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Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole

May 8, 2014

Parole Board Hosted Second Annual Training to Change Offender Behavior

Last week the Board of Probation and Parole hosted a week-long national training program for agents to learn skills that can change offender behavior.

“The key to reducing recidivism is to change offender behavior and one of the proven ways to do that is to change their thinking,” said Probation and Parole Chairman Michael C. Potteiger. “As part of Governor Corbett’s ongoing efforts to enhance public safety and reduce recidivism, Pennsylvania was pleased to host this training. We welcome our partners from other government agencies and other states.”

Since 2008, parole agents have been delivering the National Curriculum and Training Institute’s cognitive behavioral programming to offenders in its district offices. Providing this programming was an innovative idea to meet a programming need specifically for offenders that was not available in the community.

“The board saw a need for programming to specifically address the criminal thinking patterns of parolees, and we have developed the capacity to provide this programming by training almost 200 agents as facilitators,” Potteiger said.

The programs are based on cognitive behavioral therapy approaches which have been proven successful in preventing future crime – changing a person’s thinking can change their behavior. The group sessions that are held with offenders promote pro-social change by allowing participants to learn and practice specific life-skills, increasing participant self-confidence, and by identifying and cultivating lifetime patterns for self-improvement.

Participants in this year’s training included individuals from the Board of Probation and Parole, Bucks County Probation, McKean County adult and juvenile probation departments, Mercer County Juvenile Probation, Piedmont Court Services of Virginia and the U.S. Probation Department Western District of New York.

The program, which took place in Harrisburg, is accredited by the American Probation and Parole Association. The National Curriculum and Training Institute offers curriculum, consulting, and related program services using evidence-based principles that promote individual pro-social behavior change for those involved in the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems.

Local Restaurant Owner Encourages Culinary Program Graduates

“Do not think you are unemployable,” said Rob Billas, owner since 1998 of Fiorentino’s Bar & Grill at Lancaster Airport, as he stood before eight inmates who were graduating from the Department of Corrections’ Culinary Arts Training Certificate program.

Billas spoke those words of encouragement as he congratulated the students on their accomplishment and for “making the smart, first step with this class.”

The culinary program is part of the Department of Corrections and Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole’s efforts to help offenders successfully reenter into society. Finding and keeping a job is one of the most significant challenges for parolees.



Rob Billas, owner of Fiorentino’s Bar & Grill

On Friday, May 2, eight inmates received their certificate and prepared a delicious lunch of grilled salmon, crepes stuffed with chicken dijon and roast top round of beef.

Billas provided very specific guidance about how to get a job in the food service industry.

“Don’t drop off an application with the host. Do ask to speak to a manager during a slow part of the day. Do dress appropriately when you fill out an application. And bring your own pen,” he said.

Recognizing that the stigma of a criminal record can often hamper an offender’s ability to get hired, Billas mentioned his own family member’s struggle with addiction that led to incarceration and the difficulties he faced but was able to overcome. “Own your mistakes. Tell the truth about it and then move on to success,” he said.

Chef Todd Lewis, the inmate culinary instructor, noted that “this class spoiled me. Their work was outstanding.” The average score on the ServSafe exam was 91, the highest of any class to date and higher than the real world average of 87.

Once the individuals are paroled, the Board’s parole agents will work with them to find and keep a job. Parole agents have been certified as Offender Workforce Development Specialists who provide employment programs to assist with job searches, resume creation, job interview skills and job retention skills.