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Brick by brick, Folsom female inmates build foundation for solid future

By: Don Chaddock, Managing Editor



FOLSOM, CA – Behind a courtyard of gray stone walls ringed with barbed wire, 15 women marked the beginning of a new chapter in their lives.

Wearing pink shirts to signify their graduation from the California Prison Industry Authority's (Cal-PIA) Career Technical Education Pre-Apprenticeship Program, the female inmates at the Folsom Women's Facility were awarded certificates on July 11.

Many other women were recognized for their efforts in constructing what would become the facility in which they're housed.

The buildings sat vacant for a few years until the California Department of Corrections opted to convert them into a prison for women. The inmates were used to construct the facility, which opened in December, and is under the administration of Folsom Prison.

Chuck Pattillo, general manager for the Cal-PIA, offered words of encouragement.

"I enjoy seeing you work," he told the gathering. "The best thing you can do for yourselves is go out there, make better lives for yourselves and not come back (to prison)."

Folsom Women's Facility Associate Warden Robin Harrington said the women had done the right



thing in choosing to better their lives and create opportunities for themselves.

“You have pulled together and contributed something to this community,” she told the crowd. “Education is the greatest key for life. (With that key), you can walk in any door. This is the first part of your success.”

Harrington said this was the first graduating class of the construction program.

“Programs like this offer stability, confidence in their ability to do non-traditional work and sustainability so they become contributors to society (through paying taxes and buying goods and services) rather than takers (through welfare),” Harrington told the Telegraph. “These programs open a lot of doors. They probably wouldn’t have gotten these classes and training out in the community.”

A few state officials also attended the graduation ceremony.

Deborah Hysen, deputy director for the CDCR’s department of Facility Planning, Construction and Management, congratulated the graduates.

“As graduates, you have done your part by enrolling (in these programs),” she said. “You built something very tangible (the prison) and you should be proud.”

According to Cal-PIA spokesman Eric Reslock, the “ladies do everything.”

“They pour concrete, lay brick, work jackhammers – it’s amazing,” he said. “Everyone here in the facility has sentences of five years or less.”

The inmates were overseen by instructors from contractors’ labor unions and trained by professionals in their trades.

Cal-PIA’s Career Technical Education program is a first-of-its-kind in the nation to partner an offender rehabilitation program with trade unions, according to Reslock.

According to Cal-PIA officials, the three-year recidivism rate is less than 15 percent. Graduates have a cumulative recidivism rate of less than 8 percent.

All those in training are required to obtain a high school diploma or complete a GED within two years of beginning the program, according to Reslock.

The Folsom Women’s Facility is located near Folsom State Prison and California State Prison Sacramento, at 570 E. Natoma St., Folsom.