

Chowchilla News

Wednesday, February 15, 2006

NI

VALLEY STATE PRISON

Building towards a better future

Two former inmates return as guest speakers

By Patty Mandrell
EDITOR

Inmates at Valley State Prison for Women (VSPW) took a step towards a brighter future through programs offered by the Private Industry Authority (PIA). A graduation ceremony was held on Tuesday, Jan. 24, at the Vocational Eyewear at VSPW for approximately 36 women who received certification in three programs.

PIA Administrator Charles Babilla, congratulated the inmates on their success. He introduced special guests, which included PIA General Manager M. Powers, and PIA Inmate Employability Coordinator R. Drew.

Sixteen inmates were presented certificates for National Association of Institutional Linen Management (NAIIM), 10 inmates received forklift certification and 10 received certification from the American Board of Optometry (ABO).

PIA is a State-operated organization that provides productive work assignments for inmates in California's adult correctional institutions to reduce idleness and improve job skills. PIA operates 68 service, manufacturing, and agricultural industries at 23 prisons throughout California, providing assignments for approximately 7,000 inmates.

PIA is self-supporting and does not receive an annual appropriation from the Legislature. PIA's revenue comes from the sale of its products and services.



PHOTO BY PATTY MANDRELL

Thirty-six inmates at Valley State Prison for Women were honored at a Prison Industry Authority (PIA) graduation ceremony. The inmates received certificates from American Board of Optometry, National Association of Institutional Linen Management (NAIIM) and Forklift Certification. Pictured in the back with the inmates are from the left are Prison Industry Manager Roy Mattesich, Prison Industry Administrator Inmate Employability Coordinator Reggie Drew, Industrial Superintendent Laundry Andres Ponce de Leon, PIA Administrator Charles Babilla and Industrial Supervisor Optical Gerald Lee.

Many PIA inmate workers have never held a job or learned the value of work. PIA staff expect inmates to learn appropriate behavior on the job, do quality work, report to work on time and follow occupational health and safety rules.

The program does work, as many inmates have gained valuable work experience while incarcerated.

The guest speakers for the graduation ceremony proved the program can work. Both were former inmates at VSPW who were fortunate enough to be involved in PIA programs.



Christie Shows



Debbie Pollard

SEE FUTURE, PAGE A4

FUTURE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Both are now back in communities, holding down well-paying jobs, leading successful lives.

The first to speak was Debbie Pollard. Pollard expressed her appreciation to Mr. Ponce de Leon, PIA and NAILM organization. "Mr. Ponce de Leon's vision has given me, as well as a lot of other inmates in this state, an opportunity to gain hands on experience and marketable skills," she stated.

Pollard told the graduating inmates she took the marketable skills she learned at VSPW into the real world and gained employment with a couple of employers before she landed the job she currently has.

She noted that it took assertiveness, going the extra mile in the interview, answering all the questions and selling yourself. She said the skills she learned through PIA were a big part but each person is responsible to do the rest. "You have to have a lot of patience, be determined and most of all, leave your attitude at the door," she stated.

Pollard said at the time it might not have seemed like it but being in prison was one of the best things that happened to her. "It taught me self-discipline, how to use my inner strength, and regain confidence in myself," she stated.

She ended by encouraging the

inmates to take advantage of the programs offered through PIA and other educational opportunities and run with them. "Never give up hope and never stop living your dream," she stated.

The other guest speaker was also a former inmate at VSPW and now the Regional Coordinator for Inmate Employability Program for PIA, Christie Shows served three years at VSPW. Shows also admits that prison was the best thing that ever happen to her. She found the job skills she learned through the PIA Optical were the marketable job skills needed for a successful career.

Shows credits the program and PIA employee Teresa Ferguson for making a difference in her life. "Ferguson was instrumental in my success. She held me accountable. She was a teacher, a mentor in job skills and life skills," she stated.

When Shows was released from VSPW she took a job with Lens Crafters doing lab work where she worked her way up to General Manager in a year and a half. She worked for Lens Crafters for five years and then went to work for PIA.

Shows explained she could never be a peace officer but she could work for the state with her prison record. She did have to be off parole.

She started as a sales representative with PIA selling products the inmates made to government agencies. She became the Regional Coordinator for In-



PHOTO BY PATTY MANDRELL

Del Norte Industry Authority (PIA) Administrator Charles Babilla congratu-



PHOTO BY PATTY MANDRELL

Inmates in PIA programs at Valley State Prison for Women were congratulated by officials and two former inmates after receiving their certificates.

mate Employability Program in August.

Shows said prison is probably the most humiliating experience a person can go through. "If you resent it you get bitter and angry, if you embrace it, it can be a powerful motivator and tool," she stated.

She was 43 years-old when she got out of prison and started her life over. She enrolled in a community college to take some refresher courses. She takes every opportunity to better herself. While in prison she would take the Reader's Digest vocabulary test to learn new words. "If you want to be professional, you have to speak professionally," she stated.

Now Shows works with administrators and supervisors along with inmates. Her job is to help inmates learn life and job skills and prepare them for re-entry in society.

Her advice to inmates is to take advantage of all that is available to you. "You have a lot of time, use it wisely," she said. "Nothing can hold you down, you just have to decide what you want."

The policy at both Central California Women's Facility

(CCWF) and Valley State Prison for Women is that every able-bodied inmate will be assigned to full-time or part-time work training programs. It is the belief of PIA that addressing these two issues will contribute to a reduction in recidivism rates.

PIA enterprises at both institutions play an important role in the implementation of programs designed to assist inmates to become productive citizens when released from prison.

PIA programs at VSPW include the Optical Lab which employs approximately 98 inmates in the following areas: bench department, mounting department and shipping department. In addition, the Optical lab has a well-staffed customer service department. Included in the optical program is the Optical Annex located at CCWF. Here prescription eyewear orders for Medical patients from 25 counties are received and screened for private information before going to the lab for processing. The Annex provides much of the clerical

support for the lab. The Optical Lab processes plastic lens only, and the daily production is approximately 1,500 cases. Optical has a certification program called the American Board of Optometry (ABO), which has been very successful.

PIA Laundry at VSPW employs 70 inmates in two areas of production, the solid department and the clean department. The laundry enterprise has three staggered shifts ranging from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. and processes approximately 14,500 pounds of laundry daily. Laundry customers consists of CCWF, VSPW, Salinas Valley State Prison, Chowchilla Hospital, Agnew State Hospital and the University of California - Merced.

Laundry has three certification programs: Certified Washing Technician, Certified Laundry and Linen Management and Forklift Certification.

Other PIA programs at VSPW and CCWF include the Dental Laboratory, Farm, Warehouse, Administration and Maintenance.