-year old law that created the rules allowing it to be readmitted to the Union after the Civil War, said an article in *The Hill*.

According to the ACLU, the Virginia Readmission Act prohibited Virginia's constitution from being "amended or changed to deprive any citizen or class of citizens of the right to vote, except as a punishment for such crimes as are now felonies at common law."

The list of felonies at that time included murder, arson,

burglary, and rape. However, just a few years later, legislators amended the law to expand that list; an amendment that the plaintiffs now claim is illegal, for it violates the Virginia Readmission Act.

"Some of the most pernicious attempts to suppress the voting rights of Black citizens originated in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, but they have consequences that persist today," said Vishal Agraharkar of the ACLU of Virginia in a statement. "Our constitution has enabled mass disenfranchisement through decades of over-criminalization, and it turns out that was illegal."

Melvin Wingate, one of the plaintiffs represented in the case, said, "As a minister I'm a firm believer in second chances and being able to vote would be a chance for me to participate in my community. But since I was released in 2001, I've been unable to vote in five presidential elections, six midterm elections, and five Virginia gubernatorial elections."

The Hill said that Governor Younger's office had no comment.

NATIONAL

MASS INCARCERATION TO FINALLY BE REDUCED?

By Randy Hansen
Journalism Guild Writer

Congress is considering massive changes in America's criminal justice system aimed at reducing prison populations *and* reducing serious crimes.

The proposed legislation is called the Public Safety and Prison Reduction Act. It "would let Congress help states break the cycle of excessive imprisonment and its devastating impact on families and communities," according to an op-ed by Hernandez Stroud and Lauren-Brooke Eisen in *The Hill*. The legislation was pro-

posed by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law, where the authors work. It calls for spending \$1 billion in federal funds to encourage reducing prison population *and* reducing crime.

Bipartisan legislation is not common but recent criminal justice reform such as the First Step Act, which passed during the Trump Administration, shows it can be done, stated the authors.

If the top 25 states with the largest prison populations reduced the number of people they incarcerate by 20%, it would mean almost 179,000 less people confined in state

prisons, said the article.

The authors cite research showing that almost 40% of people doing time in state and federal prisons do not pose a threat to public safety. Additionally, 12% of this population are 55 years old or older and have a very low risk factor to public safety. Many diversion options, such as ankle monitors or house arrest, can safely reduce prison populations, argued the authors.

The legislation stipulates that if a state reduces its prison population by 20% after three years, then it would be eligible to receive further funding under the law.

The bill could help to fight recidivism by funding more programs within prisons and by providing more help to integrate those being released back into society.

The 1994 Crime Bill authorized \$12.5 billion to add more prison beds on the condition that states adopt an excessively harsh sentencing regime, which needs to be changed, the authors stated.

"Congress can send a powerful message to the nation that some issues are bigger than partisan politics, like delivering public safety while promoting a more fair and humane justice system," Stroud and Eisen wrote.

NATIONAL

BOP CONSIDERS TAKING 75% OF TRUST FUNDS TO COVER RESTITUTION, FINES

By Keith Carter
Journalism Guild Writer

The federal government is proposing that 75% of the money sent to people's trust accounts in federal prisons would go to pay fines and victim restitution first, an *NPR* story reported.

Advocates for incarcerated people claim the proposed new rule would go too far by shifting fiscal responsibility to families members who are trying to make sure their loved ones in prison can pay for basics like postage, hygiene, and commissary supplies.

"It's really like a sledgehammer, when you could bring a tool that was smaller to address the problem," said Shanna Rifkin, deputy general counsel for Families Against Mandatory Minimums.

The rule proposal was prompted by a *Washington Post* investigation that disclosed that some wealthy people serving time in federal prison, such as singer R. Kelly, have large prison trust accounts yet their fines and restitution remain unpaid.

Ellen Degnan, an advocate at the Southern Poverty Law Center, said that the issue could be solved by having the sentencing

court set payment schedules based on individual cases.

The nonprofit Network for Victim Recovery of D.C., a victims' rights advocacy group, contends that the regulation could make it possible for some victims to receive restitution payments more quickly. Yet even they said that the consequences of any such rule needs to be balanced, according to the article.

Most people in prison are not wealthy, and fines and restitution can be a burden of debt that is hard to overcome, during or after prison.

Renee Hoolans sends her

son, Bailly Sanders, \$75 a month. At a deduction rate of 75%, he would only have \$18.75 per month to spend on over-the-counter medication, shoes, and phone calls to his mother, said the article.

"My mother is all that I have, and she can only do so much. The bottom line is I don't feel that it's her responsibility to pay my restitution," Sanders said.

A Bureau of Prisons representative stated, "Commissary accounts are a privilege and the Bureau remains committed to assisting [the incarcerated] in paying their financial obligations."

1. South Dakota — (*Louisiana Illuminator*) With laws supporting self-defense protections, some people are claiming self-defense and asking for "immunity hearings" that prosecutors are calling time-consuming. "In my cases, its drug dealers who are using this law," Attorney Michael Moore said. "Did they want to pass this law to make it harder for me to prosecute drug dealers for shooting at each other?" Defense lawyers value the opportunity to prove their client's innocence, noting that "a prosecutor must show by 'clear and convincing evidence' that the defendant's behavior was illegal," the article said. Supporters welcomed the newer law that replaced a older and vague law.

2. Texas — (*Associated Press*) Texas lawmakers are being called on by family members of those incarcerated after excessive heat in prisons caused over 100 deaths. Of the states 100 prison units, 30% have air conditioning and 70% having limited or no air conditioning whatsoever. The Department of Criminal Justice denies the allegations saying the last heat related death was in 2012. Officials said the eight recent deaths were either cardiac arrest or other medical conditions, while others are under investigation, according to the report. Advocates and State Rep. Carl Sherman have been pushing to get bills passed that would require universal air conditioning in prisons. "This is not a political issue. This is a humanity issue... This is about survival," Sherman said.

3. Baton Rouge, La. — (*Associated Press*) Louisiana's pardon board denied clemency for 56 death row petitioners. A bill to abolish the death penalty failed a legislative session, which sparked the denial of the 56 petitions later that same month. Attorney General Jeff Landry noted that "the board can't waive a policy requiring a clemency petition to be filed within a year of a judge ruling on an appeal." There are, however, exceptions, such as a nearing



NEWS BRIEFS
By Bostyon Johnson
Managing Editor

execution. Promise of Justice Initiative is an organization within the state that noted, "Louisiana was failed by our appointed officials this week," according to a press release urging Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards, who voiced his support, to eliminate capital punishment.

4. Michigan — (*Associated Press*) Two incarcerated residents in Michigan sued the Corrections Department in order to have "Christian Identity" recognized as a religious group so they could hold services. State officials said recognizing the group could become a security risk because of its belief in the separation of races. "A prison is a microcosm of society, and racial tensions always exist in the prison. And taking a certified step towards that would only worsen existing

racial tensions," testified senior intelligence analyst Todd Belcher in 2021. The federal appeals court agreed with the lawsuit in a 3-0 opinion in early June 2023. "The department offered silence in response — it did not, for example, present any evidence that plaintiffs or any other [incarcerated people] who follow Christian Identity are violent," said the court.

5. Charleston, W.Va. — (*Associated Press*) State agencies were stumped by a federal ruling that said incarcerated people who identify as atheist and secular humanist could not be forced to participate in religiously-affiliated programs as a requirement for parole. Andrew Miller filed the federal lawsuit after being "religiously coerced" while at Saint Mary's Correctional Center. The state's "un-

mitigated actions force Mr. Miller to choose ... [to] either submit to government coercion and engage in religious exercise at odds with his own beliefs," or "remain incarcerated until at least April 2025," the article said. One attorney in agreement with the ruling said it violated Miller's First Amendment rights. "Without Andrew's willingness to take on this fight, West Virginia would continue to unconstitutionally impose religion on people in its corrections system," said Geoffrey T. Blackwell, Litigation Counsel for American Atheists.

6. Virginia — (*The Washington Post*) People eligible for sentence reductions had their release dates pushed back after Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Attorney General Jason S. Miyares restricted a 2020 law. They claimed that

it might increase crime and that it was improper for the legislature to have given relief to some violent felons, according to the article. Steven Patrick Prease argued he was wrongfully detained past his rightful release date. Senior supervising attorney Vishal Agraharkar agreed with the ruling and said, "When ... the legislature has promised [incarcerated people] that they'll get additional good time and earn an early release ... to then pull that away from people and remove the hope they had gotten is not good for public safety."

7. Boston, Mass. — (*The Boston Globe*) Individuals wrongfully convicted may seek compensation sooner than later thanks to a bill proposed to expedite access to the money owed to those vindicated of crimes. The

three state legislators who proposed the bill say people wrongfully convicted should receive \$5,000 upon release, and \$15,000 when legal proceedings begin to determine the full amount of compensation. They should also have access to social services that are currently being accessed by returning citizens. Exonerate Robert Foxworth testified at a Senate House hearing in June 2023 saying, "I shouldn't have to live at the Pine Street Inn for years, I shouldn't have to steal something to eat." Senator Patricia Jehlen said exonerates should be paid for the time they spent in prison. "When a person is sentenced to prison, we say they're paying a debt to society. But what does society owe an innocent person after taking decades of their life unjustly?"

NATIONAL

CONCEPT OF SLAVERY
ALIVE AND WELL IN
FORCED PRISON LABOR

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

The United States is one of only 17 countries that still impose state-sanctioned forced labor, according to a 2023 report by Walk Free, an Australian human rights organization.

Along with the U.S., other countries that exploit modern-day enslavement include Belarus, Brazil, China, Egypt, Libya, Mali, Mongolia, Myanmar, Poland, Russia, Rwanda, Turkmenistan, Vietnam and Zimbabwe, said a story in *The Washington Post* by Miriam Berger about the report.

State-imposed labor “is one of the forms of modern slavery that could be addressed relatively quickly as it’s about state policies,” said Jacqueline Joudo Larsen, deputy director of Walk Free.

The report highlights different types of state-compelled labor. The abuse of detainees was the most common, such as in the U.S., accounting for more than half of the instances analyzed.

The U.S. has the world’s highest incarceration rate and approximately 800,000 people are forced to work under threat of punishment in America’s jails and prisons, according to a 2022 report by the American Civil Liberties Union cited by the *Post*.

The forced-labor traces to the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which abolished slavery in 1865 with one exception: “...as a punishment for crime where of the party shall have been duly convicted.”

“The roots of modern prison labor can be found in the ratification of this exception clause at the end of the Civil War, which disproportionately encouraged the criminalization and effective re-enslavement of Black people during the Jim Crow era, with impacts that persist to this day,” reported the ACLU.

However, supporters of forced prison labor in the U.S. argue that the practice is constitutional. They claim it also helps to offset incarceration costs and aids in rehabilitation and job training for those in-

carcerated, noted the article. International law allows governments to require citizens to work under certain conditions, such as national emergencies or compulsory military service. State-imposed labor can vary from prisons, as in the U.S., to work camps and other abuses in countries such as North Korea and Eritrea, stated the *Post*.

About 3.9 million people worldwide were forced to work by government authorities in 2021. They are within the estimated 50 million people enslaved by other means, such as in involuntary labor or marriage.

Larsen said these estimates are likely to be undercounts, as “modern slavery” often remains hidden and unspeakable. The term “modern slavery” is used to incorporate “situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power,” cited the article.

The highest rate of slavery of all types was found in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Kuwait, Mauritania, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

More than half of enslaved people live in the Group of 20 nations — a bloc of the world’s wealthiest economies. Modern-day slavery is prevalent in every region of the world and is evidenced in debt bondage, human trafficking, forced marriage and involuntary labor, noted the *Post*.

The practice of modern slavery is on the rise globally. Since Walk Free’s last assessment in 2018, an additional 10 million people were estimated to have been forced into slavery worldwide.

Walk Free wrote that this comes “against a backdrop of increasing and more complex conflicts, widespread environmental degradation, climate-induced migration, a global rollback of women’s rights, and the economic and social impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

“It is a problem of our own making,” Larsen said. “So it is completely within our power to address.”

NEW YORK

REDEMPTION: EXONERATED YUSEF SALAAM
CLAIMS NY CITY COUNCIL SEAT

By Anthony Manuel
Carvalho
Staff Writer

Yusef Salaam, one of the Central Park Five who was part of the young Black and Latino teenagers wrongly convicted and imprisoned for seven years, is ready to claim a city council seat he won during a recent election in New York City.

According to Jeff Coltin of the *City & State New York*, Salaam has gone from prison to exoneration and now to elected office. “From prison, to exoneration, to the New York City Council, Yusef Salaam is on track to take one of the unlikely paths to City Hall of anyone in history,” wrote Coltin.

“What has happened on this campaign has restored my faith in knowing that I was born for this,” Salaam said Tuesday night at his victory party at Harlem Tavern.

The June 28 article reported most voters felt empathy for his wrongful conviction or his past simply did not matter. Salaam received more than 50% of first place votes according to election night results as tabulated by the New York City Board of Elections.

Salaam, running in the Democratic primary, de-



Courtesy Staci Nurse

feated two acting Assembly members, Inez Dickens and Al Taylor. The exonerated citizen is now all but set to take over the Harlem City Council seat held by Kristin Richardson Jordan. Jordan dropped her reelection bid and received only 9% of the votes and Dickens had 25%, Taylor 14%, compared to Salaam’s 50%.

Salaam’s platform included running as a candidate of change in hopes of appearing as a more progressive choice than the incumbents.

“I am not a seasoned politician. So therefore this was not politics as usual,” Salaam said on June 27.

His forecast proved accurate as the city elected him in spite of his lack of experience, which included the fact that he had never attended a city council meeting nor did he know how many council members made up the body (51) or how large the city budget is (\$107 billion).

According to the *City & State New York*, Salaam’s only exposure to politics

occurred when he had advocated for some policies at the state level before. The media outlet stated Salaam had no experience in city politics.

“He was the prodigal son that has returned. And ...he is authentic,” said Manhattan Democratic party boss Keith Wright.

Wright, a top supporter of Salaam’s campaign and a longtime political leader in Harlem, decided to take a chance on Salaam. He recruited Salaam to come back to Harlem and run as the exonerated hero had relocated to Stockbridge, Georgia.

Dickens, who previously held the City Council seat for 11 years and was widely considered the favorite in the race after he received strong support from Mayor Eric Adams, Rep. Adriano Espaillat and the United Federation of Teachers.

If the election is confirmed, Salaam will be one of the first Muslims to serve on the council, following state Sen. Robert Jackson and Council Member Shahana Hanif.

Salaam, campaigning Tuesday, heard Wright’s prediction that, “When Yusef speaks at City Hall, he will speak with a national voice.”

His voice will reflect the thousands of years wasted on the wrongfully incarcerated.

COLORADO

INCARCERATED WORKERS PENALIZED FOR REFUSING
TO WORK, DESPITE ENDING FORCED LABOR

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

Incarcerated persons in Colorado have been written up hundreds of times for refusing to work despite a recent constitutional ban on forced labor in prisons, reported 9NEWS.

Work refusal occurred at 20 state facilities resulting in over 700 instances where residents received “failure-to-work” notations.

“Offenders are informed of the potential consequences of refusing to work or attend assigned programs, including, but not limited to: restricted privileges, loss of other privileges, delayed parole hearing date, and not being eligible for earned time,” reported the June 25, 2023 article.

Citizens passed legislation in 2018 removing the slavery

exception from the Colorado Constitution so that involuntary servitude could no longer be used as punishment for crimes.

The Colorado Department of Correction’s former Executive Director Dean Williams and Gov. Jared Polis have been sued by incarcerated persons for allegedly violating the Colorado Constitution, according to the article.

“In the years after the passage of Amendment A, the state has continued to require and compel incarcerated individuals to work under conditions amounting to involuntary servitude and under threats of punishments that include being cut off from contact with family and being socially isolated under conditions that approximate solitary confinement,” wrote Valerie Collins, an attorney

representing the incarcerated.

The complaint also included the fact that non-compliant incarcerated persons were threatened with reduced “earned time” — an incentive for earlier parole. Attorneys for the state responded by writing that removing incentives is not the same as forced labor.

“By awarding privileges to inmates who comply with programming [including work requirements], and denying privileges to inmates who refuse to work, CDOC is incentivizing work and programming compliance consistent with the will of the voters,” wrote State Attorney Ann Stanton.

“I think that their refusal was a protest,” said Taj Ashaheed, a reentry advocate who was formerly incarcerated in Colorado. He also said that people refuse to work not out

of laziness but because they desire a job that is meaningful.

“I cannot comment on the lawsuit given that it is an ongoing case,” wrote CDOC spokesperson Annie Skinner, according to 9NEWS. “However, the court has already dismissed the plaintiffs’ facial constitutional claims, holding that ‘the challenged statutes and administrative regulations themselves do not force incarcerated persons to participate in involuntary servitude.’”

In 2022, a District Court judge ruled that threatening isolation or physical punishment for not working may be considered unconstitutional but that taking away privileges or earned good time may be allowed, the article reported.

Attorneys for the plaintiffs said they intend to appeal the ruling.

NATIONAL

HIGH COURT RULING
LIMITS APPEALS
GUN CASE COULD RESTRICT SECOND CHANCES

By William Burley
Journalism Guild Writer

The United States Supreme Court says defendants who have exhausted their due process cannot reopen their case. The 6-3 Supreme Court decision was the result of a federal gun case (*Jones v. Henrix*, 21-857), reported *The Associated Press* in a June 21, 2023 article.

Writing for the conservative majority, Justice Clarence Thomas declared that people who have exhausted their appeals don’t get another day in court “based solely on a more favorable interpretation of statutory law adopted after [their] conviction became final.”

In the case in question, Marcus DeAngelo Jones was convicted in 2000 for being a fel-

on in possession of a gun and given a 27-year federal prison sentence. His attorney argued that Jones believed that his felon record had been cleared and that he was no longer prohibited from possessing a gun.

Key to Jones’ argument was a 2019 court decision ruling that requires prosecutors in felony gun possession cases to prove that defendants knew they were not allowed to have a weapon. Following this ruling, Jones tried to reopen his case but was denied by a federal appeals court, the *AP* story said.

A 1996 federal law meant to limit excessive federal appeals, known as AEDPA, was used by the Supreme Court in its ruling when the conservative majority said Jones had exhausted his appeals even in the face of the 2019 decision.

Thomas wrote that only two instances — newly discovered evidence or the new interpretation of a constitutional provision — would authorize Jones to have “a second bite at the apple,” said the article. Given that most federal appeals courts would have allowed Jones to reopen his case based on the new defense, Thomas wrote that this would amount to an “end run around” the 1996 law.

Coupled with other recent court-imposed limits on appeals, dissenting Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson claimed that the ruling has transformed “a statute that Congress designed to provide for rational and orderly process of federal prosecution judicial review into an aimless and chaotic exercise in futility.”

WASHINGTON

TEEN CREATES PROGRAM FOR SYSTEM-IMPACTED KIDS

By Jad Salem
Journalism Guild Writer

Yasmine Arrington was 16 years old when she created ScholarCHIPS, a program to help children of the incarcerated with college financial aid, *CNN* reported. Arrington knew about these difficulties because growing up her father was repeatedly incarcerated.

Now she is 30 and ScholarCHIPS has provided over \$450,000 in scholarships and other assistance, supporting the educational journey of over 80 scholars as they pursue their college degrees, the network reported May 12, 2023.

Because of her work, Arrington has been designated as a “CNN Hero.”

Besides her father being in prison, her mother died when she was 13. Arrington and her two brothers were raised by their maternal grandmother.

“All too often you become marginalized or dismissed as

a delinquent,” she said “Having an incarcerated father also took a toll emotionally, mentally.”

Despite facing challenges, Arrington actively participated in extracurricular activities and joined LearnServe, a program for teenagers in Washington, DC. In the program, she was prompted to identify issues that angered her. Arrington selected mass incarceration and its impact on children and families, aiming to address this concern.

“My father has literally been in and out of jail and prison my entire life,” Arrington said. “I began to do research, and I learned that there’s so many other people that are kind of my age experiencing what I’m experiencing.”

Motivated by the lack of scholarships specifically for teens with incarcerated parents in her region, Arrington embarked on a mission in 2010 to establish ScholarCHIPS,

a nonprofit organization that provides scholarships, mentorship, and a support network for young people in similar situations.

“Most of our scholars, when they apply to ScholarCHIPS, they say, ‘This is the first time I’ve ever told anyone’ that they have an incarcerated parent. So, ScholarCHIPS becomes a safe space where young people feel comfortable even divulging and sharing that information,” Arrington said.

Every year, new scholars are welcomed into the program, expanding its reach and impact.

“I definitely stay in contact with scholars well after they’ve graduated. It really is a family of sorts,” Arrington said. “Just a little bit of support can go a very, very long way and make a difference not only in one person’s life, but in an entire family and an entire generation.”

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DAVID INOCENCIO

FOUNDER OF *THE BEAT WITHIN* TOUCHED COUNTLESS LIVES,
LEAVES BEHIND A POWERFUL LEGACY OF SERVICE, COMPASSION

With his ever-present smile and the power of encouragement, legendary advocate for incarcerated youth, David Inocencio, died July 8 after losing a courageous battle with cancer. As the founder and senior editor of The Beat Within, his service to those impacted by the juvenile and criminal justice systems will live on through TBW's monthly magazine, and in the hearts and minds of every person whose lives he crossed paths with. These are just a few of those voices.

A legendary advocate for incarcerated youth, David Inocencio, founder and senior editor of *The Beat Within*, died on July 8 after losing his battle with cancer. His resilience and dedication produced *The Beat Within*'s monthly magazine, "A Publication of Writing and Art from the Inside."

David was not only a light at the end of the tunnel; he has also left a light in the tunnel.

The *Beat Within* creates a network of inspiring volunteers that encourage incarcerated people inside San Quentin. The *Beat Within* holds weekly workshops facilitated by incarcerated writers and artists. Since 1996, David reached thousands of incarcerated youths in juvenile facilities nationwide. David's trailblazing 27-year journey reached thousands of hearts — one beat at a time.

When a divine appointment comes our way, and we meet someone who holds us close to their heart, their spirit enlightens and inspires us all for generations to come.

Much has been said, and even more has been felt, as David's close companions and *The Beat Within* writers and artists share their memories of this great man. His colleagues and all of his incarcerated writers and artists felt David's vision and passion.

David's heart was, and still is, larger than the "heart of a

lion." His smile stretched from a place of love as he fought with compassion alongside others, helping them to find their voices and put them into words. The poetry and short stories from *The Beat Within* put feelings into words that pulse all around the globe.

David's loving, wonderful family mourns a father, husband, son, cousin, close friend, and colleague as they say their loving goodbyes. His closely knitted writers and artists bid a farewell to David Inocencio as well.

We love you and miss you dearly Brother David — rest in heavenly peace.

—Raúl Higgins
Contributing Writer

I met David in 2018 at *The Beat Within*. I was greeted with a warm smile, a gentle yet firm handshake, and with words of compassion.

He carried an understanding of acceptance and a sense of belonging. Brother David did not judge us for our past choices or present circumstances. Instead, from a place of love in his heart, he chose to see the good in all of us. To some, he was one, and to others, he was all.

He was someone who didn't mind getting in the trenches to fight alongside others, helping them find their voices — words of poetry, song, spoken word, and rap. He shared feelings of laughter, hardship, happiness, joy, pain, and listened to everyone.

I thank God for these past five years he blessed me with

him. David shared his life, not just with me, but with so many. His family was also blessed to have had him in their lives.

I love you and miss you my brother David. You have left each of us in a better place than where you found us. You have fought the good fight — now rest in peace my brother.

—Donald Thompson
Beat Within Writer

I have had the great honor to have met and called David my friend these past 12 years. David taught and inspired us here at San Quentin. When I spoke with other Kid CAT members and others who knew David, they all expressed feelings of, "We can't believe he's not with us anymore, yet it's in spirit and inspiration that we carry him

now moving forward."

I honor David and his family in ceremony and in song, to help them in their loss. He was taken too soon.

He grew the vision and goal to give youths throughout the country and generations to come a voice for each other to change and reshape their paths. Now, it is everyone's vi-

sion to keep it moving forward. I give gratitude to all the ones who helped grow his vision throughout California and nationwide.

Thank you my friend and brother David, with love and respect.

—Greg 'White Eagle' Coates
Kid CAT Facilitator
Beat Within Writer

I will be honest. I expected David to treat me like everyone else had that I met for the first time.

Yet I will never forget the time I first met David in *The Beat Within*. He didn't judge me because I was bald-headed and full of tattoos. David welcomed me with open arms.

He was super friendly and

treated me like a human being. David was a down to earth person, a man of service, and compassionate to all people. He encouraged me to be the best person I could be.

The world lost a wonderful human being. Both of us had made plans for when I got out to work with at-risk youths in local juvenile halls. This was

something we were very passionate about. I will continue to carry on his service in his honor. I will always keep David close to my heart. He may be gone physically, but never forgotten.

—Michael Sperling
Kid CAT Member
Beat Within Writer

David was heart felt listener and a compassionate giant who always treated you like a human — he helped so many lives. He sent vibes of love, peace, and empathy for our community. He always held a space and made you feel at home. In his presence, we felt at home.

My own work with David started in 2019 when he welcomed me into *The Beat Within*'s workshops, inviting me into bear witness to a group of remarkable humans whose friendships he treasured. I felt incredibly lucky to be part of this extended family. The magic of *The Beat Within* extends far and wide into places David didn't even imagine.

This past June, one of our graduating seniors at the high

school where I teach spoke about *The Beat Within* in her graduation speech. She described *The Beat Within* workshop in her "Voices of Incarceration" class that led her and her peers to an almost magic vulnerability and honesty.

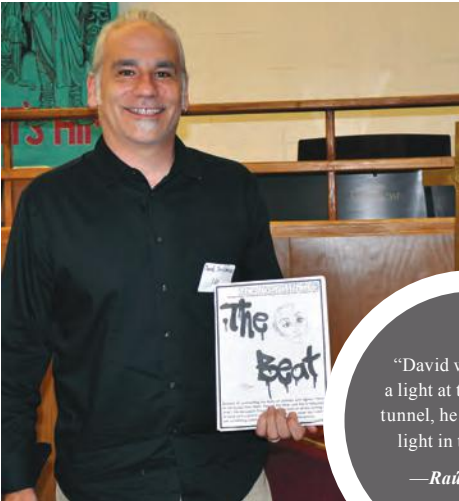
She described her response to hearing such raw, honest, and complex truths from her classmates: "All I could think about were the ways that I would have liked to have shown up for them, to have been a friend in their difficult moments," she said. "In 27 years, David seemed impervious to burnout or compassion fatigue, or any perils of doing work in this field."

"He didn't see *The Beat Within* as 'work,' but instead as a community of voices striving

to be heard. He gave full attention to every detail, but also to the unmet needs of the person he talked to. David inspired hope, new ideas, storytelling, and creating art with the spirit of courageous vulnerability and humility. David made lifelong relationships marked by trust and gratitude."

As we reflect back into our own moments with brother David, remember what he always reverted back to keeping hope alive, the beat goes on, and so does the space where we can show up fully and honestly. Thank you David for being a friend to so many, in both the difficult moments and the sweet ones.

—Courtney Rein
High School Teacher
Beat Within Facilitator



SQNews archive photo



Courtesy Courtney Rein

"David was not only a light at the end of the tunnel, he has also left a light in the tunnel."

—Raúl Higgins



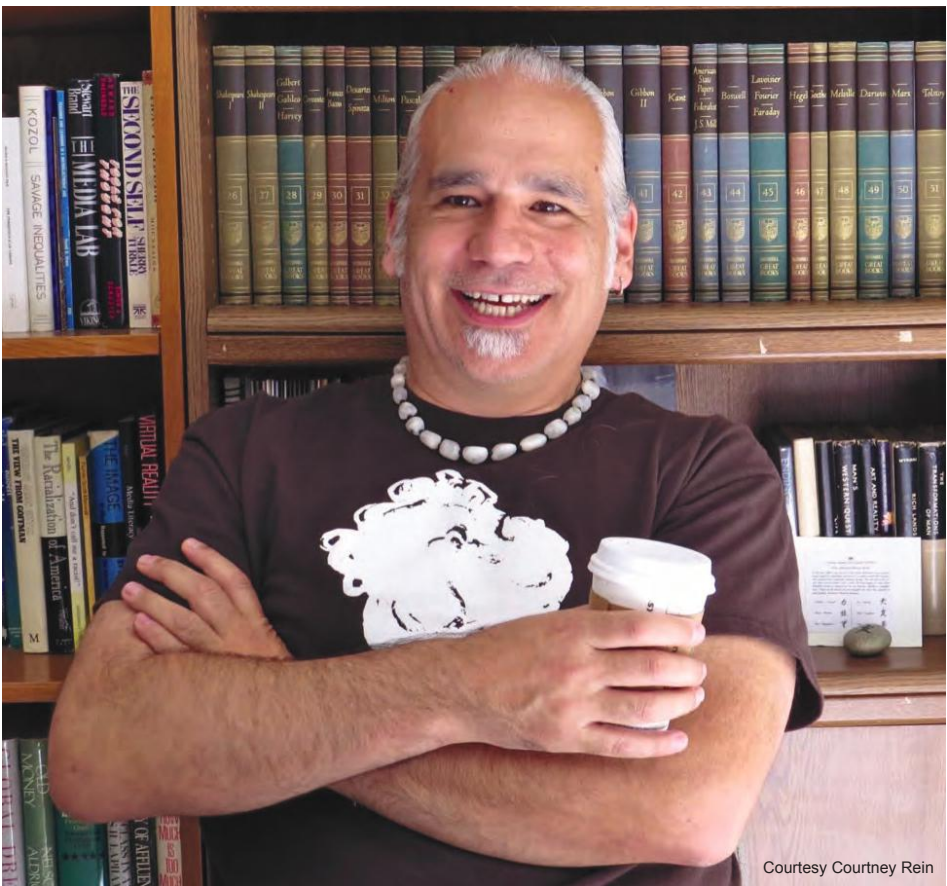
Tony Singh // SQNews

HEAVEN COULDN'T WAIT FOR YOU

By Sarah Cummings

A vessel for healing, a beam of light
You cleansed souls of their suffering
Like the purest of natural springs
You encouraged us to drink in you hope
You absorbed our toxins
For you can't pour from an empty cup... How was yours never empty?
Do you lead with a heart that has no bounds?
Humility needed you but didn't know how to nurture you
God took you back home swiftly
He could no longer allow his angel to suffer
A kiss of death
Sweet surrender and peace
Maybe you'll come back as a trombone
Deep, deep bravado
Touched by the hands of an adoring musician
For I know how you love the vibration of jazz blues and creation
Maybe you'll be a Redwood tree
Standing tall with your head blissfully in the clouds
Supporting all life
Above and blue you effortlessly
Your roots grounded, deeply connected to the source
You breathe life into wilted flowers
The last time I saw you I brought you flowers
Almost as colorful as you
Your body was frail and vulnerable
Your eyes being brighter than I had ever seen
I realized, through your eyes, you weren't afraid

Maybe it's because you knew you left this realm more beautiful than it was before you came
Maybe it's because you live life selflessly without regret
Maybe it's because you were finally able to unburden yourself of the weight of the world
What I do know now is you had no fear
I saw serenity, I saw eternal love
A love and too grand for a body to hold
As you withered, so did the bouquet of flowers I left for you
As each pedal fell, a tear dropped from my eye and cracked my heart
This grief comes in waves
When the moon is for the tides come flooding in
Water flows through my eyes
Softness of silver moonlight reminds me of you
In mourning, good mornings are scarce
Followed by melancholy afternoons
Fleeting memories glimpses of moments with you
Night covers me like a weighted blanket
The kind of paralyzing comfort
Natural habitat for the nocturnal creature which is a writer
Thank you for teaching us the power of the pen
In the hands of tortured souls
Thank you for showing us
Freedom is only a page length away
By the way of scribbled feelings, thoughts, beliefs, and revealing Truth.



Courtesy Courtney Rein

HEALTH

MEDICAL SUPPLIES FOR PAROLEES INCREASES AS RESULT OF LAWSUIT

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation will now provide extended supplies of medication and other medical equipment needed by people paroling from prison.

Instead of a 30-day supply of medical supplies, CDCR will now provide a 60-day supply under an agreement made in the 30-year old class-action lawsuit under the Americans with Disabilities Act, according to *KFF Health News*.

CDCR will also have to provide canes, wheelchairs, walkers and other equipment deemed medically necessary in the first month of release, without charge.

“Most people on parole and [those] who they are releasing to parole are going to end up benefiting from this,” said At-

95%
of parolees
are eligible for
Medi-Cal

orney Ben Bien-Khan, one of the lead negotiators on behalf of the incarcerated.

At least 11,000 parolees who have physical developmental or mental disabilities will benefit.

The state is also required to sign up parolees for Medi-Cal, Social Security benefits or Veterans Administration benefits at least 90 days before their release.

“These improvements are expected to help shut the revolving door between home-

lessness and incarceration that prevents far too many people with disabilities from succeeding on parole and re-integrating into the community,” said Bien-Kahn.

About 95% of parolees are eligible for Medi-Cal, according to a recent state report. Until now, roughly 17% of Medi-Cal applications and 70% of Social Security applications were still pending when incarcerated people were released.

The Federal Receiver who controls the state prison medical system made these latest changes in February 2022 after earlier negotiations with incarcerated people’s attorneys, and it’s now written into parole policy.

“The transition from prison to parole is fraught with danger for all parolees, but especially those with disabilities,” said a letter from an attorney arguing for better care.



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

BITTERSWEET
ARTIFICIAL SWEETENER LINKED TO CANCER

By Steve Brooks
Editor-In-Chief

The popular artificial sweetener known as aspartame is now on the World Health Organization’s list as “possibly carcinogenic to humans,” according to *The Guardian*.

It has been linked to cancer, primarily in animal studies, but also some human studies. For example, a 2022 study of more than 100,000 adults in France found consumption of large amounts of artificial sweeteners was linked to a slightly higher risk of cancer.

Aspartame is used in thousands of “sugar-free” products, including diet sodas, drink mixes, syrups, gelatin, ice cream, and even chewing gum. It is now officially deemed a “possible” cause of cancer if consumed heavily.

The WHO’s International Agency for Research on Cancer has three categories of classification for cancer-causing substances: possibly carcinogenic to humans, probably carcinogenic to humans, and carcinogenic to humans.

“It’s a slight warning to people, but it’s not ‘do not consume,’” Barry Popkin, a professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina, said of the WHO decision. “Consume moderate levels and your OK,” he said, according to *NBC News*.

The popular ingredient has been around since 1974 and is found in over 5,000 different foods and drinks commonly consumed.

The WHO decision advised that a person weighing 70 kg would need to drink more than nine to 14 cans of diet soft drink a day to exceed the daily guideline.

Nonetheless, a second WHO group, the Expert Committee on Food Additives, did not change its threshold for the daily amount of aspartame that it claims is safe to consume: 40 milligrams per kilogram of body weight for adults who weigh about 154 pounds, equivalent to the amount in around 14 cans of Diet Coke.

The Food and Drug Administration has a slightly higher daily limit of 50 milligrams per kilogram of body weight for an adult who weighs about 132 pounds.

“FDA scientist do not have safety concerns when aspartame is used under the approved conditions,” the agency said to *NBC*.

However, there are many who would disagree. “This new report from the WHO shows that companies need to reduce the overall sweetness of their products rather than relying so much on sweeteners,” said Harriet Burt, a senior officer for World Action on Salt, Sugar & Health based at Queen Mary University of London.

“When done correctly, reformulation can gradually remove excess sugars, salt, and saturated fat from foods to improve their overall healthiness without the need for replacement ingredients such as non-sugar sweeteners,” Burt told *The Guardian*.

Past research has linked artificial sweeteners to a higher chance of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity in addition to cancer. Cancer is on the rise among youth and is no longer considered to be a disease of the aging population.

Further, the purported health benefits of sugar-free sweeteners have been drawn into question by a variety of research.

For example, a 2022 study in France found that people who consumed aspartame were at increased risk of stroke and that replacing added sugar with artificial sweeteners did not lower the risk of heart disease.

In another study published last year, Israeli researchers found that artificial sweeteners altered the participants’ populations of gut microbes.

“It’s best to eat a natural, healthy diet with naturally sweet foods,” said Dariush Mozaffarian, a professor of nutrition at Tufts University. “So, I think of these artificial sweeteners as a bridge away from very high doses of added sugar but not necessarily a safe switch.”

PROSTATE CANCER EXAMS SAVE LIVES

By Simeon Alexander
Journalism Guild Writer

Cancer is a leading cause of death in America’s jails and prisons, yet those afflicted frequently refuse to get examined or acknowledge their illness, according to data from the *Bureau of Justice Statistics* cited in a *Prison Journalism Project* article.

From 2001 to 2019, cancer accounted for 27.5% of all prison deaths, said the May 23, 2023 story. Prostate cancer among men is one of the leading types of cancer, equal to the number of cases and deaths by breast cancer among women, according to a report by the National Cancer Institute cited in the article.

The chance of a diagnosis for prostate cancer climbs for men over 50 years of age, but many men refuse to accept their problem because of fear and reservations.

“There is a fear of the

exam itself and finding out you may have cancer,” said Al Burgess, a resident of the Everglades Correctional Institution. The examination typically requires a gloved, digital rectal examination.

“You can run from the examinations only to discover the cancer years down the line,” Burgess said.

Some men worry that “something is wrong with them as a man” if they receive a prostate cancer diagnosis, Burgess commented.

Burgess has self-tested for prostate cancer since age 32. He has worried about the disease since a visit to his grandfather at age 19. His grandfather had large tubes protruding from his groin — tubes to drain his urine and control prostate enlargement, Torres reported.

A *Yale Cancer Center* study found that anyone diagnosed while incarcerated or recently released from prison has a higher risk of dying

from cancer than for persons never incarcerated.

“What are we running from? The disease? Fear of the unknown?” Burgess asked. “If you detect it early, the treatment isn’t that severe. ... We have to establish a pattern of dialogue to leave a better legacy for the generation coming up.”

An Everglades health administrator shared her concern stating, “We don’t see [these patients] until it’s too late. ... Why won’t the men speak up and notify medical staff?”

The author of the article, Gervasio Torres Jr., noted that men openly talk about alcohol addiction or drug dependency in support groups but not about prostate concerns.

“Fear prevented my dad from having an honest conversation with his provider and his family about his health. Don’t let it stop you,” he wrote.

WHAT ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HEALTH CARE AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY?

Transitions Clinic Network is a network of community health clinics that serve returning community members. TCN clinic programs are led by community health workers with lived experience of incarceration and reentry and support people with their healthcare and reentry. TCN hosts a monthly Frequently Asked Questions 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.

Connecting to the health care you need and deserve is important when you get out of prison. There are different kinds of health care in the community. The kind of care you choose depends on what your health problem is, how urgent your need is, and your health insurance coverage.

What is Primary Care?

Primary care in the community is for your everyday health care needs. Each person can select a home clinic where they pick a primary care provider. Your primary care provider will help you



stay healthy with regular check-ups to track things like blood pressure and weight and to test for conditions like sexually transmitted infections, diabetes, or cancer.

Another goal of your primary care provider is to help you watch and treat any health conditions you already have, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, or asthma. Your primary care provider may order medications or suggest other treatments. Primary care providers want to get to have an ongoing partnership with you, so they know you and understand your needs.

What happens if I have special health care needs?

Sometimes your primary care provider will decide you need “specialty care.” Or maybe you are already seeing a specialist. Specialty doctors help diagnose and treat very specific medical conditions, such as cancer (oncology), diabetes (endocrinology), heart problems (cardiology), or skin conditions (dermatology) to name a few. Your primary care provider helps organize

all your medical care and will typically need to make a referral for you to go to a specialty clinic. Check with your health insurance before seeing a specialist to make sure it will be paid for by your plan. If you need specialty care, seeing a primary care provider as soon as possible is especially important so they can connect you to the specialist you need.

When and how do I see my primary care provider?

Getting primary care as soon as you’re out of prison is important to keep you healthy and prevent you from having to seek emergency care. Typically, you will receive only a 30-day supply of your medications to take home when released, so finding a primary care provider *as soon as you can* is important to continue your treatments. Activating your health insurance is a necessary first step to finding a doctor; if you have Medi-Cal (free public health insurance) you will need to call your county to let them know you are out so they can turn it on for you. Then call to make a doctor’s appointment as soon as you can (before you get low on or run out of medications) because sometimes you must wait to see a doctor and to

get your medications refilled. Most of the time, clinics will require a pre-scheduled appointment for you to see your primary care provider. Sometimes clinics will offer options for unscheduled “walk in” appointments. Your clinic may offer appointments in-person, over the phone, or by video. These “telehealth” options are more common from the Covid-19 pandemic, and it may be a good option if you live far away from your clinic or have limited transportation. If you have access to a phone or computer, you can ask about this option when looking for a clinic. Your new doctor may want to meet you in the clinic first before allowing telehealth follow-up visits. Visits with your primary care provider should happen regularly (every three months to a year depending on your health) or if a new problem comes up. It’s good to see the same provider each time so they can get to know you and your conditions.

What services are offered at a primary care clinic?

The services that are offered are vary between clinics. Some clinics only have medical care, while some clinics might offer additional

services like behavioral health (including psychiatrists and counseling), addiction medicine (like medications for substance use such as Suboxone or Naltrexone), dentistry, insurance assistance, or social services. Community health workers work at some clinics in the community to help support patients. Clinics that are part of the TCN employ community health care workers with lived histories of incarceration to help people who are coming home from prison. When you call to make your first appointment, you should ask what services are available so you know if the clinic will fulfill what you need and want. Also, check that they take your health insurance, such as Medi-Cal, because each clinic accepts different types of insurance.

What’s the difference between an emergency department and urgent care? How will I know if I need emergency care?

Emergency departments are for when you need immediate care for something that may be life-threatening. Urgent care is a middle ground between your primary care clinic and the emergency department, where you can be

seen without an appointment for an injury or illness that cannot wait until tomorrow to be treated. Emergency departments are open 24/7 and urgent cares have set hours. Urgent cares have a specific list of conditions they can help with, so they may have shorter wait times than emergency rooms. If a new problem comes up and you’re not sure where to go for care, you can call your clinic to speak with a nurse or an on-call provider after hours and they can help you decide when and where to be seen. Some health insurances will have specific costs associated with seeking emergency care. Keep in mind that urgent care and emergency departments are not meant for your everyday health care.

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 community health worker and to see if there’s a TCN program in your community of return. We are open Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Robert E. Burton Adult School's academic and trade programs recognize more than 350 grads

GRADUATION

Continued from page 1

and more rehabilitative approach, that more than two-thirds of these student have moved on from San Quentin. Most of them returned to their communities and their families with a sense of achievement and accomplishment, having gained a new set of tools to equip them for success in the world.

"I'm very pleased that we are able to do this," said Principal Wheelless. "I'm thankful we are not on a modified program [for Covid]... We are able to have friends and family come in to celebrate the achievements of our graduates. It's been a long time coming."

Looking forward, Wheelless sees the education of the incarcerated becoming an even greater priority as rehabilitation and reentry take center-stage in the California prison system.

"It's key," he said. "It's one of the key components of Governor Newsom's initiatives to introduce the California Model of rehabilitation."

WORDS OF INSPIRATION

It was an atmosphere of joyous celebration, of pride and accomplishment. Around 8:30 that morning, a line of loved ones from outside began to file into the chapel. Most were wearing smiles; one was already in tears. In the background, San Quentin's own band, The Greater Good, began to tune up, running through a few quick notes and sharing welcoming smiles with the visitors.

As the first few notes of "Pomp and Circumstance" filled the air, grads began entering the chapel in a single continuous line. In seconds, families and friends were on their feet, the applause and screams of encouragement overwhelming the live music as ear-to-ear smiles broke out in a wave across the faces in the room.

Once the procession of graduates had reached their seats, everyone in the packed auditorium remained standing and the room fell silent as incarcerated veterans of San Quentin's Honor Guard presented the state and national colors. The California Republic flag was dipped in respect as the instrumental sounds of the National Anthem washed over the crowd. On-stage the sign language interpreter offered a moving interpretation of the music, a flowing performance that stood in contrast to the stoic expressions on the faces of the former soldiers.

Master of Ceremonies Ms. D. Searle looked out over the assembly and expressed her pride and gratitude for the efforts of the graduates before her.

"We had over 350 graduates from our combined technical and academic programs," she said. "Students who defied the odds. ... This serves as a testament to their strength and character."

Then she announced the first of five graduate speakers, Milton Alcantara, whose multilingual English-Spanish presentation had everyone's attention as he reflected on the mistakes he made before coming to prison.

"I chose the streets over my family," Alcantara admitted. "I lived as if I had no family, as if I had no ancestors, as if I had no future."

He unknowingly echoed grads from the school's last commencement ceremony in 2019, crediting Principal Wheelless for getting him back on track to earn his high school diploma.

He also thanked his teacher for her dedication. "Sufi did the work to keep her students on-track during the pandemic," Alcantara said, recalling taking an algebra test in the North Block rotunda while sitting on a milk crate in the middle of a pandemic. "All of this stands as a testament to what we can achieve."

Though he hated school as a child, Alcantara has learned to love learning. On graduation day, he was receiving his high school diploma, as

well as certification as a Peer Literacy Mentor. He will be receiving his Associate of Arts degree this fall, moving on to a bachelor's thereafter.

Another graduate speaker was James Duff, whose opening words held the audience's rapt attention: "I lost my father — twice."

First, when he was just three years old, his birth father was assassinated in Thailand. Years later, his adopted father lost his life to brain cancer in 2012. Devastated by the loss, Duff dropped out of college and lost his way. At San Quentin, however, he found it again and has now earned his Computer Related Technology core certificate.

Again, the refrain was heard: "Principal Wheelless was instrumental to my success."

"I want you to see how important education is," Duff told his peers. "We have a second chance to change our lives; education is the key to our future. Tomorrow is built on today."

COMMENCEMENT

The time came for graduates to take the stage, one by one, to receive their honors.

The first name to be called was Jose Acevedo, who strode proudly across the stage with his head held high, accepting his core certificate in Computer Related Technology to a live soundtrack of screams and applause.

Acevedo was one of 44 individuals receiving Computer Related Technology certificates. Twelve other graduates received Career Technical Education certificates for the Vocational Machine Shop or Plumbing programs, while 10 were honored as certified Peer Literacy Mentors. Forty-five received high school diplomas or equivalencies, and 10 students graduated from various colleges, including Coastline and Feather River.

Several students were called to take the stage more than once. Mark Jarosik received both CTE and Peer Literacy Mentor certificates. Milton Alcantara received his Peer Literacy Mentor certificate, in addition to his high school diploma.

The women of Anthony Denard's family leapt to their feet twice for him as he received his Computer Related Technology certificate and another for Vocational Plumbing. Their screams of support brought smiles to his face, as did their support of his friends who were also graduating.

Overachiever Donald Edge received dual Associate of Arts degrees in Social and Behavioral Sciences from Coastline and Lassen Colleges, while simultaneously earning his Computer Related Technology core certification.

One of the most notable graduates was Walter Reid, who at the age of 65 earned his Associate degree in Liberal Arts and Humanities from West Hills College.

BRINGING FREEDOM IN

One of the most powerful, but understated, facets of the day's events was the involvement of family and loved ones and their ability to celebrate their graduates' achievements in-person.

Scott Lardizabal later reflected on the impact of having his friends in from the outside community to show their support.

"I haven't seen family or friends in five years," he said. "The distance from L.A. makes it hard to travel."

"So when I graduated, it meant a lot to me that Jane [Wallace] and Jan [Divine] showed up. They've supported me from day one, and it was an awesome feeling to see them in person, to give them a hug, to have that human touch."

His sentiment was echoed on the faces of all incarcerated grads who had supporters from the community present to share in their moment. And the impact wasn't only felt by the incarcerated.

"Jane was very touched and emotional," Lardizabal said, a smile on his face. "She cried during the entire ceremony."



Below: Families and loved ones came from far and wide, often from great distances, to see their grads take the stage and receive their certificates and diplomas. San Quentin's long-standing tradition of inviting family members to attend graduations and other events has a profoundly motivating effect on prison residents, adding an incentive to pursue rehabilitative opportunities.



◀ There's one in every crowd: Donald Edge proudly displays not one, not two, but three certificates, including his Computer Related Technology core certificate and two separate Associate of Arts degrees from two different colleges.

◀ The graduation's first speaker, Milton Alcantara, addressed his audience in both English and Spanish and held listeners' attention with his funny yet poignant speech.



▲ CRT Core graduate James Duff offered a moving speech on the loss of both his birth and adoptive fathers, sharing about how he lost his way, then found it again through education.



▲ Through their tears, Jane Wallace (foreground) and Jan Divine applaud their friend, Scott Lardizabal, as he took the stage to receive his CRT Core certificate. "I don't think I've ever been so moved in my life," Wallace told SQNews later.

Below: Instructor Diane Searle, Vice Principal Dr. Worthington, Principal Michael Wheelless, and Instructor Alaina Stanciu sit proudly on stage as the ceremony progressed, happy to see their students earning their honors.



Dozens of loved ones from outside join more than 100 graduates of Robert E. Burton Adult School's academic and trade programs at the school's first commencement in four years. The chapel auditorium was silent as an honor guard of incarcerated military veterans presented the flags of the California Republic and the United States of America.

Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Academic and trade programs resume celebration after long pause

By Anthony Manuel Carvalho
Staff Writer

The Robert E. Burton Adult School commencement was held on Friday, July 28 at San Quentin State Prison.

The graduation was the first student recognition the school has held since the pandemic forced the elimination of all graduation ceremonies beginning in 2020.

The school's administration, staff and students all thoroughly enjoyed their day of recognition by sharing in the long-overdue celebration.

As the event began, high school equivalency teacher H. Lucas spoke about the significance of the day for all who participated.

"We're all really excited because it's the first graduation in four years," Lucas said.

Teacher D. Searle emceed the ceremony. She noted that between June 2019 and June 2023, the Robert E. Burton Adult School had accumulated over 350 graduates from their combined career technical education and academic programs.

Searle proudly commented, "On behalf of our school staff, I extend our heartfelt congratulations to all our graduates who are present, as well as those who were unable to attend today. Among us are students who defied the odds through unparalleled challenges. Their resilience is truly inspiring and serves as a testament to their strength and character."

For the event, the school combined all of its graduates from the numerous programs it offers, including vocational courses in computer-related technology, machine shop and vocational plumbing.

Besides adult basic education and vocational programs, students who had completed their college degrees were honored in the graduation ceremony as well. This included graduates from correspondence degrees from Coastline College, Columbia College, Feather River College, Lassen College and West Hills College.

The most prominent group of graduates was the forty-five incarcerated students who devoted themselves to earning their high school diplomas or high school equivalency by participating in the Robert E. Burton Adult School.

Perhaps the oldest graduate from the high school equivalency program was 66 years old John Gearhart, who has been a resident at SQ for the past three and a half years. He displayed the tenacity it takes for an incarcerated student to succeed.

Gearhart arrived from Wasco near the end of the Covid-19 quarantines at SQ and had to borrow books to study on his own before he took the GED exam. "I self-taught through GED; now it's on to be of service with Sufi in the PLMP program and to continue my education at Mt. Tamalpais College," Gearhart said.

"And I believe Moses was a little older than me," joked Gearhart about his advanced age.

A special mention went to the mentors' teacher A. Sufi, who started Gov. Gavin Newsom's Peer Literacy Mentoring Program pilot project at The Q with the school's vice principal, Dr. Worthington. The program, which uses peer mentoring to reduce illiteracy and improve reading comprehension, recognized the 10 men who had become certified mentors under the program.

PLMP graduate William Tolbert spoke about what the program means to him and his fellow mentors.

"We are here for a special reason," he said. "To see a person's eyes light up as they improve their reading skills is a blessing. Thirty-five months ago, Sufi gave me an opportunity to labor for freedom with an open heart that allowed me to move beyond my limitations. Education became my practice of freedom, and graduating from the Peer Literacy Mentoring Program shows me learning is a region where paradise can be created. Today's graduation was paradise for me and a lot of other men," Tolbert said.

REDEMPTION

FORMERLY INCARCERATED ARTIST RECEIVES \$20K FELLOWSHIP

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

After serving 40 plus years, former San Quentin resident Gary Harrell earned a fellowship award in March for his artistic work. His artwork started as an act of self-preservation to help him endure the deprivation and hardship of prison life.

Harrell was one of six individuals who had their artwork recognized by Right of Return. The New York City-based organization rewards formerly incarcerated artists who display exceptional creativity with a \$20,000 fellowship, reported *The Sacramento Bee*.

“Some people pump themselves up to be a lot tougher than they really might be,” said Benjamin Ballard, a formerly-incarcerated artist who knew Harrell from San Quentin. “But Gary never had that kind of persona. He was more down to earth and straightforward and humorous and everything.”

In 2020, Harrell paroled from San Quentin after serving over 40 years in multiple prisons for his part in a 1977 homicide. During his many days of incarceration, freedom seemed elusive for Harrell and his many trips to the parole board left some wondering if he would ever get out. Since paroling, adjusting to living free for the long-incarcerated Harrell has consisted of good days, bad days, and eventful days.

“If it’s not one thing, it’s 10 of another,” Harrell said in the article. “That’s the thing about life on the street. But my worst day out here is better than my best day in there.”

Several years after beginning his sentence, Harrell starting making art as a means of buying commissary items. His arts endeavors started with leather, wood, and glass. Upon his transfer to SQ in 1992, he learned block printing under the California Arts in Corrections program.

As part of the program, he was introduced to William James Association teacher Katya McCulloch, who offered

Harrell an opportunity to further expand his creative abilities and build lasting relationships.

Through persistent efforts in the 2000s, McCulloch and another instructor, Steven Emrick, used the multi-ethnic art program as a bridge to help change the longtime prison dynamic of racial and ethnic segregation and tension.

The collaborative space offered Harrell, who is Black, an opportunity to form multiple relationships despite the distinctive cultural differences. A few of those connections were with attendees from the art class including Ballard, who is White, and Henry Frank, who is of Yurok and Pomo decent.

“In the art room, factors like race, religion and what the men had done to land in prison fell away and we’re just artists in there. And that was it,” Frank said.

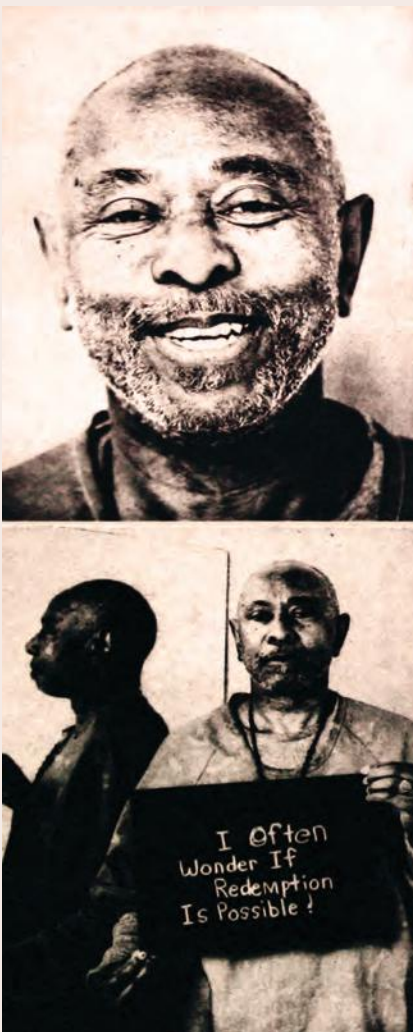
Harrell remains busy balancing working security for FedEx, creating a non-profit to provide homeless individuals with access to shower services, and investing in a trucking business. While at SQ, his work with the PIA furniture factory gave him the skills needed for his second job creating furniture out of construction debris.

Unfortunately, his artistic success does not guarantee a future of security. With little time for constructing his art, only twice a week, bills take priority, the article said.

Many people have helped Harrell in creating his artist's portfolio that has helped earn him accolades. McCulloch, his former art teach at The Q, continues to provided guidance for Harrell and his artistic vision.

A 2020 exhibit called, “Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration,” featured Harrell and Frank. Now, with the Right of Return fellowship, he is getting welcome support to continue pursuing his artwork.

Harrell’s story is far from over. When asked if he is hopeful for his future, he replied, “Every day is a good day.”



Gary Harrell spent over four decades in prison. He was recently awarded a fellowship for artists who have returned to the community.

Courtesy Beth Thielen

RUNNING FOR A CAUSE

INCARCERATED PERSON RAN ULTRA-MARATHON TO RAISE MONEY HELPING THE FAMILY OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICER WHO LOST HIS LIFE

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

A person incarcerated at Salinas Valley State Prison raised over \$7,000 by running an ultra-marathon for the family of an officer who had died.

Timothy Gridley ran for nearly six hours straight with a group of friends who rotated on and off the running track to support him.

Two hours into his run, as to be expected, Gridley’s mind started playing tricks on his body.

“My brain is telling me to stop,” he said. “[But] I like that challenge. It drives me to keep going.”

People pledged donations for every mile that Gridley ran. His effort was not for personal gain or for a medal. Instead, it was to help the family of a friend who suddenly died in a car accident in 2018.

“As bad as this may hurt right now, the reward is in the end, the feeling of accomplishment and achievement,” he said.

What makes Gridley’s ultra-marathon different from any other isn’t how far he ran, but for whom and where.

His friend was Humerto Ayala, a correctional officer at Salinas Valley State Prison where Gridley is serving 15-to-life for second-degree murder. And he ran his laps in the prison’s yard, all of 106 laps in a circle with staff and fellow incarcerated people cheering him on.

The rare friendship between an officer and an incarcerated person was sparked

by a random act of kindness. A few years ago, Gridley got into a heated argument with a guard. Officer Ayala intervened and defused the situation, saving Gridley from potentially serious punishment.

Gridley said afterwards they would always say good morning to each other and joke about their sports teams, “like two men talking to each other, not an officer, not an [incarcerated person], just two men who built a relationship.”

To deal with the grief of losing his friend, Gridley began to run. As he started feeling better, that’s when he came up with the idea to channel his running into something positive and help give back for his selfishness and bad decisions that landed him in prison.

Gridley only set out to raise \$5,000. However, after five hours and 53 minutes of running, Gridley crossed the finish line, raising \$7,108.

“This is special, it’s the best thing I’ve ever done in my life for sure,” he said.

According to Associate Warden Ed Borla, Salinas Valley has been trying to operate more humanely since 2019 in an effort to reduce violence at the prison.

Seeing an incarcerated person raise money for a correctional officer’s family is not the norm, but under Gov. Gavin Newsom’s plan to create a new “California Model,” normalizing better relations between staff and incarcerated people is the goal.

“I’m feeling great,” Gridley said. “We got a lot of good energy.”

PRISON HISTORY

WALKENHORSTS: MYTH AND TRUTH OF A POPULAR VENDOR

By Kevin D. Sawyer
Contributing Writer

The vendor, Walkenhorst’s, has been selling quarterly packages and special purchase items — such as food, appliances, clothing, music, and hygiene products — to incarcerated people in California for more than 40 years.

Many of its customers, however, know little about its history, which began in the 1960s when it was founded in Napa, California.

Prison folklore has it that the company was started by guards who worked for what was then the California Department of Corrections, but the company denies this story.

“Walkenhorst’s was not started and has never been run by corrections officers,” the company wrote in a letter for this story. “Walkenhorst’s is a family-owned company, currently operated by its third generation.”

Today, Walkenhorst’s has hundreds of employees across the United States where it does the bulk of its business. The company also provides products to Canada, Mexico, and other countries. It primarily sells products to federal and state prisons, and jails, “with few exceptions,” the company wrote.

“Stewart and Danny [Walkenhorst’s] started the prison portion of the company,” said Natalie Tovar, Walkenhorst’s representative, in an interview. “They knew someone who sold items to prisons. That person was re-

tiring and asked if they wanted that business. That’s when Walkenhorst’s started doing business in prison. Today it’s their main business.”

Tovar visits all 34 of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s prisons. She said Walkenhorst’s started marketing to the incarcerated population in the 1980s. “We’re number one in all CDCR prisons,” she said. “We are the most consistent, and that’s the feedback I get from all the prisons.”

“As Walkenhorst’s is a family company, we genuinely care about our customers and the service they experience,” the company’s letter states. “We try to ensure that our customers receive their packages with their ordered items, quickly and efficiently and we think we excel at that.”

“Anyone can order a package from us,” said Tovar. “There’s a rule within CDCR that we can only hold a package for ten business days [before shipping].”

“One of the things I feel good about saying is that we have the best customer service,” said Tovar. “We have one call center. That’s in Sparks [Nevada].” We communicate well.”

Tovar said Walkenhorst’s competitors Access Secure and Union Supply are corporations, but, “This is a family — a business that has been passed down from generation to generation.”

According to incarcerated customers, Walkenhorst is the better choice. “Access is trash,” said Quinn Cory

Martin, 43, incarcerated at San Quentin. “I ordered eleven promos, and they sold me everything at regular price. I only go to Access for Keefe coffee, the eight ounce Columbian freeze dried, in the red bag.” He said the company was out of that brand and sent him Folgers coffee as a substitute. “They never have stuff in stock.”

Several years ago Walkenhorst’s moved its operation and warehouse. “Walkenhorst’s relocated to Nevada in order to increase our selection of products for our customers,” the company wrote. “It was determined that Nevada was the best place from which to be able to provide our customers with that increased selection.”

“There’s no state income taxes in Nevada,” said Tovar. “The warehouse is bigger and nicer. It was built exclusively for Walkenhorst’s.” She said Access and Union also have warehouses in Sparks.

The pricing of packages always raises concern for the incarcerated. Many say Walkenhorst’s charges are “too high.”

Tovar explained that oftentimes the incarcerated compare Walkenhorst’s prices to its competitors’ promotional pricing. “Our dollar deals are a better comparison,” she said, adding, “Inflation has affected the prices we’re paying so we make the increase we’re seeing.” As a consumer herself, she said, “Items are going up for me too. [Incarcerated people] don’t see what I see in the supermarket. I get

sticker shock.”

According to Tovar, a CDCR employee at California State Prison Calipatria did an independent study on the top three vendors’ pricing and compared some 100 random items. The finding, she said, was Walkenhorst’s prices turned out to be the lowest of the three. No details from that study were provided for this story.

Pricing aside, Walkenhorst’s is known by the incarcerated at San Quentin as the vendor that gives back to the community. The prison’s annual Day of Peace is where the giving is most noticeable. For years the company has contributed free bags of candy, chips, cookies and other treats to make the event enjoyable.

“I appreciate their service and what they do — coming out listening to us and sharing their stories,” said Mesigh Perry-Garner, 30. He’s a member of San Quentin’s Inmate Advisory Council, a liaison group of incarcerated individuals that works between the prison administration and the prison population. “They’re very efficient in getting orders here,” he said. “They’re faster than their competitors, and you get what you order.”

“I’m happy a part of my job is to sponsor events and participate in them,” said Tovar. “We also sponsor Angel Tree,” an organization that sends gifts to children from their incarcerated parents, so the children feel like a parent is buying the gift. “Walkenhorst’s gives back because it’s

a really good thing. It’s not just for business. It’s because we care.”

For Tovar, being able to sponsor Angel Tree was “a big deal,” she said. “Angel Tree sponsored me and my brother when we were kids. I think that’s important to the child. We’ve been doing that since Christmas 2014.”

The next event Tovar said Walkenhorst’s will sponsor is Get On The Bus, a program that takes children of the incarcerated to visit their parents in prison, free of charge.

“My dad was incarcerated here [at San Quentin],” said Tovar. “I also had two uncles [in prison]. That was in my teen-age years. I think in a lot of ways I get to do good things in the prison, so I feel a lot of purpose here. I thoroughly enjoy what I’m doing.”

Three years ago, Walkenhorst’s shared moments of uncertainty with other vendors when the Covid-19 pandemic swept the nation. “Walkenhorst’s was very affected by Covid, just like other businesses,” the company wrote. “One of our largest challenges during Covid was supply chain issues. Fortunately, our employees met the challenge.”

Walkenhorst’s wrote that it became difficult to receive different products for sale as many manufacturers shut down and were no longer producing products. “This caused delays in Walkenhorst’s receiving products,” they wrote. Like many companies, they bounced back and thanked their staff. “We are proud of the amazing work our em-

ployees did.”

“Our competitors have gone through several reps since I started,” said Tovar. “California is my number one territory.”

Tovar also visits prisons in other states where Walkenhorst’s does business. “I visited ten prisons in Ohio last year, but at some point I’ve visited all 30 of the prisons in that state. If a prison is to be visited in the U.S., I’m going to go.”

For nearly a decade, Tovar has been Walkenhorst’s pillar inside the CDCR, where she meets with different prison administrations, and IAC members, “on all yards,” she said. For her, it’s about providing a valuable service to what is seemingly an invisible community.

“We also love to receive feedback from prisoners regarding the items that they would like us to provide,” Walkenhorst’s wrote. “As long as those suggested items meet the security requirements, we strive to add those items.”

There’s no longer a Napa, California office for Walkenhorst’s. “We closed that down completely,” said Tovar, who works from her home in California. She said the company has a warehouse in Ohio. “Josh Walkenhorst’s moved to Ohio with his family to take care of that warehouse.”

For nearly 60 years, Walkenhorst’s has been keeping its business in a family that today “provides approved items to many facilities across the country,” they wrote.

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

For many people, Labor Day is an occasion to celebrate the fruits of their labor, push for better workplace conditions, or simply join friends and family at their favorite lake for a three-day weekend of festivities. For some, their job is a labor of love, a source of identity and pride. For others, it may simply be a way to survive. But for all, motivation comes in the form of a paycheck.

Incarcerated workers however, working for pennies on the dollar, must find sources of motivation other than their paycheck. Work ethic, service, and satisfaction for a job well done motivate incarcerated laborers.

Acknowledgment for such work ethic and unselfish kindness in life can be transforming. “Going above and beyond, going that extra mile makes a difference,” said San Quentin resident Alan Brown, a Health Facilities Maintenance worker.

Another incarcerated worker who takes pride in his labor is Pablo Salinas, one of a team of landscapers who tends the grounds of San Quentin’s Garden Chapel. Salinas uses his creativity to beautify the area.

“The compliments from staff and guests on how wonderful

the garden looks makes me feel excited and happy,” Salinas said.

Incarcerated worker Robert Cole enjoys a sense of accomplishment by working hard and building a relationship of trust with his supervisors. In his job as a porter at the Maintenance and Vocational Building, Cole’s duties include cleaning staff offices and state vehicles.

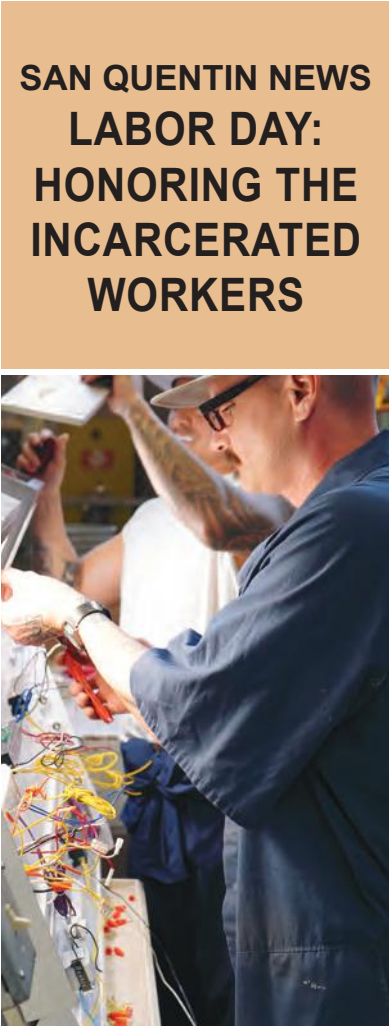
More than just cleaning, Cole is spending his days building respectful and meaningful relationships — something that will help him succeed when he paroles.

“Just knowing the free staff and administration trust me, gives me satisfaction and purpose,” Cole said.

For Brown, he finds purpose in showing his incarcerated peers how much he cares for them, which gives him a sense of meaning and helps him build empathy.

“I am making a living amends, being of service to my brothers in the hospital,” Brown said. “The parallels of our journey coincide when two people find healing from helping each other get through tough challenges.”

For these incarcerated workers, like so many others, Labor Day is not about a paycheck, it’s about service and hope for a better future.



JOURNALISM LOWERS RECIDIVISM

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-chief

Sitting at my desk in front of my computer, fingers on my keyboard, I am approached by a staff member who asks, “Why do you do what you do?” I look up and notice it’s my fellow journalist, Juan Haines. He is standing next me, playing Candy Crush on his GTL tablet, smiling and waiting for me to answer.

Some of the brightest hope left for human transformation may be found in the most unlikely occupation — as an incarcerated journalist. At the San Quentin News, we boast a 0% recidivism rate for the dozens of staff who have worked here before being released. Some of them even received commutations from the governor.

We have one of the last remaining true newsrooms in the country to go along with our still-printed-on-paper newspaper. We started in a closet with one computer, a handful of incarcerated journalists, and one retired professional journalist as a volunteer. Today we are a bustling enterprise with a staff of 20 sharing an office with 12 computers. We have over a dozen professional volunteers.

Each day is a day that I get to focus on capturing history as it happens. I live vicariously through others. One of my inspirations, John J. Lennon, built a career as an incarcerated journalist. He’s been in the business for over a decade.

“You are wildly irrelevant when you come to prison,” Lennon wrote in the *Prison Journalism Project*. “You’re nothing here and you’re nothing outside because you’ve become a memory of what you used to be. But when I’m writing and when I’m doing journalism, I take back the narrative.”

Lennon hones his skills at the Sullivan Correctional Facility in New York. He is managing to stay alive in prison through his written words.

For some, journalism provides purpose while living a purposeless life. Chris Blackwell is serving a life sentence in a Washington state correctional facility.

“Seeing the change that happens when you have the ability to educate people around the harms of things like solitary confinement, mass incarceration and the traumas that come through those, it feeds a fire that burns so hot inside of me,” Blackwell wrote.

There are a myriad of hard and soft skills that a person can develop through practicing journalism.

Shaheen Pasha is a journalism professor and the co-founder of PJP, an organization that provides a platform for training incarcerated writers and publishing their stories.

“The study of journalism can provide tangible skills, such as writing, critical thinking, social skills, and a foundation in ethics that are invaluable on the outside, regardless of profession,” Pasha wrote in *NeimanReports*.

“But, even more importantly, helping incarcerated men and women create works of journalism that lay bare their hidden world can generate more societal understanding of their experiences, aiding in their rehabilitation upon reentry to the outside world.”

Thousands of incarcerated people across the country send written contributions to places like PJP. Many collaborate with other freelance journalists, such as through Empowerment Avenue. Many of them earn honest money for their work.

One of them was Rahsaan “New York” Thomas, the co-founder of Empowerment Avenue. He recently paroled from San Quentin where he worked for SQNews and Ear Hustle.

“Before I became a writer, I was a 49-year-old man asking my mom for money for packages and support to help me access justice,” Thomas said. “[But] as a working artist, I was able to get the help I needed to get a lawyer and

I’m no longer a burden on my family. I can also take care of my grandkids.”

Journalism is not only good for rehabilitation; it can be a viable career choice after prison.

Lawrence Bartley spent 27 years in New York prisons where he did a lot of writing, earning advanced degrees. Once released, he landed a job at the Marshall Project. He is now the executive producer of *Inside Story*, a video series that delivers stories to the incarcerated. He has been living a successful life since his release in 2018.

Keri Blakinger went to prison for drugs and ended reporting on women’s issues while inside. She is the first formerly incarcerated reporter who worked for The Marshall Project and now works for the Los Angeles Times. She also has a new book, “Corrections in Ink: A Memoir,” about her time in prison for a drug crime in New York. Blakinger has been out of prison over seven years, succeeding in journalism at the highest levels.

As for me, I didn’t start my life as journalist in a newsroom or in college. I started on my bunk in my prison cell using a portable NEO digital typewriter. I was inspired by the cries for help that pierced through my cell bars during the outbreak of Covid-19 at San Quentin. I honed my skills writing for PJP and SQNews, eventually winning writing awards. That’s what brought me to journalism.

I use my voice to capture the life and mood of the incarcerated and to share my findings with the world. The work I do ensures that those hidden from society are seen, and it changes people’s lives for the better. I find myself caring about others and my community even more as journalism has helped me find my voice and place in this world. It also offers me a viable job option on release and lowers my chance of recidivism.

“There are so many reasons why I do what I do,” I told Haines.

JOURNALISTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD TOUR SAN QUENTIN

By Timothy Hicks
Staff Writer

International journalists visited San Quentin on Apr. 8 to gain an inside perspective on American prisons and how residents are making changes to better themselves through rehabilitative efforts and self-determination.

The group of inquisitive journalists came from all over the world, including Finland, Nigeria, France, Argentina, Pakistan, Bulgaria, Brazil, Australia, and Turkey where prisons vary greatly from the ones in America — for better or worse

“I wanted them to be inspired by what is possible with change,” said Michael Montgomery, a representative from *Reveal* and the World Press Institute who helped organize the visit.

He and the group toured the prison and took in the historical monuments inside one of America’s oldest prisons, surrounded by the beautiful waters of San Francisco Bay.

In their native tongues, the visitors asked about the prison’s 170-years of rich history. This included learning about some of the prison’s tumultuous times, such as when several people lost their lives in Aug. 1971 — among the prison’s deadliest days.

The peak of Mt. Tamalpais gave the group a glimpse of its majesty when they came down the hill to the Lower Yard from exploring the spooky dungeon on the side of the hospital.

On the Lower Yard, the reporters observed all of the residents out and about dressed in the grey and white workout gear and tennis shoes typical of prison, prompting many questions about the attire of the incarcerated, including their watches and jewelry.

For the visitors to see the racial and ethnic diversity around the prison was astonishing to them. They were told of the history of the wars and treaties made over the “real estate” that each race claimed on the Lower Yard, and of that mentality that has been embedded into the fabric of prison culture over the decades.

When the reporters stood inside an occupied cell, disdain marked their faces as they experienced the limited space that the incarcerated have to live in — and typically share. When some of the visitors exited the small space, they said they “felt bad” for the people forced to live in the closet-sized cells.

The guests expressed curiosity about the prison and its residents. They were accustomed to seeing how prisons are portrayed on TV. Vivid pictures conjured up by Hollywood in movies such as “The Shawshank Redemption” and “Lock Up” were all that they knew about American prisons.

Some of the visitors remarked that their country’s prisons were worse than America’s.

“I wanted to bring the group of journalists from around the globe to see at least one prison in California is not like any place they see in Hollywood,” Montgomery said, who regularly takes groups from the World Press Institute on such trips to give them different perspectives.

The journalists were excited to see the renowned SQ Media Center and hear about the effort to reimagine the prison as the new San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, inspired in part by the Media Center with its 0% recidivism rate.

After the tour, the reporters expressed their fascination with the prison and its residents and vowed to return.

ATTENTION ALL VETERANS

The Veterans Information Project of San Quentin is here to serve YOU!



Cal-Vet is the point of contact for benefits, including VA forms, reentry resources, transitional housing, and resource information for all 58 counties in California. We pride ourselves on meeting the veteran where he is at. Help is available, with information available on:

- CORRESPONDENCE COURSES
- BOARD PREPARATION
- LETTER FORMATION
- GENERAL VETERAN KNOWLEDGE

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Created in April 2002 after a Senate white paper and DD53/01 Dissemination of Information Regarding Veterans Benefits, the goal of the Veterans Information Project is to be of service to all incarcerated veterans.

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SAN QUENTIN STATE PRISON
Education Dept.
1 Main Street
San Quentin, CA 94964

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE

TECH

STUDY: EDUCATION IN PRISON PAYS DIVIDENDS

By Stuart Clarke
Journalism Guild Writer

Educational programs offered to incarcerated people can reduce recidivism and enhance their chances of success after release, according to the *Boston Globe's* editorial board.

“Providing education to people in prison is one of the best things the state can do to steer them toward a better future. College programs can positively impact prison culture and public safety,” stated the July 2, 2023 *Globe* article.

Persons who participate in correctional educational programs are 28% less likely to recidivate, a 2018 study by Rand Corporation revealed. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy reports that a college course for the incarcerated population has a return investment of nearly \$20 for every \$1 spent.

One example are the efforts of the Massachusetts Department of Correction to advance educational offering in its facilities, which according to the *Globe*, is hindered by a variety of problems.

The state recently began offering The Last Mile, a national program that teaches software development and website design, in its prisons. Each student receives a laptop computer with which to practice in their housing unit.

However, lengthy waiting lists can be expected for those interested in educational programs. As of December 2021, the Massachusetts DOC had 886 people enrolled in programs and 4,065 on wait lists. The lists included programs in adult basic education, vocational and technological training, and postsecondary education.

Correction officials claim this may not be a complete picture of the demand as some people are on multiple waiting lists, cannot participate in a class because of conflicts with other programs, or become uninterested in taking the class, the article noted

“Yet the size of the waiting lists suggests there remains room for expansion, and state officials should look for ways to eliminate barriers and expand educational offerings,” wrote the *Globe*.

Vocational programs have the longest wait lists because many have small workspaces and require careful su-



“Education turns someone who’s a tax burden into a taxpayer.”
—Jose Bou, formerly incarcerated

pervision around tools. The past school year saw 53% of incarcerated individuals in the state’s prisons enrolled in at least one educational program, according to Bernard Audette, Massachusetts DOC’s director of education.

Five universities were offering degree-granting programs in Massachusetts prisons, according to an October 2022 report by the Boston Foundation. Nevertheless, less than 500 degrees or certificates have been awarded to incarcerated people in the state since the 1970s. Further private colleges relying on donations for their small prison educational programs can accept fewer than 20 students per cohort, noted the *Globe*.

As of July 1, 2023, Pell Grants are available to eligible incarcerated students nationwide for the first time since 1994. This funding goes directly to educational institutions, which could provide a new source of money for colleges to expand prison pro-

grams, said the article.

Mount Wachusett Community College participated in a pilot program that accepted Pell Grant funding, and as of July 2, had 85 students in two prisons. The school is expanding its certificate program in business administration, bookkeeping, and accounting to allow students to earn associate degrees.

Besides limited access, numerous barriers can hinder earning a degree while in prison, according to the Boston Foundation report. The lack of computer technology limits online classes. Physical spaces for students to take classes or study can be unavailable. Students can be reclassified or transferred to other institutions where classes are not offered. Administrative barriers can prevent volunteers, instructors, and educational materials from entering the prison, the article stated.

“The two worlds of corrections and education really don’t understand each other well,” said Lee Perlman, codirector of the Educational Justice Institute at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. “There’s a real culture clash between them.”

The correctional facility in Shirley, Mass. is working to address these problems. It is creating a “dedicated housing unit for the approximately 75 to 80 men enrolled in postsecondary education to make it easier for them to create study

groups and work,” stated the article.

Currently being developed are online minicourses that can be distributed through videos and basic education courses that can be taught remotely by a live instructor.

Perlman said that in Maine, he offers online classes via Zoom that connect incarcerated people with students from MIT and other teaching assistants that can provide individualized attention. He also e-mails students and conducts online conferences with them. By comparison, Perlman said Massachusetts has been slower to implement similar initiatives.

College credits earned in prison should be transferable and ensured by educational institutions, the *Globe’s* editorial board stated. Prison officials, according to the *Globe*, should expedite security reviews and materials related to educational staff.

Jose Bou earned a bachelor’s degree in English literature from Boston University while incarcerated for seven years. “It was the first thing I ever finished,” he said.

He went on to earn a master’s degree in criminal justice while working for an organization that helps at-risk youth. He also taught restorative justice at the college level and worked in public schools.

“Education turns someone who’s a tax burden into a taxpayer,” Bou said.

HOME CONFINEMENT FOUND TO BE BETTER THAN INCARCERATION

By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

Targeted home confinement for individuals convicted of criminal offenses is safer, smarter and cheaper, according to data cited by the Niskanen Center, an advocacy organization that works to change public policy.

In March 2020, Congress passed the CARES Act in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Among other actions, the law temporarily expanded the authority of the federal Bureau of Prisons to place incarcerated people in home confinement. This helped to reduce the threat posed by Covid-19 to staff and people housed in federal prisons. It also allowed a test of the effectiveness of home supervision using electronic monitoring.

According to the report, the Department of Justice defines home confinement as containing the following restrictions:

- 1) Supervision, including monitoring, drug and alcohol testing, and check-in requirements;
- 2) Only leaving their residence for work or other preapproved activities; and
- 3) Individuals who violate their conditions or commit new crimes may be returned to prison.

Prior to placing people on home confinement, the BOP conducted thorough risk assessments using a number of criteria intended to ensure the lowest-risk incarcerated people were prioritized.

Evidence from the home confinement program after the passage of the CARES Act suggests that this approach is effective and safe, according to data cited by the Niskanen Center.

Three years after passing the law, 13,024 individuals were under in-home confinement. Of those individuals, 521 returned to protected custody — approximately 3% — mostly due to drug and alcohol violations. As of May 2023, only 22 people had committed new offenses — a new crime rate of less than half of 1%.

Due to these results, the Niskanen Center argues that home confinement and electronic monitoring is safe for the public and an effective al-

ternative to incarceration.

It also has the benefit of reducing overcrowding in prisons and allowing for better officer-to-incarcerated ratios, which creates safer prison conditions.

Another benefit are the cost savings. In 2020, housing a federal prisoner cost approximately \$120 a day whereas home confinement costs roughly \$55 a day. In addition, a smaller federal prison population can reduce the billions spent on maintenance for the numerous aging federal prisons.

The Niskanen Center contends these cost savings could be used on crime prevention measures, having a larger impact per-dollar. For example, investing money on law enforcement can actually reduce crime by providing resources to capture, prosecute, and incarcerate the most violent offenders, said the report.

Due to these advantages, the Niskanen Center is encouraging Congress to expand the use of home confinement.

The Niskanen Center’s recommendations included that Congress should change federal sentencing laws to make home confinement the default sentence for offenders who meet specific criteria.

The report noted that the BOP could customize supervision requirements to individual offenders by coupling clear rules with immediate and reliable sanctions. Some people may need stricter restrictions or more frequent drug tests while others may not.

Providing a graduated reintegration off home confinement would incentivize individuals to follow their restrictions and demonstrate good behavior. Additionally, just knowing that authorities are tracking every move can reduce reoffending, according to the report.

“In light of those promising results,” wrote the Niskanen Center, “Congress should establish [an expanded] home confinement program [to] generate substantial public safety benefits, including savings that can be reallocated to law enforcement, better enforcement of community supervision rules, and improved management of federal corrections facilities.”

BINARY DATA: THE MATHEMATICS OF COMPUTER WORLD

By Sherman K. Newman
Contributing Writer

Have you ever wondered how computers and smartphones are able to store so much information? The digital information we see as text and images, as well as the music and digitized speech we hear, is actually made up of billions of 1s and 0s known as the binary number system.

Every piece of information transmitted over the Internet, whether by wi-fi signals, fiber optics, or over actual copper cables, is sent as binary data that our devices convert into content that we can understand as text and images.

The binary or base two (2) mathematical system represents values as a series of ones (1s) and zeros (0s). In binary, the number following 1 is 10. But in this case, the digits 10 represent the value two, not the value ten. Here are the values 0 through 8 represented as both binary numbers and their decimal equivalents:

Binary: 0, 1, 10, 11, 100, 101, 110, 111, 1000.
Decimal: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

Binary numbers are usually written in groups of 4 or 8 digits. When the value being represented uses fewer digits, any unused positions are filled with zeros to maintain uniformity. These leading 0s don’t change the value of the number as they are merely placeholders. For instance, the binary number 11 (which is 3 in decimal) would be written 0011.

An individual zero (0) or one (1) is referred to

as a bit. As you might imagine, binary numbers can become very long very quickly. Writing them in 4- or 8-bit groups makes them a bit (pun intended) easier to read for us humans. We use commas in much the same way to make large decimal numbers easier to read.

For example, writing twelve million as 12,000,000 is more easily recognizable than writing 12000000. Similarly, twelve million in binary can be written as 101101110001101100000000. To make this more readable, a dash or space can be placed between every four binary digits, 1011-0111-0001-1011-0000-0000.

A bit represents one of two possible states: true or false, on or off, etc. Groups of bits are used inside computers to store large amounts of information and complex data types. The most common grouping is to take eight (8) bits and reference them as a single unit. A group of eight bits is technically called an octet, however, in computer mathematics it’s called a byte. A byte is the smallest number of bits that can be accessed in a computer system.

The term character, as used to denote 8 bits, comes from the fact that computers store alphanumeric characters, such as letters and numbers, one to a byte.

At this point, you might be wondering, “Why would I need to know this?”

First of all, it’s pretty cool knowing what a computer is actually doing under the hood. Second, becoming “tech savvy” can save you mon-

ey when buying data. Data speed is measured in bytes per second: Million/Mega – Mbps, Billion/Giga – Gbps. Having an understanding of bits and bytes will not only improve your computing skills, it may even boost your confidence when it comes to mastering the computing experience.

We are living in an age of rapid technological advancement with AI, Blockchain, and Web3 application development on the rise. Having a working knowledge of what goes on inside computers will help us stay competitive for when we get out. This includes understanding the basics of the binary number system.

Another method of representing binary numbers is using the powers of 2, known as exponentiation. In mathematical notation, the powers of 2 can be written: 2**0, 2**1, 2**3, etc.

Whenever there’s a binary number consisting of a 1 followed by all zeros, that number represents a power of two. The power is the same as the number of zeros in the binary number. For example, 1000 is the same as 2 raised to the 3rd power, or 8 in decimal.

Binary numbers can become astronomically large, allowing computers to process vast amounts of data. Byte by byte, these numbers are processed into the information we see and interact with on our smartphones, desktops, and tablets.

There is another mathematical numbering system commonly used in computing called hexadecimal, or base 16. This number system is

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Here is a table representing the various bit groupings.

Number of Bits Common Terms	
1	Bit/Digit
4	Nibble
8	Byte/Octet/Character
16	Double Byte/Word
32	Double Word/Long Word
64	Very Long Word

more complex than binary, but far more efficient at representing numbers that are too large to represent in decimal. It’s also more convenient to use than binary when representing digital information. We’ll cover hexadecimal in a future edition of Tech Block 42.

MT. TAM 'FREEDOM WALL' HONORS ALUMNI



“The wall is a testament to the transformative power of education, not only mending lives but mending communities. Let it also stand as a reminder of our commitment to empower, inspire, and elevate one another, embracing education as a catalyst for change.”
—Angel Alvarez, MTC alum



By Michael Callahan
Staff Writer

San Quentin’s community college has unveiled a “Freedom Wall,” represented by 42 pictures of formerly incarcerated alumni. It adorns a wall entering an education building with the goal of inspiring and encouraging residents to further their education and find success on the outside.

Nearly 100 people gathered July 23, 2023 to witness the unveiling of the collage of photographs depicting a continuing community of higher learning, of boundless potential, hope, and restoration.

Mt. Tamalpais College, formerly known as the Prison University Project, offers in-person teaching to residents of SQ who can earn an associate degree. Just as importantly, their faculty and staff have created a culture of community and connection through education — inside and outside of the prison.

“The [freedom] wall is a testament to the transformative power of education, not only mending lives but mending communities,” said resident and alum Angel Alvarez. “Let it also stand as a reminder of our commitment to empower, inspire, and elevate one another, embracing education as a catalyst for change.”

The college program played a significant part in Alvarez’s life for years, accelerating his rehabilitation and recovery through the knowledge he learned from his classes.

Formerly incarcerated Corey McNeil, an alum and associate for Mt. Tam, opened the presentation by acknowledging how the college provides everything students need to succeed.

Emcee Henok Rufael thanked faculty and staff as well as residents Carl Raybon and Arthur Jackson, the college’s clerks who helped make things happen daily for the students.

Rufael, a resident of The Q, came up with the idea for the Freedom Wall as way to honor students who persisted in their journey to earn a degree through Mt. Tam. He also talked about the roadblocks and challenges.

“Sometimes it gets difficult,” Rufael said, encouraging students to stay focused. “No matter what we do today, this wall can and will be you.”

Alumni spoke to attendees about how Mt. Tam influenced their pursuit in education.



Richard Richardson // SQNews alumni

Troy Dunwar described how his journey through Mt. Tam helped him realize there is more to life than substance use and stealing. His encouraging words highlighted the value of the education at Mt. Tam, including making use of the college’s computer lab.

Dunwar paroled in 2021 and said coming into the parking lot was not easy as it triggered mixed emotions. But he said the event was not about him, it was about those whom he loves who are still inside.

As for life on the outside, Dunwar stressed he faces challenges, whether with self-care or time management. “The journey is not easy. I encourage you to keep on going,” he said.

“Mt. Tam is not about the place, it is the people,” said paroled alum David Le. He discussed the importance of making connections with people when you are inside so that when you leave they can be a part of your support network. “Here today, I am a resource for you. If you need anything, I am here for you,” Le said.

“We each have our own journey, it gets ugly and hard, but it gets better,” commented former SQNews photographer Eddie Herena.

The 2017 graduate talked about how life comes at you fast and you need a plan. “Stay focused and keep your eyes on the prize, because it’s real,” Herena said.

Dr. Wendy Martinez, Mt. Tam’s educational student adviser, read a poem by Maya Angelou, and Rufael played a piece on the violin.

Incarcerated alumni also shared sentiments on how important the college community is.

John Levine explained how the college helped him feel more comfortable by offering a similar educational experience to that of Cal State-Fullerton, where he went to school prior to his incarceration.

“Mt. Tam faculty and students embody inclusivity; I learned to embody those principles,” Levine said.

First-time visitor to the prison, Seemay Cho, was impressed with the immense courage and openness of the people in SQ. She observed that everyone seems to be taking advantage of their opportunities and how “the community really cares for each other.”

After the alumni spoke, staff member Corey McNeil and resident Wilbert Frank pulled the curtain to unveil the photos.

Le said he was honored to be part of the unveiling. He shared how Mt. Tam helps to manifest community at The Q and how the wall commemorates the presence of this community.

“The wall was a way to validate community in a physical aspect,” he said.

COLLEGES CAN EDUCATE FORMERLY INCARCERATED — AND EMPLOY THEM



By Charlotte West
Open Campus reporter
Reprinted with permission

Donnie Veal, 51, doesn’t fit the profile of a typical student at University of California Santa Cruz. In fact, he served more time in prison than many undergraduates have been alive.

Veal has had to get used to his professors questioning whether he’s a student and his classmates mistaking him for the professor or a college staff member. “Sometimes people don’t know how to approach,” he said. “Students will talk to me as if I have some type of power over them or whatever. And it’s just like, ‘Nah, we’re in the same boat. I’m trying to figure this out, just like you.’”

But that confusion will soon be cleared up as Veal graduates with a degree in sociology from UC Santa Cruz in June and starts a new job at Cabrillo College. He’ll be the program coordinator of Rising Scholars, a support program for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students. His life experience was why he was hired for the job, he said. Veal spent 23 years in prison, and got out in 2019.

Colleges are well placed to hire formerly incarcerated graduates like Veal, Rebecca Villareal and Basia Skudrzyk argue in a recent op-ed. As some of the largest employers

across the country, colleges and universities can provide job opportunities for formerly incarcerated students in addition to educating them. For example, UConn Health, the medical system under University of Connecticut, has committed to filling 5% of its entry level positions over the next three years with formerly incarcerated people.

“They have a unique capacity not only to educate individuals currently in the criminal justice system but also to tap a new source of talent to enrich their community,” Villareal, of Jobs for the Future, and Skudzyk, of Prison to Professionals, write.

Charlotte West sat down with Veal to talk about his educational journey from prison to college, the expertise that formerly incarcerated people bring to higher education, and what’s top of mind as he graduates and transitions into his new job. (Veal’s responses have been lightly edited for clarity.)

Charlotte West: How did your education journey in prison get started?

Donnie Veal: I started taking some correspondence courses with Coastline [Community College] somewhere around 2010. I initially started just to give myself something to do. But I really didn’t get that college thing ignited inside of me until I took a public speaking course from Hartnell College. I researched the topic of recidivism because I didn’t want to come back to prison once I got out. And in the process of my research, I learned

that the higher I go in education, the less chance I have of coming back to prison.

What was it like taking courses via correspondence?

The correspondence courses were challenging because there were courses or things that I didn’t know how to decipher. Some of the things were so foreign to me, I didn’t have anybody to fall back on to help explain to me what they wanted in a prompt, or even just what some of the readings were discussing. I would have to call home sometimes, and maybe ask people to look stuff up and I would have to wait for them to print things out and send it into the prison.

Can you talk about your transition to community college?

When I first started doing correspondence courses, I was in Salinas Valley State Prison. Then Hartnell started sending professors in. Once they started doing that, I was trying to burn the candle at both ends, taking correspondence courses with Coastline and taking in-person courses with Hartnell, just trying to expedite the process, getting as many units as I could to get myself closer to that associate’s. And while I was in the middle of school, my appeal was granted. I was released from prison. My brother offered me a proposition. He said, “Look, I’ll give you a place to live. I provide you with food. The only thing I want you to do is go to school.”

I was thinking I needed to get some form of degree ASAP to help me in the world.

I left Salinas State Prison on October 11, 2019. I enrolled in Cabrillo in January 2020. And then we were on COVID lockdown so everything went online.

What was it like being on a college campus?

As I was in Cabrillo and was going to school, adjusting to going from a level-four prison institution to a college campus, everything that had been hardwired in me in prison—don’t go in crowds, or if you’re in a crowd, watch people’s hands—didn’t apply. I had to remind myself, ‘You’re okay. You don’t have to put your back to the wall.’ I still have to catch myself sometimes.

In prison, if you violated my personal space, you would get a reaction and your reaction would determine how far we went from there. But in a college setting, I have to remember that people aren’t violating personal space because they’re trying to test you, they are simply oblivious. So I can’t be giving people death stares every time they bump into me.

What work are you doing with Underground Scholars at UC Santa Cruz and how are you supporting other system-impacted students?

The Underground Scholars program really promotes hiring and dealing with people from within. That’s why their student and staff positions are filled by people that have been justice-impacted. So when the director Joshua Solis found me and listened to my story, he was like, ‘Yo, bro, we have a spot for you.’

I started working with policy analysis and then they offered me another position as the outreach coordinator. With my story, it’s a lot easier for me to pull people into our college program than it would be for anybody else. Because I know how to walk the walk. I have examples of these trials by fire and coming out the other end.

How did you end up with a job offer from Cabrillo College, doing work that builds on what you’re doing now?

Joshua forwarded me an email with the position for being a program coordinator for the Rising Scholars program, which also caters to system-impacted students. I looked at the position initially, and just thought it’ll go to someone with more education or a fancy résumé. I thought that I don’t even stand a chance. I wanted to go for the position; I just didn’t have the confidence. I had a conversation with my brother. And he told me to send him the job description. And he went over it and he says, ‘I don’t know why you wouldn’t be the perfect fit for this position. So go for it.’

I applied for the job at Cabrillo College and it was a panel. It wasn’t just a supervisor, one on one. There were five people shooting questions. I thought I blew the interview. And the next thing you know, at an event, the director pulled me to the side and said, ‘We were supposed to be starting the second round of interviews, but we’ve decided to cancel all

the interviews and we want to move forward with you.’

I’ve gone from prison to community college, to university, and from university straight into my career. And I really believe that those are just some of the indicators that I am, in fact, on the right path.

I recently read an article about the fact that colleges should not only be educating incarcerated and formerly incarcerated students, they should also be hiring them. I’d love to hear your take on that as someone now working in higher education.

This is a student population that is largely ignored — not just in education, but in life. Since colleges are supposed to be forward thinkers, I think it’s important that colleges lead by example and hire those same people. They should lead as an example of giving people that are reentering society chances of having a normal life upon post release. I think that colleges have a huge responsibility.

Do you think there’s a danger of system-impacted folks becoming sort of pigeonholed into just working with reentry programs?

I don’t know if anyone else would have wanted to take a chance on me. I enjoy the work and I really feel good about staying within that realm. But there may be some people who think that they would like to explore some different parts of life and I think that they should definitely have that opportunity. I have so many more levels of myself than just prison.

ESPAÑOL

Por Willy Alarcón & Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism Guild

La persona que abre las puertas a la educación, cierra las puertas de la prisión.

El departamento de educación de la prisión de San Quentin celebró la graduación de 351 alumnos que comenzaron su enseñanza desde antes de la pandemia en el 2019.

Varios de ellos han sido trasladados a otras instituciones estatales o están ya en libertad.

La ceremonia inició con la procesión de los graduados entrando al escenario, mientras que los familiares gritaban con júbilo al verlos con sus togas y birretes. El salón se llenó de energía e hicieron que esta ocasión fuera muy inolvidable.

Poco después, los guardias de las banderas desfilaron presentando los colores, haciendo descender un silencio completo en respeto al verlos marchar.

“Hoy es como navidad para todos los maestros de SQ”, dijo la maestra Alina Stanciu. “Estoy tan emocionada que perdí mi voz de tanto llamarlos a que se alistaran”.

Este evento no solo fue de gran impacto para los graduados y familiares. También resonó en los corazones de personas como la maestra y estudiante de Berkeley, la señora Mitzi Perez-Caro, que asistió por primera vez.

“Todos estaban súper emocionados de ver a sus seres amados graduarse en el escenario. Como maestra de secundaria, yo veo graduaciones cada año y la energía aquí es en verdad muy inspiradora”, dijo la Sra. Perez-Caro.

El poder de la educación cambia la perspectiva y da poder a la rehabilitación.

Para Raymoan Powe, como un alumno y padre, el obtener su diploma significa mucho. La educación le ha enseñado la importancia de ser el ejemplo para su hija de 13 años.

Anteriormente Powe no consideraba el impacto de este alcance. Ahora comprende que muchos nunca lograrán cruzar el escenario con sus birretes.

“La gente me dice que hoy soy una persona diferente. Ya no pienso con una mente criminal o negativa”.

Similarmen te recibiendo su certificado de Tecnología Relacionada con Computadoras, Joe V. Zigler se conmovió al completar este curso en honor y memoria de su hija – que falleció mientras él se encuentra encarcelado.

Milton (Ton) Alcantara, fue invitado a compartir sus pensamientos y con agradecimiento habló en ambos idiomas

– en honor a sus padres. Él dijo que había abandonado sus estudios cuando era joven, por sus creencias distorsionadas.

“Nunca pensé que estaría recibiendo mi diploma de la secundaria...”, Alcantara añadió, “Aun cuando no recibía visitas [por COVID] o llamadas, mi maestra siempre se hizo presente”.

Viendo el crecimiento de los individuos tratando de superarse, dijo René Sutton, “No juzgues a nadie; quizás nunca podrás entender lo que [ellos] están pasando”.

El orgullo de los padres es inexplicable. Ellos pudieron compartir este momento tan especial juntos con sus hijos.

El señor Aurelio Acevedo se sintió muy feliz y orgulloso que su hijo José lograra graduarse del curso de Tecnología Relacionada con Computadoras.

“A todo padre yo lo animaría apoyar a sus hijos mientras están encarcelados”, dijo el Sr. Acevedo. “Lo que me gusta de este evento es que todos pudieron divertirse sin importar la raza, o color de piel”.

El amor de una madre es la bendición de los hijos. No hay barreras, ni distancia que impida que una madre visite a su hijo.

Para la señora Norma Mata, que pudo ver a su hijo por primera vez después de un año y medio, fue una ocasión muy conmovedora.

“Como madre, yo sentí muchas emociones, cuando lo vi por primera vez después de tanto tiempo”, compartió la señora Mata.

Con este logro, ella puede ver el cambio que su hijo está dando para una vida mejor.

Un caso muy especial que se dio en la celebración: Pablo Salinas se graduó recibiendo su GED – pero la historia no terminó allí.

Avivó a su madre con una gran sorpresa y nueva realidad. Hace tres días (antes de su graduación), él fue otorgado libertad condicional de su sentencia de cadena perpetua.

¡“Estoy sobrecargada con gozo! ¡Mi hijo se graduó – y hoy me dijo que él fue encontrado disponible para libertad condicional, después de siete años de encarcelamiento!”, dijo Obdulia Jacobo Salinas. Ampliando, “Tengo la esperanza que en el futuro mi hijo estará en la casa con todas sus hijas”.

La comunidad latina formaban un gran segmento de todos los honrados en esta ceremonia, con más de 23% del total. De entre los 102 que se pudieron hacer presentes para la graduación, 24 de ellos eran de ascendencia hispana.



Photos by Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

CON LA EDUCACIÓN SE ABREN LAS PUERTAS DE LA PRISIÓN

Arriba: Más de 100 graduados vistiendo la tradicional toga y birrete, escuchan al discurso inspirador de inicio, dado por uno de los graduados.

Derecha: Pablo Salinas-Jacobo con orgullo muestra su certificado de GED el día de la graduación. Su madre y hermano (foto dentro) viajaron para verle graduarse.

Abajo a la izquierda: Omar “Gabby” Nunez posando junto con su madre mostrando su certificado de GED.

Abajo a la derecha: José Acevedo se juntó con su familia para la foto después de ser otorgado su certificación de Tecnología relacionada con computadoras.



SE DIGITALIZA UN ARCHIVO CONTENIENDO MILES DE NARRATIVOS PERSONALES DE LOS ENCARCELADOS

Por Willy Alarcón
Journalism Guild Writer

Dos punto tres millones de dólares en fondos han sido donados por la fundación Mellon para digitalizar los escritos de miles de reos en las prisiones estatales de los EE.UU.

El proyecto Archivo de Historias de la Prisión Americana contiene ya más de 3,300 narrativas escritas por reclusos y es el repositorio digital más extenso de escrituras acerca de las condiciones y manera de vida dentro de más de 400 prisiones en 47 estados del país, según reportó Patricia Leigh Brown en *The New York Times*, el 17 de abril.

El proyecto recibió esta

donación substancial para hacer posible la creación de un tipo de sombrilla digital que enlace esfuerzos similares, digitalizando más de 10,000 historias personales, creando una serie de libros y patrocinando exhibiciones.

“Yo adquirí mi maestría en sobrevivir [dentro de] la prisión”, contó José Di Lennola – en su contribución a la colección, describiendo su adoctrinamiento al aprender a siempre mantener puesto un chaleco hecho de revistas y cargar un cuchillo hecho de una tapa de lata, para protección.

La idea principal es darles a los reos la oportunidad de expresarse, por sus experiencias personales, el costo humano del cautiverio legal – incluy-

endo el impacto que esto tiene en cada familia representada.

Una de las otras metas primordiales es de resaltar a comunidades que aún no son bien representadas: aquellos de habla hispana que se encuentran en centros de detención de inmigración, aquellas personas que se identifican como “trans” o que no se conforman a un género específico. Esto incluye a reclusos en lugares como el estado de Hawái, pero también incluye a todo personal de las prisiones y los voluntarios.

Los organizadores están esperando que estos testimonios hagan más visible la necesidad de reforma de pólizas y que anime a los legisladores, escolares, periodistas y a cualquier otra persona,

a que incorpore estas fuentes para analizar el sistema criminal de este país.

Las escrituras en el archivo proveen evidencia personal de los hechos en la oscuridad y se espera que provea una transparencia de “instituciones opacas” alumbrando discrepancias que existen entre los historiales oficiales y las observaciones de primera mano, añadió el reporte.

Estas historias resaltan todos los retos que la gente encarcelada enfrenta día a día, y usa términos muy personales.

Los EE.UU. continúan siendo el líder de encarcelaciones y “roba la humanidad de la gente que ha sido convicta de un crimen”, dijo Marc Mauer – consejero principal para el Proyecto de Sentencia (en in-

glés, The Sentencing Project), una organización sin fines de lucro.

Mauer añadió que este archivo “juega un rol principal para contrarrestar los estereotipos y desafiar la difícil estructura social en que los individuos encarcelados se hayan enlazados”.

Por ahora el archivo incluye la digitalización de documentos originales – incluyendo escrituras hechas a mano y otros que incluyen dibujos y garabatos para ilustrar “las condiciones bajo las cuales la gente está escribiendo”, dijo el profesor Doran Larson.

Algunos documentos están escritos usando máquinas de escribir, mientras otros escritos son sometidos usando solamente las minas o repuestos de lapiceros “que se menea más que algunas de las comidas” de acuerdo a Robert W. Leisure – escribiendo desde el “hoyo” (una unidad de vivienda singular, como castigo).

El reporte de Brown añadió que el archivo lleva ya más de

200 años y contiene famosos artículos, como la biografía de Malcolm X (1965), las “cartas desde una cárcel en Birmingham” escritas por Martin Luther King Jr. a sus amigos en el pastado (1963) y otras contribuciones desde 1799. Estas han documentado diversos abusos, como:

- confesiones forzadas
- abusos sexuales
- hambrunas sufridas dentro del sistema correccional

“Al juntar y hacer disponible sus cartas, sus testimonios y su arte, haremos un récord imposible de remover para que toda futura generación lo pueda considerar también”, dijo la Sra. Heather Ann Thompson, profesora de historia y estudios afro-americanos en la universidad de Michigan.

Millones de personas han aguantado esta crisis de encarcelación masiva desde los 1970s. Ahora es nuestro deber considerar sus voces y lo que esto significó para ellos y sus familiares.



Archive photo

NO HAY DINERO DE SALIDA PARA LOS QUE ENFRENTAN DEPORTACIÓN

Por Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism Chair

El Departamento de Correcciones de California (CDCR) no está pagando el dinero de liberación de \$200 a los reos que van a ser deportados o a cualquier prisionero que va a ser trasladado a otro estado o a custodia federal.

A nivel del estado, personas de origen hispano componen el grupo étnico más grande de la población que está encarcelada y entre el 40-44% de ellos son indocumentados. En cuanto terminen su condena son transferidos a una institución federal, para su posible expulsión de los Estados Unidos.

Los datos del Sistema de Manejo Estratégico de Ofensores (Strategic Offenders Management System, en inglés) dicen que hasta el mes pasado, de los 3,803 encarcelados en San Quentin, 930 son hispanos residentes, representando más del 24% de la población.

Un antiguo trabajador de SQNews, Juan Espinosa – que ahora reside en México, dijo en una entrevista telefónica, que él había vivido en Estados Unidos desde la edad de 11 años.

Después de su deportación a la ciudad fronteriza de Tijuana donde fue deportado, Espinosa necesitó fondos para el costo de su vuelo a la ciudad de México, donde reside su familia. Afortunadamente un amigo le pagó

el boleto. No todos los deportados son tan afortunados para contar con ese tipo de apoyo.

“Al llegar, no recibes el dinero de liberación y tienes que hacer lo necesario para comer, en un país donde no tienes a nadie conocido. ¿Dónde te vas a quedar?”, dijo Espinosa, quien estuvo encarcelado 29 años.

“Si me dieran los \$200 de liberación después de ser deportado, me ayudaría a buscar un lugar para rentar o comprar algo de ropa. A veces somos deportados en trajes de papel cuando el comprar ropa es una necesidad inmediata”.

El Código de Regulaciones de California, (California Code of Regulations, en inglés) indica que, “la ayuda económica no se le dará a un interno que es liberado a la custodia del gobierno federal o a otro estado.

Pero si es liberado de custodia y califica para ser supervisado bajo liberación condicional en California o a un estado que esté incluido bajo el arreglo de compacto interestatal sí debe recibir el dinero.

Residentes liberados a la custodia o supervisión de la inmigración de los Estados Unidos y servicio de naturalización que están esperando una fecha de la corte para deportación tampoco tendrán derecho de recibir la ayuda económica”.

En resumen, los que no son ciudadanos no reciben nada. Por décadas el estado ha negado dar

la ayuda financiera fundamental que podría hacerles la diferencia crucial.

El señor Eduardo Sosa que está encarcelado en la prisión estatal Richard J. Donovan, ha expresado su preocupación por ser indocumentado y está confrontando deportación a su país natal. “Aquí en la prisión Donovan, nos sentimos discriminados porque cuando seamos liberados no vamos a recibir el apoyo de liberación de \$200. Yo creo que deberíamos recibir la ayuda económica como todos”, dijo Sosa.

“En pocas palabras, si eres ciudadano de EE.UU. recibirás los \$200. Solamente porque vas a ser deportado, no significa que no necesitamos la ayuda económica para reingresar a nuestras comunidades”, concluyó Sosa.

Gonzalo González residente de San Quentin comentó, “Yo no tendría los recursos necesarios para el autobús para regresar a mi rancho en México”, y añadió, “Es importante recibir la ayuda de esos \$200 para la salida, para poder comprar una barra de jabón o hasta comida en cualquier parte del mundo”.

Vicente Gómez, quien fue encontrado elegible para liberación condicional después de servir 23 años de su condena perpetua, también encara la deportación a México.

“Yo siento que tengo derecho de recibir los \$200 de liberación”,

dijo Gómez. “Yo he estado encarcelado por muchos años y no sé cómo están las cosas allá [afuera] en la comunidad”.

Huan H. Nguyen, confrontará su deportación a Vietnam después de servir 22 años de su cadena perpetua. “Tengo miedo porque no conozco a nadie allá en Vietnam. Somos refugiados, mi papá fue soldado”, dijo Nguyen. “Toda mi familia está aquí en los Estados Unidos. Si yo recibiera los \$200, me ayudaría por lo menos para comprar comida o rentar un lugar para hospedarme por un par de días”.

El ciudadano de los Estados Unidos y encarcelado de San Quentin, Michael Moore entiende la importancia de la ayuda financiera. El opina que esa ayuda se le debe entregar a toda persona que sea liberada.

“Este es otro ejemplo donde la forma antigua de ver a la gente encarcelada no está en acorde con la realidad de lo que es correcto y justo en el aquí y el ahora”!, dijo Moore.

“No dar asistencia a todos está revelando la falta de comprensión y conciencia que es el resultado de convicciones establecidas”.

Moore agrega, “\$200 podrían ser la diferencia entre prepararnos para la libertad o prepararnos para re-ofender. A todos se le debería dar la misma oportunidad”.

—Traducido por Arsenio Leyva Escritor contribuyente

SE DEMANDAN REFORMAS TRAS EL INCREMENTO DE VIOLENCIA

DIARIAMENTE
DESAPARECEN PERSONAS
DEBIDO AL CRIMEN

Por Gerardo Mato
Spanish Journalism Guild Writer

Aumento de la violencia en México. Aproximadamente 25 personas desaparecen en México diariamente, siendo los estados del centro, suroeste y del norte los más afectados, escribe la profesora Rebecca Janzen para *The Conversation*.

Tras el incremento de homicidios, el porcentaje es cuatro veces mayor que en EE.UU. La violencia en el país aumentó a partir del año 2007 y con mayor índice en el 2011 y repitiéndose en el 2018, hasta el día de hoy

La criminalidad en varias partes del país es asociada a los...carteles, al crimen organizado, pandillas independientes, y fuerzas de autodefensas integradas por los residentes de la comunidad debido a la falta de protección por las autoridades, según el artículo en *The Conversation*.

Los estados con mayor índice de delitos son Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Norte Baja California, Michoacán, Guerrero, y la Ciudad de México donde los narcotraficantes, bandas callejeras, y las llamadas autodefensas han sentido sus reales.

Desde 1917, la Constitución Mexicana prohibió el uso y venta ilegal de drogas, con la finalidad de prevenir la delincuencia México. Sin embargo, a pesar de haber intentado exterminar el aumento del narcotráfico y la delincuencia organizada, esos esfuerzos han sido sin éxito, de acuerdo con el artículo.

Como parte de esa prohibición, en el 2006 el ex-presidente Mexicano Felipe Calderón, declaró una guerra frontal contra el narcotráfico. En esa ocasión el presidente Calderón contó con el apoyo del gobierno estadounidense, el cual apuntaló dicha contienda en un acuerdo militar binacional llamado iniciativa Mérida, que dio inicio en el 2007 y se finalizó en el 2021 con un costo de 3,400 millones de dólares, reporta Janzen.

El plan, que incluía la persecución, localización, y asesinato de los líderes de los carteles por el ejército mexicano, no dio frutos, según el artículo.

México continuó intentando, ante la creciente actividad delictiva, frenar la delincuencia y desplegó a 128,000 soldados mexicanos a desempeñar el trabajo policial y así acabar con dichos grupos delictivos.

Desafortunadamente, esto causó la violación a la constitución mexicana que no aprobaba que los militares hicieran el trabajo de policías dentro del país, según Janzen.

A consecuencia de las desavenencias con la constitución, en octubre del 2022 se aprobó una reforma de la constitución que autoriza a los militares a trabajar como policías hasta el 2028 y así mismo aprobó nuevas leyes para combatir la criminalidad en el país, reporta *The Conversation*.

En una de las últimas contiendas con mayor relevancia por sus hechos, se logró la detención del líder del cartel de Sinaloa Ovidio Guzmán López hijo de ‘El Chapo’ Guzmán, que actualmente está en prisión en EE.UU, donde la violencia afloró al máximo y dejó un saldo de 29 personas muertas en Culiacán, Sinaloa el pasado enero del 2023, reporta el artículo.

La corrupción en el gobierno, en el ejército, y en el sistema de justicia obstruyen la aplicación de las leyes reformadas.

En el 2008 el congreso mexicano aprobó reformas al sistema de justicia penal, que abordan el hecho de condenar a personas detenidas por delitos ficticios.

Más del 90% de los asesinatos en México siguen en el limbo, cuando las mujeres denuncian abusos de cualquier índole o cuando son reportadas como desaparecidas por sus familiares no son tomadas en cuenta, los mexicanos en su mayoría no confían en la justicia penal, ni en la policía, de acuerdo con Janzen.

El centro de estudios México-Estados Unidos de la universidad de California en San Diego calcula que el 93.3% de los delitos no son denunciados y que, de los casos reportados sólo se llevan a cabo detenciones en el 11.5% de ellos, dice el reporte.

“En mi opinión: las reformas a la justicia penal por sí solas, no pueden reducir la delincuencia en México”, dijo Rebecca Janzen, profesora académica asociada de español que estudia la cultura y literatura mexicanas, en la Universidad de Carolina del sur.

Dentro de la prisión estatal de San Quentin, algunos reos opinaron lo siguiente:

José Meza, un residente de SQ opinó, “respecto a la delincuencia debe haber investigaciones reales, porque hay delitos que no se castigan por falta de pruebas y en realidad, sí existen”.

“La delincuencia en México, como en Estados Unidos es muy difícil de controlar y debe haber un cambio en las leyes”, expresó Crisanto Bedolla, un reo de SQ. “Por ejemplo tener un gobierno que trabaje en contra de la delincuencia sería más efectivo”.

TRAGEDIA EN JUAREZ CON DOCENAS DE INMIGRANTES FALLECIDOS

Por Carlos Drouaillet
Staff Writer

Docenas de inmigrantes murieron el lunes, cuando empezó un incendio en el interior del Centro de Detención para emigrantes en Ciudad Juárez, México. Reportaron María Verza and Morgan Lee – *The Associated Press*.

Los muertos y heridos fueron identificados como latinoamericanos, más específicamente de Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Honduras y Guatemala, de acuerdo con el reporte de las autoridades de inmigración y la Oficina general de Abogados de México.

La tragedia ocurrió en el dormitorio para varones de las instalaciones del centro de detención.

Según las autoridades, el grupo de detenidos se encontraba bajo llave detrás de puertas de seguridad enrejadas. Dichos individuos estaban muy enojados después de ser notificados por administradores de la institución de su inminente deportación.

Los ofuscados emigrantes decidieron protestar poniendo los colchones donde dormían, contra las puertas enrejadas de la celda y les prendieron fuego, de acuer-

do con el reporte de María Verza and Morgan Lee.

Un video presentado el martes por la *Prensa Asociada* mostro que, “guardias rápidamente se alejaron y no hicieron el intento de liberar a los hombres antes de que el humo llenara la celda y matara a 38 hombres”. Además de los 38 fallecidos confirmados el martes, otros 28 resultaron seriamente heridos, quienes fueron tratados y atendidos por inhalación de humo en el hospital local.

El residente de SQ Carlos Cammal-Ruiz dijo, “En el video se ve la negligencia de los oficiales de emigración al no tratar de salvar la vida de otros seres humanos”.

La autenticidad del video fue confirmada por el Secretario del Interior de México, Adán Augusto López, en una entrevista por Joaquín López Doriga, un corresponsal de la Ciudad de Juárez.

“Había humo por todos lados. A las únicas que salvaron fue a las mujeres, y a esos (empleados) de inmigración”, dijo Viangly Infante Padrón. “A los hombres, no los sacaron hasta que llegaron los bomberos”.

Infante Padrón es de Vene-

zuela y está pidiendo asilo en EE.UU., juntamente con sus tres hijos y su esposo quien es uno de los que son atendidos en el hospital cercano.

Durante la noche anterior ella esperaba a su esposo fuera del centro de detención cuando el incendio empezó, y fue testiga ocular de la tragedia. Mientras trataba de localizar a su esposo en ese pandemio, pudo ver varios cuerpos de hombres sin vida, antes de localizar a su marido en una ambulancia, de acuerdo al artículo informativo.

Ella dijo, “Yo estaba desesperada porque miré un cuerpo sin vida, un cuerpo, un cuerpo, y no lo miraba a él por ningún lado”.

Muy temprano en la mañana del martes, un grupo grande de emigrantes se congregó afuera del centro de detención, pidiendo información sobre el estado de salud de sus familiares detenidos, *The El Paso Times* por medio de AP.

En una rueda de prensa, el presidente de México Andrés Manuel López Obrador mencionó de nuevo que el fuego fue iniciado por los emigrantes como una protesta después que las autoridades anunciaran que iban a

ser deportados. Añadiendo, “Ellos nunca se imaginaron que eso causaría esta terrible desgracia”.

Otra emigrante, Katiuska Márquez una mujer venezolana con dos hijos, estaba notablemente buscando a su medio-hermano quien estaba viajando con ella. “Queremos saber si él está vivo o si está muerto”, dijo ella.

Márquez cuestionó cómo es que todos los agentes de inmigración que estaban dentro del edificio salieron sin problemas y solo los emigrantes fallecieron. ¿“Cómo no pudieron ellos sacarlos”?, reportó el *Marin Independent Journal* 03/29/2023

Otro residente de San Quentin, que también fue emigrante, entiende bien esta tragedia con una percepción más directa.

“El gobierno tiene que tener un plan para saber quién en realidad necesita el asilo; todos nos merecemos una oportunidad para una vida mejor”, dijo Daniel García un residente de San Quentin SP. “Esta tragedia no debería haber pasado, lamentablemente la acción de estos hombres emigrantes fue la causa de esta tragedia y es triste pero es la realidad por querer evitar la deportación”, concluyó García.

SPORTS

EARTHQUAKES REFUSE TO BE DEFEATED BY OUTSIDERS

By Willy Alarcon
Journalism Guild Writer

The loud boom of soccer balls being propelled through the air filled the Lower Yard with the return of the “Outsiders” team for game three against the San Quentin Earthquakes team, who achieved a narrow 5–4 victory over the visitors.

“I know the Outsiders haven’t won one game yet, so I know they’re gonna be on fire. They’re hungry for a win, so they’re gonna give us hell today,” said Kolby Southwood, the Quakes’ forward, as the scrimmage was about to get underway.

From the beginning of the season, the Outsiders have been looking to win a game against the home team so everyone expected they would come in seeing red, ready to win. They certainly put up a valiant effort, but in the end, the home team remained on top.

This match was different from those previous as only eight outside soccer players, plus the coach, were able to make it in to play. The men that did though, were ready to play.

According to Outsiders’ goalie, Baendan, the team’s only objective was to play better this time around. “In this game, my aim is to not let one ball get to the goal,” he said.

Outsiders’ Coach Andrew said it was good being back and seeing how strong SQ’s soccer program has become. Noting the change, he said,



Team Outsiders show up to the Lower Yard for a scrimmage with the home team Earthquakes. The two teams traded goals until the home team came out on top.

“The team was strong; now the team is a machine under the new leadership. You immediately see the changes he [SQ Earthquakes’ Captain Luna] has made.”

The Quakes’ kicked off game with speed, not letting the visitors outthrustle them. Within the first five minutes of the game, “Lino Lora” of the Quakes’ scored first.

In response, the Outsiders dialed up the pressure and drove the ball hard into the Earthquakes’ side of the field. After some quick footwork, the outsiders coach Dario took the ball and shot

it towards the Quake’s goal, hitting the goalposts instead for a miss.

Ten minutes into the first half, the Earthquakes picked up steam again, running the ball through the defense of the Outsiders. Lee from the Earthquakes masterfully placekicked the ball into the net, bringing the score to 2–0.

Five minutes from half-time, the Outsiders’ team leader, Dario, stopped a strong volley from Luna and passed it to Demetry an Earthquakes playing for the Outsiders, who scored the Outsiders first goal to bring

the score to 2–1.

With ten minutes elapsed into the second half, Dario attempted another shot at the goal, but it went wide.

The Quakes seized control of the ball and passed quickly to Luna, who skillfully danced the ball and blasted it into the net.

The Quakes dominated ball movement on the Outsiders for the rest of the game, scoring more goals along the way. Even so, the Outsiders were determined to score again. Their player Jose scored the team’s second goal from the right field with

a shot that went past a Quake defender and landed in net. “Goal!” shouted the sidelines.

That goal sparked momentum for the visitors and a couple of quick goals were scored only two minutes apart by the Outsiders, including Dario’s first goal of the game. This brought the score to 5–4.

As the clock was counting down, the Outsiders attacked with desperation. The Quakes felt the pressure but responded with fierce defense, kicking wildly and playing loud as both teams sped up their pace on the field.

The five minutes of added

time at the end of the game gave both teams a chance to catch their breath and reset for the final push. Down to the wire, the Quakes shot one last blast. It was declared a miss and the game was officially over. The final score remained 5–4 for the Quakes.

Earthquake Captain Luna told the Outsiders team, “Thank you guys for coming. Always look forward to it. You guys made me bust my [explicit] today. I hope to see you guys more often.”

—David Arias and Aristeo Sampaablo contributed to this story

GYM RE-OPENS AFTER LONG HIATUS

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

As of July 12, San Quentin residents can use the gymnasium on the Lower Yard again after an almost five year hiatus and residents are elated.

“It feels good to have the gym back open,” said resident Jekarre “Skinny” Thompson. He was standing on the gym basketball court and getting in some shots. Thompsons’ smile showed his appreciation. “It reminds me of the old days. I was a part of the Youth Offender Program [YOP] when I first came here. Me and my buddies would meet up in here and we would watch the games.”

Thompson has been at San Quentin since 2019 when the gym was partially opened, sharing the space with a self-help program. Residents had access during the nights and on weekends.

On the first day of the re-opening the population did not get knowledge of it until late in the afternoon. When the gym opened its doors for residents there was a slow ingress, but longtime resident A. Starks did not mind.

“I saw the gym open and close,” said Starks. “I remember when it used to be reception. It’s a bad thing when it closed.” Starks reminisced on times when he would come in and play card games and shoot hoops on the basketball courts. Now he is just glad to be able to sit back and enjoy watching the big TVs.

Francisco Legorreta and his friend Ceferrino Trujillo were thankful to be able to play some cards on the tables and avoid the wind that blows outside.

“It’s a big difference,” said Legorreta. “Our cards not flying around. It’s a big difference after all these years.”

It was his friend Trujillo’s first time being inside of the gymnasium. He wished one more table game could be added. “It’s my first time in the gym. It’s more room, more space. We just need a pool table,” he said.

Sgt. Nelson had just received his detail for the gym assignment around

the same time the residents had found out it was open. He said that he was glad to get the call for it.

“I like the open unit atmosphere,” Sgt. Nelson said. “It’s good to be able to have a place to get out of the heat. Having the gym open give the residents more recreational space.”

Sgt. Nelson said surveying the interior of the gym he noticed that it needed some upgrades.

“It could use some new paint on the walls and we probably need to repaint the courts, maybe some new TVs, maybe some new courts all together. Some new things would bring a different vibe,” Sgt. Nelson said. “We need to get more things going.”

Sgt. Nelson recalled when the gym was used for Covid bed space during the outbreak. At various times, prison officials have used the gym for bed space for emergencies.

When the prison was overcrowded in the ‘90s, the gym was used as part of reception overflow. And when there is no space for mandated programs, the prison will allow the gym to be designated as the primary space for those programs.

To mention a few programs that have occupied the gym; Substance Abuse Program, Long Term Offender Program and the latest one, the Integrated Substance Use Disorder Treatment program. Those programs took up space in the gym and prohibited recreational activities from happening for the residents. But now, ISUDT has agreed to share the space with the population.

“There are no limitations with the gym being open,” said IAC President, Cainen Chambers, who had talks with the prison warden Ron Broomfield and the program heads to negotiate the space time. ISUDT is still functioning 5 days a week.

The program is vital to prison residents who depend on it for rehabilitation. The program provides services that are needed for those who might still be struggling in their recovery efforts.

“Thanks [to ISUDT] for being able to share this space with the incarcerated population,” Chambers said.

SQ BASEBALL TEAM RECEIVES BOOST FROM UPSWING FOUNDATION

SPORTS FOUNDATION MAKES GENEROUS DONATION

A foundation of sports enthusiasts for change named UPSWING has donated \$15,000 to the San Quentin A’s baseball program to support their rehabilitative efforts and the rebranding of the team as the San Quentin Giants.

The name change for the San Quentin baseball team is a move that correlates with the planned move of the Oakland A’s away from the Bay Area to Las Vegas, leaving only the San Francisco Giants to represent the region.

“Catapulting dreams and connecting people,” is the motto of the Colorado-based organization. The UPSWING Foundation primarily helps under-served and under-privileged children in sports, according to Harmony Myers, who co-founded the foundation with her husband, Jason Myers.

“We’re following God’s breath to write, connect, and inspire people,” Harmony Myers said. “[We’re] so blessed to meet the amazing San Quentin family. Thank you for inspiring us. Onward and upward, let’s go!” she said while watching the game between the SQ team and the Mission, an outside team.

After the sale of Jason Myers’s cancer-diagnostic company, the couple used the proceeds to start UPSWING. “It’s about having heart and passion about life, so we felt it was best to give back to the kids, to save generations,” Jason Myers said.

The couple visited the prison with their team of life-changers July 12, accompanied by Brandon Terrell, a former San Quentin A’s shortstop and the prison’s equivalent of an “All-American Athlete.”

“When I first met Brandon, he was energetic and passionate about the San Quentin baseball program. He hasn’t lost that drive since I first met him,” said the foundation’s executive, Theodore Gerbick. “Our



organization gives back to other nonprofits with grants, and we offer scholarships to kids and performance training to them as well.”

Since paroling, Terrell remained connected to the San Quentin baseball team and continued to contribute to the program, such as through the connections he made at Bob Goff’s Love Does Foundation. That connection enabled him to link up with UPSWING.

UPSWING reaches out to schools to select young athletes to participate in their program through their leadership academy, whose mission includes “developing strong, confident, successful student-athletes who are able to give back in meaningful ways.”

“The foundation provides opportunities to have experiences for [people in] under-privileged areas,” said Terrell, who has been out for nine months. He introduced UPSWING to the San Francisco Giants and they shared the idea of the name change of San Quentin’s team with them. “They [UPSWING] not only support [us] through donations, they believe in supporting humanity. They believe in second chances. And they support what we do here at the prison,” he said.

Vice-President of UPSWING,

Joe B., got a first-hand look at the baseball program and was amazed at how organized it was. “The sense of community and the sports program here ... is impossible to ignore,” he said.

The organization came into the prison to watch the San Quentin team play a game against its longtime rivals, the San Francisco Mission team. Terrell joined the Mission, playing on the opposite side against his former team for the first time.

“It’s good to see one of our own guys come back in to play against us,” said Richard “Will” Williams, head coach of the A’s. “I don’t particularly ‘like’ that, [laughs] but I’m glad to see him.”

Asked about the name change, Coach Williams said, “They [UPSWING and the San Francisco Giants] are the ones who are supporting us, so it’s the right thing to do. At one point, San Quentin had the A’s and the Giants, so I’m all for the name change.”

The SQ team beat the Mission that evening, 13–0. For Terrell, coming back into the prison to play his old teammates felt, “Surreal.”

“It’s great to see him come back, it’s cool,” said catcher Matt Negus. Negus played several seasons with Terrell, including the 2019 season in which the team ended up with a record of 38–2. “It’s inspiring to see him come back in because it lets me see that it can be done and what I would look like once I parole in October.”

Everyone came away inspired from the visit, another step in the evolution of San Quentin’s “Field of Dreams.”

“Our mission is to connect youth and athletes with a goal of connecting people and catapulting dreams,” said Josh Wilson, CEO of UPSWING.

—Timothy Hicks

SQ NINERS THUMP HARDTIMERS IN EXHIBITION

SAN QUENTIN'S
PREMIER FOOTBALL
TEAM PUMMEL
SOFTBALL FOES IN
INTER-LEAGUE EXPO

By Timothy Hicks
Sports Editor

The San Quentin Niners football team revealed their brand-new jersey's in an exhibition game against the SQ Hardtimers softball team on July 21. While it was nice Friday evening, the Niners defense was not nice to the opposition, holding the Hardtimers scoreless in a 38–0 victory in the flag-football game.

"I'm probably the rawest more than likely," said Niners middle linebacker Robert "Big Rob" Belfield. He led his defense in sacks against the softball team and had an especially powerful block on offensive lineman RJ "Hollywood" Hill, putting him on his back.

"It's a high probability I am the best," Belfield said.

He has been using the athletic program to lose weight, and he has accomplished a tremendous achievement by dropping almost 100 pounds. "I hope what I did can inspire someone else to do the same, and I want people to know that they can do anything if they put their minds to it," said the confident, self-proclaimed "pro-bowler."

"Bang, bang Niners gang!" chanted the team in a huddle before a play. Head Coach Bryan Underwood of the Niners predicted it was going to be an easy match up. He loaned a couple of his players to the Hardtimers to balance the game, but clearly, it wasn't enough.

"Always go hard in everything you do!" said Niners' lineman "Willie" Wilkerson.

The Hardtimers team was made up of mostly older, softball veterans as opposed to the Niners, who are a young squad.

"That youngster really put me on my pockets," said Hardtimers veteran Hill about the pancake block from Belfield. "We older so it was expected for them to win. But for me to just show up was a win to me. It's all about the fun. The youngsters really appreciated that."



SQ Niners quarterback Taiosisi 'CC' Matangi runs past multiple defenders for a touchdown.

Due to the ferocious defense of the Niners, the Hardtimers had a hard time trying to get across the 50-yard line. However, moving the ball was not a problem for the Niners' left-handed QB Taiosisi "CC" Matangi, who threw for over 300 yards and three touchdowns. Highlight reel passes included a 40 yarder to star receiver Keyshawn "Steez" Strickland and a 20 yarder to golden boy Donnie "JR" Pimpton, who celebrated with a dance in the end zone.

Appreciation for all the staff, coaches, administration, and players for participating and allowing the team to have the football program was a common sentiment expressed by Niners players such as players Eliazar "Eli" Guerra and Pimpton.

The athletes proudly sported their new jerseys.

"I'm just happy to see the guys happy to represent the new Niners team, and I'm proud to be a part of it," said Coach Underwood.

The football team was previously called All Madden, but Coach Underwood rebranded the team as the San Quentin Niners. He said the donor of the new jerseys chose to remain confidential, staying modest to allow the football program to shine in the spotlight. He added

SQ NINERS & SQ HARDTIMERS LINEUP

Taiosisi "CC" Matangi
Eugene Marcus
Janquil "Moose" Weisner
Kolby Southwood
Wilkerson Willie
De' Andre "Jihad" Deshote
Dewayne Leon Scott Jr
Keyshawn "Steez" Strickland
Robert Belfield
WAQA. R
Eliazar 'Eli' Guerra
Bryant Underwood
Anthony Virgle

Michael Mirabal

Vicent Fowler
Satterfield Jason
P. Church
Kenneth Lewis
RJ Hollywood
Miguel Munozhuerta
Fernando Renterie
Warren Davis
Gabriel Olivo
Kenny
Dias Ricky

Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners/sub
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners
Niners Asst.

Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers
Hardtimers

QB/S
WR
OL/DL
WL/DB
WR/DB
WR/DB
LB/RB
WR/QB/FS
ML
DL/OL
DB
HC
COACH

REF

OL/DL
WR/DB
OL/DL
DL/S
LB/TE
OL
OL
S/R
OL
WR
COACH

that the team is extremely grateful of the donor.

By the fourth quarter, hope was running out for the Hardtimers to get some momentum by scoring a touchdown. Their defensive lineman, Warren Davis, broke it down as to why his

team was not clicking on the field.

"On offense, we wasn't letting the plays develop. And on defense, we were giving up. We had a problem finishing in the end zone, plus we had too many errors," Davis said.

CHANELLING THE NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE

KEYSHAWN STRICKLAND, 'ALL AMERICAN ATHLETE' TALKS ABOUT HIS
JOURNEY FROM TROUBLED YOUTH TO DOING THE RIGHT THING



Vincent E. O'Bannon

Young people need something constructive to do with their free time. The youth at SQ are no different — if not directed to a right path they will most likely gather and find something destructive to do with their free time, either to themselves or to someone else.

In their defense, for young people coming fresh from the streets positive choices can be elusive, especially if negativity is all they are used to seeing in their neighborhoods and families.

Imagine having a plethora of energy compressed inside of you

TIER TALK

with nowhere to go — eventually, it will have to escape. The answer to that dilemma was something that the San Quentin Warriors' star point guard, Keyshawn "Steez" Strickland, had to find. He had to learn to manage that energy to keep his idle time from misdirecting his life. How did he do it?

Timothy Hicks: Hey young "Steez," say was sup to the people.

Keyshawn Strickland: Was sup people.

TH: So, I brought you here because I noticed how you are now taking advantage of the programs, and it looks good to me to see you young dudes wanting to better yourselves. Being that you are the most promising point guard for the SQ Warriors, I wanted to highlight you.

KS: Thanks man. That's cool.

TH: No problem. Tell me a little bit about you. What city you from and did you play any other sports when you were out there?

KS: Yeah, I did. I played football, basketball, and baseball in Sacramento where I'm from.

TH: You obviously were good at them?

KS: I was. I was the star player at my school. I was in the local newspaper every week, and I was being scouted by colleges too.

TH: Really. That's big. Why you didn't pursue college?

KS: I let my pride get in the way. There was this certain college that wanted me, but I wanted to go to a different one. And since it was not the one of my choice, I turned it down.

TH: Did anything else happen after that?

KS: Yeah, I took a break from school. I already was not the ideal student, so when I took that year off, that was the worst decision. My girl got pregnant and it was all downhill from there.

TH: Yeah, I get it. It's a trip how the decisions we make can alter our lives for better or for worse. So tell me, how did your jail and prison life happen?

KS: That was the worst thing that could of happened to me. I was running the streets out there, doing things that I shouldn't of been doing, and the result of a

sudden decision caused me to come to prison.

TH: Them streets can rob us if we not focused. After you made it to prison, what made you want to come to SQ?

KS: I was at another prison and I was reading the *SQNews* when I saw that the Golden State Warriors was coming up here. I was determined to get here after that. Miraculously, I was transferred here. I was glad of that.

TH: How did you get on the SQ Warriors?

KS: I was on the court playing and someone told Coach JB of my skills. Long story short, he put me on the team.

TH: Did you get into more trouble. I did notice a time that you were missing in action?

KS: Yeah, I went to the hole for something that I did not do. But I'm grateful that I did, because being there made me realize something here that I needed to take advantage of. That's why you see me participating in all the groups like the Mentorship and Youth Offender Program, YOP. It was an eye opener. Just like basketball is to me.

TH: That's good to see you develop on the court and off.

—Timothy Hicks

SOFTBALL: COMPETITION AND CAMARADERIE BRING TEAMS TOGETHER

For some of the softball volunteers from team Dreams Awaken, it was their first time coming into prison to challenge the San Quentin Hardtimers in a competitive game. The result was a 23–1 win for the home team, but more importantly, everyone came together in camaraderie and sportsmanship.

"It was nothing but love out there on the field today. Win loss or tie, this was a win today," said first baseman Hannah L.

It was her first time inside any prison to play sports. She used to work as a nurse at another prison and to her, "something always didn't feel right." She said that she could never be herself.

It wasn't until she quit and started contributing her recovery knowledge at a women's prison that things started to feel different.

"I've been clean and sober for 13 years," she said. "On the streets I used to hear stories of being locked up in San Quentin. It's such a beautiful parallel to come in here and feel such freedom in a place that's historically so oppressive."

On the field, the visiting team had a "hard time" getting any hits past the Hardtimers' outfield. The Dreams Awaken team's only run scored came when shortstop Jorge Zaragoza got through the gap, driving in a runner from third to home.

"I been out of prison for 20 years now. I paroled in 2006," Zaragoza said. "I feel blessed to come back in here like this. Life has come full-circle for me. I just got promoted in this big company. I've also been clean and sober for five years. Ever since I been clean and sober, my life changed dramatically."

He shared this advice: "Sometimes it don't seem like there's light at the end of the tunnel, but stay focused and grateful."

Hardtimers' catcher, Nathan Venegas, not only went

3-for-3 and got on base,

he got to enjoy the experience of having

some people come back into the prison

and share in the game he loves.

"To see the guy who got me to turn

my life around in prison get a chance

to come in and play against my team is

epic," Venegas said. "To see formerly incarcerated

guys who got out and have made something of themselves and are now in turn coming in to give back is something you will only see here."

Most of the people on the field for both teams have either been involved in some sort of recovery or experienced some type of self-destruction in their past. This included second baseman Mei Lia S. of team Dream Awaken, who has been clean and sober and out of jail for six years.

"This feels like a homecoming to come in here and play ball with you guys," she said.

This was her first time coming into a prison as a free person. It was her fiancé John, known as "Shaggy," who put the game together. She said that he had recently paroled after 12 years. The two are clean and sober and wanted to give back.

"That's what it's all about," she said.

The pair started a transitional home, JMS Recovery Homes, where they offer support for those recently paroled.

The softball game was more than just a game for those playing, and the positive energy was palpable.

"I paroled nine years ago from High Desert Prison," said Kelly Corkill. He has visited the prison about six times since paroling. To him, it's always is an overwhelming feeling. "I get to come back into prison and play ball with the people I can relate to. It brings back memories every time I see old friends."

In those nine years since paroling, Corkill has accumulated a family along with a business and property. He can now hire people who get out and need employment. He has a successful construction company, Cinecor Construction, that builds theatres.

Coach Rick Dias of the Hardtimers boasted about not striking out. However, he spoke too soon.

"I can't believe that I struck out," he said with exasperation after too many consecutive strikes across the plate. "I swung at a weird pitch." The sideline erupted in laughter.

Longtime volunteer Matt Davis usually visits the prison with his team, The Outsiders, who's record is also not so great against the Hardtimers.

"Another day, another team, another [expletive] kicking," he said.

The day was good for Garrett Lester; it was his first time coming into the prison. Before his visit, he had heard many negative connotations about people in prison, but soon learned that reality was quite different.

"This was a good atmosphere. The people were respectful and competitive, nothing you would expect. All the negative stigma is not true. The experience will let you see that it's not true," Lester said.

—Timothy Hicks



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Edited by Jan Perry

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Across

1. A fine spray
5. Small jazz ensemble
10. What prison cells need on hot days
14. Preceeds charged, eating, or drawn
15. Equipment used to cook french fries
16. Remove from danger (military slang)
17. “The Biggest Little City in the World”
18. A thin flat piece of wood used in the back of a chair
19. In Beatles lore, she was a lovely meter maid
20. “Machete” actor: Danny ____
22. Eighth letter of the Hebrew alphabet
23. Command
24. Cancer, in a sweet blue packet
27. “Family Guy” character Joe ____
30. Post-Christmas sale (2 words)
34. California’s current First Family
35. Broad chisel used by stonemasons
36. Preparation of food in a certain style
37. ‘Hail’ in Latin
38. US inventor Anton ____ who invented lighting for film sets
42. One of the main components of fantasy football
45. Former country of the USSR on the Baltic Sea
47. Things birds eat from at your house
48. Shoulder belt used to carry bullets
50. Church worship group
53. Post-grad business degree (abbr)
54. Canine command: “Go get it!”
58. 90’s Mariah Carey hit
59. Actors Hemsworth and Neeson, e.g.
61. Director: ____ Ephron
62. Not shuttered
63. Abalone, to the Brits
64. ____’s Walk for Breast Cancer
65. ____ Disney
66. Workout term: “____-mode”
67. Sexually crude or offensive

Down

1. “Family Guy” pharmacy owner
2. Pop group Bon ____
3. Monetary unit in Samoa
4. USC’s football team
5. Post-infection fever, aching and tiredness, with unknown cause (abbr)
6. Motherless child
7. One trained to run in one-mile races
8. Actress Shirley MacLaine’s brother, Warren ____
9. Leftover food scrap
10. Italian chocolate brand ____ Rocher
11. Keen or enthusiastic
12. Rapper ____ Dogg
13. Sometimes the ones you can’t see are the worst
21. Italian veal dish: “____ buco”
23. Michael K. Williams’ character on “The Wire”
25. Fruit drink: ____ Wonderful
26. Portable paddles (abbr)
27. Criminal character from the Simpsons
28. *War of the Worlds* author: Orson ____
29. Anticipate
31. Side-step
32. Ain’t gonna happen
33. Put some clothes on
39. Hypothetical non-living ancestor of life in chemical evolution
40. To snarl or growl
41. “Furious 6” director: Justin ____
42. Golf ball’s mate
43. Boat-bottom menace
44. Glands that are located on top of your kidneys
46. To hold [someone] in high regard
47. Failure means going down in these
49. President Barack
50. The SQ wake-up call: “____ time”
51. A type of air filter
52. Industrial city in SW Russia
55. Pop singer: ____ Lo
56. A hearty meal for the mistaken
57. A fist is made of this
59. A tennis stroke
60. Dodge performance line (abbr)

BOOK REVIEW

I Cried to Dream Again

Trafficking, Murder, and Deliverance

By Sara Kruzan and Cori Thomas

By Juan Haines
Contributing Writer

I first learned about Sara Kruzan, an activist and survivor of child sex trafficking, from listening to an episode of *Ear Hustle*, one of the podcasts at San Quentin. The episode “Dirty Water” featured an awkward conversation between Kruzan and SQ resident Louis Scott about what it’s like to be abused. Scott had been an abuser, Kruzan had been abused. It was difficult for me to listen to their discourse because I am an abuser *and* I’ve been abused.

Author, playwright and long-time SQ volunteer Cori Thomas told me about her take on the episode.

“Sara was facing Louis Scott and talking about trafficking,” Thomas said. “I never heard a woman talking about this subject and I wondered how many other people didn’t know about this important subject.”

Thomas sought out Kruzan after hearing the podcast herself, wanting her to share her story. Thomas’ persistence became the basis of a friendship between them that continues today.

“That’s when I suggested she write a book, but she was reluctant about putting her personal life out to the public,” Thomas said. “But I let her know that her story was important and [that] her telling the story from her perspective would be for the public good.”

Thomas met with Kruzan, encouraging her step-by-step to write, “I Cried to Dream Again,” her memoir that covers how she grew up steeped in abuse from childhood to adulthood, never escaping until one day when she decided to kill her abuser.

The act — seen by herself as self-defense — came with a toll: a life sentence in state prison.

Still, Thomas was determined to help Kruzan tell her story.

“I was relentless in getting details. I wanted more and more information to tell the story as fully and authentically as possible,” Thomas said, calling it a “traumatic and hard, rough process.”

After listening to the episode and interviewing Thomas, I wanted to read Kruzan’s memoir.

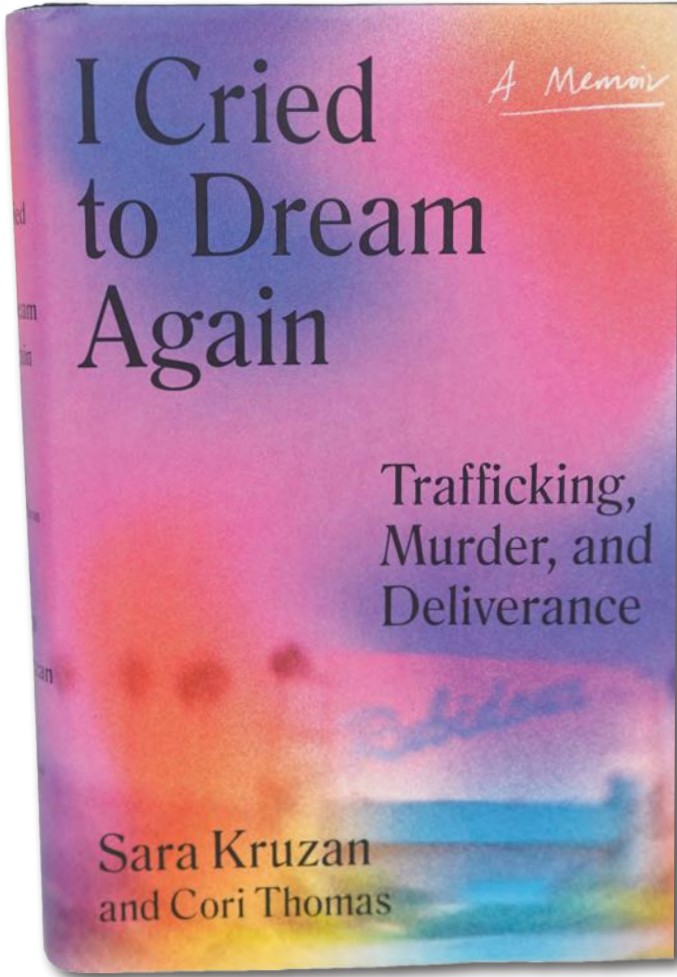
When the memoir was ordered and delivered to SQ’s mailroom, I got a notice that the book, “I Cried to Dream Again,” was banned due to language depicting a minor in sexual activity.

When Thomas learned that the book was held up by the mailroom, she told me that she was “shocked.”

“It was hurtful to read that it was banned at San Quentin,” Thomas said while holding the notice. “[It] was insulting and offensive to read those words.

“The fact that it was banned for depicting a minor in sexual activity is the subject matter of the story. The story does not glorify what happened — it’s saying that that conduct is immoral and wrong.”

Several weeks passed. Then, I got a notice from CDCR headquarters that the book would be allowed in San Quentin.



For me, “I Cried to Dream Again” was a very hard book to read, but the insight of Kruzan’s plight from incarceration to freedom to advocate will inspire its readers as a real-life hero’s journey.

Kruzan’s resilience is refreshing; the narrative shifts from her being abused to owning a powerful voice as a survivor without shame.

The language and narration allowed me to put myself in Kruzan’s shoes, giving me a keen understanding of how horrible an upbringing Kruzan endured.

She also gives readers a better understanding of the importance of supporting young, impressionable children, and being ready to intervene when necessary to prevent child trafficking.

“The circle is broken only after there’s been healing,” Thomas said about Kruzan’s new life outside of prison.

Kruzan was pardoned a few months after “I Cried to Dream Again” was published. She now advocates for children’s rights and has collaborated with Human Rights for Kids to develop a slate of policies collectively known as “Sara’s Law” that will protect child sex crime survivors from lengthy prison sentences for acts of violence committed against their abusers. This model policy has been introduced in more than a dozen states and in the U.S. Congress.

“The power of hope is so important to share,” Kruzan said. “We are not only the reflection of humanity, we are the very echo etched within the wind.”

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SNOLUTOS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



DONOVAN READER APPRECIATES SQNEWS' LGBTQ+ COVERAGE

Dear SQNews:

My name is Yvette Blake, and I am an incarcerated transgender woman at R. J. Donovan. I wrote recently and want to thank you for giving my people, the LGBTQ+ community, a page of news stories. I am honored and humbled by your thoughtfulness and would like to make a donation from my trust account. I'm encouraging other incarcerated LGBTQ+ people to donate as well.

We are a strong community who only want the same respect and dignity as anyone else. We're all human and have the same struggles as our peers.

Please thank those who wrote such terrific stories about my people. Are they allowed to receive floral deliveries at the office?

I am so proud right now I cannot wipe away the smile of joy this brought me. On behalf of the entire LGBTQ+ community, thank you, and God bless you all.

Pleased to write,

—Yvette Blake
RJD Correctional Fac.
San Diego, California

Hi, Yvette! Thanks for writing back.

The LGBTQ+ community is indeed a strong one. It is also one of the most overlooked and underserved communities in the entire American criminal justice system.

At SQNews, we strive to serve our entire readership. Most of the feedback we get is extremely positive, but sometimes we get letters that are somewhat less than enthused. We are so grateful anytime an unhappy reader's mind has been changed, as yours has.

Thank you again for writing, and for your heartening words. It means a lot to everyone on the SQN team.

—Ed.

PS: Sorry, while we appreciate the sentiment, please don't send flowers to the newsroom. Instead, please submit your articles for possible publication in either SQN or Wall City magazine. (See page 3 for our submission guidelines.)

CAN GOV. NEWSOM 'CALIFORNIA MODEL' REALLY WORK?

Dear SQNews:

The announcement of Gov. Newsom's commitment to implementing [California-version of the] "Norway Model" is an opportunity to tackle endemic problems identified in the survey questions 3, 4, and 7 that make lasting CDCR changes difficult. Some of the problems relate to cultural/ demographic differences in Norway. Others are internal factors like Solano Prison's delay implementing the Delancey Street restaurant program because participants were told they couldn't go to the yard again. Alternatively, California currently has a \$31 billion deficit.

Closing more prisons may help mitigate these budget pressures, but ultimately a commitment to permanent change along the lines of processes embraced decades ago by manufacturing and health services is what I would like to see. Management and workers involved in improving processes to maximize efficient production and quality output, while minimizing waste. Nurses and doctors need to talk with each other, share perspectives on patient care. We must do it now.

It will take time and many at first will not embrace the evolving process. Incarcerated will face peer pressure and the institution can use ways to pollute the incarcerated mindset. Eventually, the business model (total quality management) can pull recidivism, learned helplessness toward total transformation.

—Wendell Bigelow
California Health Care Facility
Stockton, California

PROPOSAL FOR BPH HEARINGS PROCESS

Dear SQNews:

On July 26, 2023 at 10 a.m. a group of men at Folsom State Prison will be hosting a discussion and proposal on impediments and deficiencies existing within the California Board of Parole Hearings. These men will be touching on issues they perceive are problematic with the BPH process

as a result of their own personal experiences and those shared by other of their peers. More importantly, this group of men have carefully undertaken the task of formulating non-personalized, rational solutions, many of which most people misperceive as already in effect and part of the process.

Proposal topics such as but not limited to include: parole consideration reforms; BPH state appointed attorneys; BPH appointed clinicians; non-violent lifer parole consideration hearings; conflicting terminology.

—Antonio Calles
Folsom State Prison
Represa, California

RESENTENCING RECOMMENDATION FLAWS

Dear SQNews:

According to California law, a staff may recommend an incarcerated person to be eligible for early release, if the individual meets the criteria and is displaying good behavior, PC 1172.1(a). CDCR states that it may recommend to a sentencing court that the sentence be recalled only if the agency Secretary or Board of Parole Hearings is specifically making the recommendation.

You are expressing to voters that upon good behavior and staff recommendations, residents have the ability to receive early release.

From what I have witnessed, CDCR overlooks numerous staff recommendations. The justification is because the recommendations come from custody or the free-world staff.

It seems to me that the staff in the prison with us on a daily basis would be more knowledgeable about an incarcerated person's growth and conduct within the same facility.

People who work in Sacramento, who never leave a tiny board room, who only know what they read, may take one encounter with an incarcerated person as an indicator that all are the same. They know nothing about our change or growth. I feel the details and regulations should be clearer to everyone.

—Sarah Marie Sims
CCWF
Chowchilla, California

EDITORIAL

THE PEOPLE IN BLUE AND OFFICERS FIND COMMON GROUND THROUGH CANDID DIALOGUE

By Steve Brooks
Editor-in-Chief

On Friday, July 14, The People in Blue and correctional officers came together for a collaborative conversation about how to move forward as a community within the vision for the reimagined San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

The meeting was conceptualized by Public Information Officer Lt. G. Berry and The People in Blue. The incarcerated group, also known as TPIB, is a diverse collective of incarcerated stakeholders with a vested interest in safe communities and ensuring the success of Gov. Gavin Newsom's "California Model" of prison reform by contributing their lived-experience as a living amends.

Our expectation is that this meeting will be the first of many conversations with officers moving forward in an effort to change the culture at San Quentin to one centered on health and wellness for everyone.

At the meeting were 12 members of TPIB, including myself; 10 correctional officers, including a California Correctional Peace Officer Association (commonly known as the CCPOA) union representative; institutional training officers; the public information officer; and IDEO consultancy team members Lillian Tran and Bianca Jimenez-Rivera. The diverse group sat together in a circle and was led in discussion by the incarcerated residents.

The event opened up with a grounding exercise led by TPIB member Anthony Tafoya designed to help calm the nervous energy of those in the room. As expected, many on both sides were anxious and wondered what was going to unfold.

At the meeting, the members of TPIB made it clear that the people on the ground, living and working in the prison, are the only ones who can actually make the vision of the SQRC and the California Model work.

Most officers at the meeting said they didn't really know what the California Model is and are not sold that the idea can work. Some said they don't believe they have a voice in the matter, and they believe that government bureaucracy is going to continue business as usual — using a top-down approach to criminal justice reform.

I opened the meeting by acknowledging that our broken prison system does not just hurt the incarcerated population. It hurts everyone.

Officers deal with a lot of post-traumatic stress and depression that is job related and can lead to divorce, addiction and even suicide. At least 10% of California's correctional staff contemplate or actually commit suicide due to job related stress. One officer at the meeting spoke about five separate incidents in which he knew someone from work who took their own life.

At the same time, we all acknowledge that incarcerated people also deal with many psychological disorders related to the stress of living in prison. This has also caused a high suicide rate among the incarcerated population.

Later in the discussion, I made officers aware of the idea that what makes this

criminal justice reform movement slightly different is that we are being asked to create the California Model at San Quentin by sharing our thoughts and ideas with the IDEO consultancy team and Gov. Newsom's advisory council.

Most people at the meeting agreed that a building alone won't change San Quentin and transform it into an innovative rehabilitation center.

Talking points for the meeting included: 1) how to create a therapeutic community; 2) how to change the rules concerning "overfamiliarity" so that the relationship between people in blue and people in green isn't so uncertain or adversarial; 3) how to incentivize officer participation in self-help groups; 4) training at the academy before becoming an officer or coming to SQRC; 5) changing uniforms and changing the dehumanizing language of how we refer to each other; and, 6) getting the CCPOA's buy-in for the California Model.

Surprisingly, or perhaps not surprisingly, some of the officers shared some of the same concerns as the TPIB. Overcrowding is a problem, one officer said. We need to keep the lifer population because they are the foundation that makes the programs work, another officer offered. There needs to be a screening process for those committed to rehabilitation to participate in the model and everyone else should be excluded, remarked another. There needs to be a specific program for people with mental health disorders and addictions, due to their higher needs, said one.

Officers even showed interest in being a part of some of the self-help groups and programs that exist at San Quentin — if more paid incentives could be added. The idea is that through staff sponsorship and participation, we can eliminate long waiting lists for programs and create more rehabilitation programs at the SQRC.

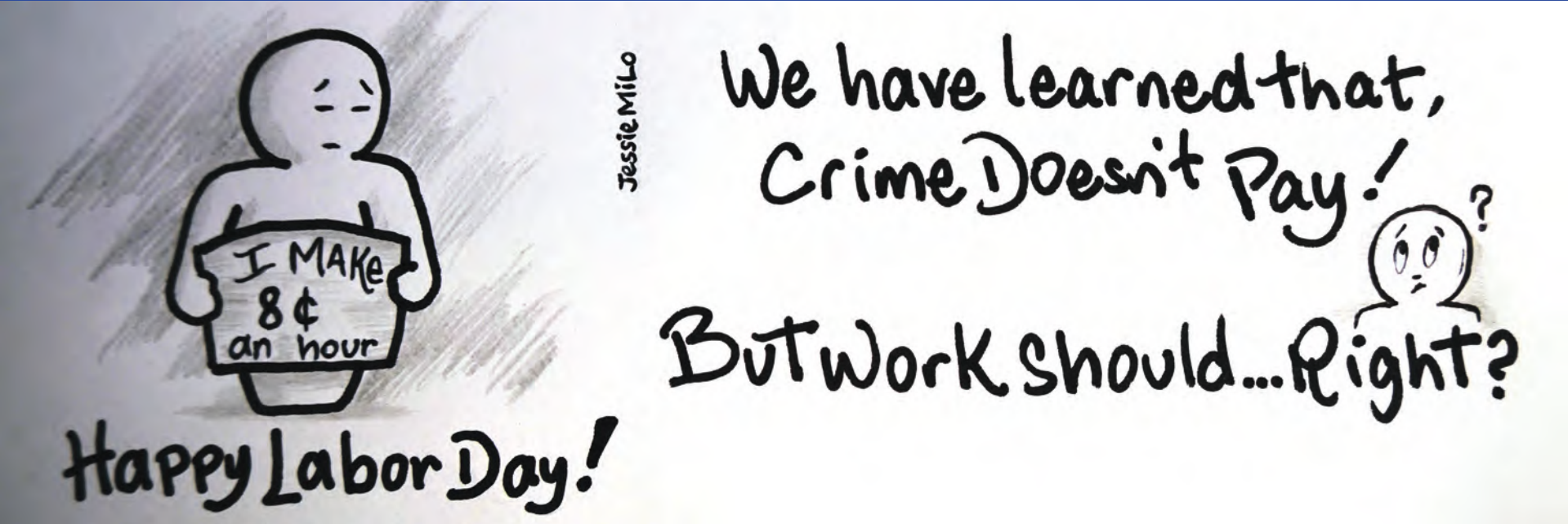
Some officers expressed concern about potentially losing their equipment and their peace officer status. The CCPOA representative said that is not on the table for discussion. TPIB did not take any position concerning prison security. However, we do believe less threatening attire is important to shifting the culture inside California prisons so that it is healthier for everyone. This is inline with the California Model's pillar of "dynamic security," which emphasizes incentives and pro-social relationships over force and control.

What TPIB determined from this first meeting is that officers are not receiving much in the way of communication about their role in creating the SQRC and the California Model to date. Some are frightened of losing their peace officer status and equipment as part of this transformation. Some don't believe a building will resolve any of the problems that exist here, and some even say San Quentin already had successful programs that were working but were taken away.

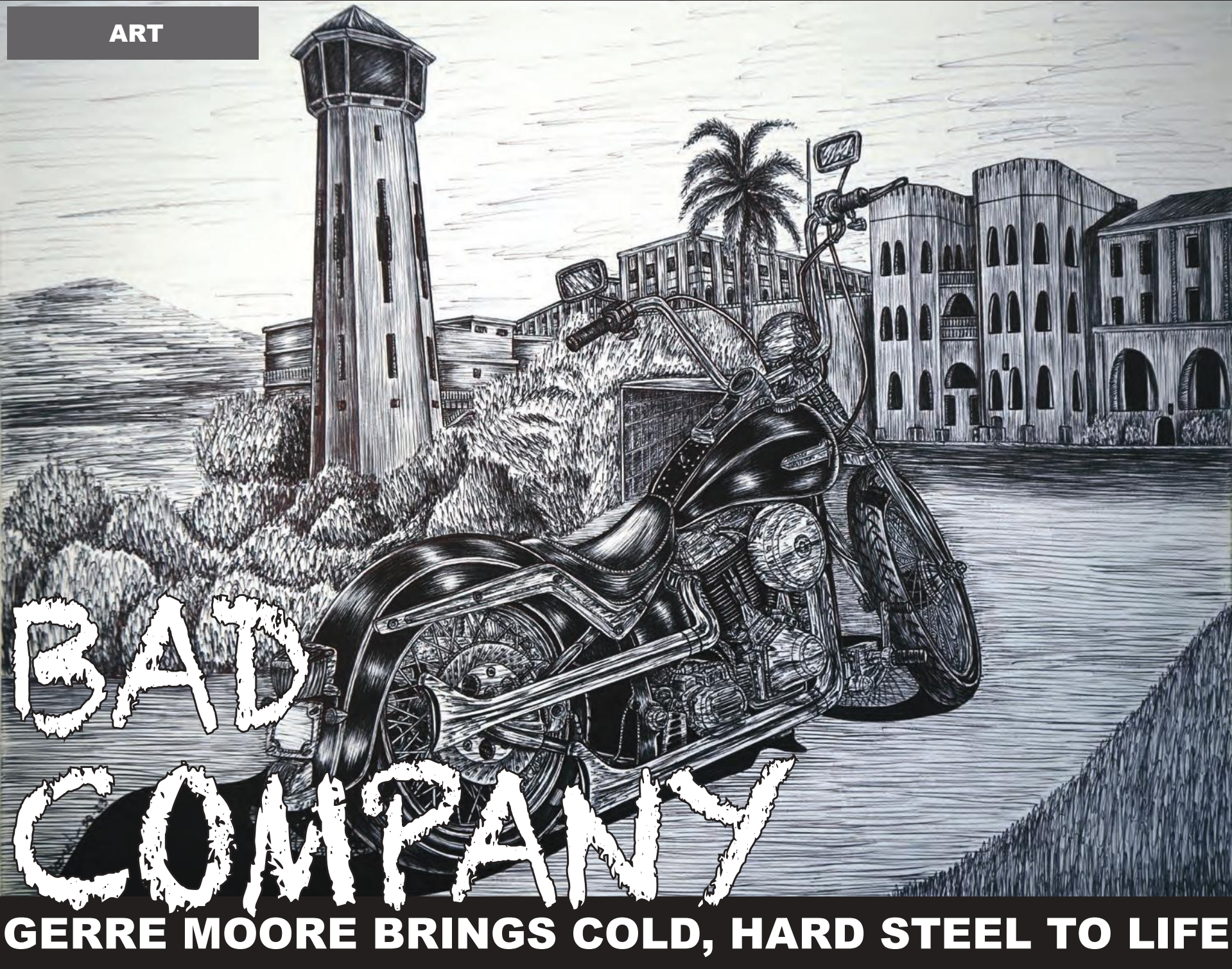
The officers generally entered the room with a very pessimistic and hopeless attitude, but after a conversation with The People in Blue, many closed out the meeting by describing themselves as now "hopeful" that things can finally change for the better.

SAN QUEN-TOONS

BY JESSIE MILO (2023)



ART



Vincent E. O'Bannon // SQNews

Gerre Moore got his artistic lineage from his mother. He began sketching classis rides in 1996 after reading classic cars and motocycles magazines. Moore's art reflects his upbringing, connecting the dots to long-lost memories.

By Edwin E. Chavez
Spanish Journalism
Guild Chair

Artist Gerre Moore has been working with ink pen and color-pencils for decades. For Moore, 56, his journey as an artist began as a five-year-old child, inspired by his mother's talent.

"My mom was a good painter and got all my sisters and my brother doing some kind of art work when we were young," Moore said. "I owe my mom everything."

In 1996, he started reading classic car and motorcycle magazines, which led to him trying his hand at drawing the classic rides. He has always had an affinity for old-school vehicles.

Moore credits as his inspi-

ration David Mann, a well-known motorcycle artist for *Easy Rider* magazine. Copying pieces by Mann started Moore on a path of mastering the art of sketching motorcycles. He sat in his cell for days and spent many hours bringing the roaring two-wheelers to life on canvas.

A proud artist always has a favorite piece. For Moore, it's his drawing of a 1980 Harley Davidson low-rider-style bike parked in front of Folsom Prison. The work took over 50 hours to complete.

Moore also has a drawing of a 1970s-style Harley Davidson at the main entrance of San Quentin prison. The drawing shows the famous prison's watchtower and palm trees in the distance with the bike parked in the foreground.

This particular piece took Moore about ten days to draw.

"I love motorcycles; they are cool. They are freedom. I love riding in the wind," Moore said.

Moore's art reflects his upbringing. Vehicles just have a special way of taking him back to his childhood, connecting the dots to long-lost memories

Some of his other works feature a 1971 Camaro and a 1970 Chevelle SS, two cars owned by his late brother-in-law. Each car took him about 72 hours to complete.

Recently, he created a masterpiece for a friend — a 1966 Chevelle SS, sketched with the skyline of San Francisco in the background.

According to the artist, art is a tool that gives him the op-

portunity to express his emotions and keeps him at peace.

"I've been clean and sober for 28 years. This is my substitute for alcohol and drugs," Moore said. "It is a positive thing to do, because it keeps me away from negative peers. Art brings me a lot of peace."

Currently, Moore is working on a drawing of a 1962 Lincoln Continental parked in a driveway alongside a 1968 pan-head Harley Davidson chopper. Moore will send the work to one of his friends back home.

"I just got going a '70s style chopper motorcycle with Frank Frezetta in the back ground," Moore said. "I watch 'Counting Cars' with Danny Cokker, so I sent this piece to my friend who will personally deliver it to Danny for me."

