



the Green sheet

Allegheny Reentry Program graduation

“I made up my mind that I was done with drugs and crime and that it was time to do the right thing,” said parolee Shepherd about his involvement in the Board’s court-based Reentry Program for offenders with substance abuse problems.

Shepherd was one of three graduates on December 17 from the Allegheny Reentry Program celebrating the successful completion of the program with refreshments and an unexpected festive touch of a choir and symphony playing holiday music.

“The graduates being honored here today are here because of the hard work they have put forth,” said Bureau of Reentry Director Richard Podguski in his address to the graduates. “We, the team, can be here for you and assist everyone involved in the program along the way, but ultimately it was your individual efforts that got you to where you are today.”

Shepherd’s biggest challenge was handling the demands of a full schedule. “It was really tough trying to juggle everything. I was overwhelmed and

really worried it would interfere with working,” he said. “It all really came together in the end.”

Shepherd obtained a job early on in the program and not only maintained it, but advanced into a supervisory role. It was extremely important for him to earn the trust of an employer again. Being involved in the program helped him put things in perspective and served as a positive monthly “reality check.”

For parolee Rutherford, aside from maintaining his sobriety and working his way through the program, his main goal was getting his suspended driver’s license back.

“Judge Mariani was very helpful in assisting me with this,” he noted. “Getting the positive feedback and support from the entire team and the judge and Board Member McKay each month was extremely helpful in helping me stay focused. Even when they had to cuff someone up and put them into jail or treatment they were positive and trying to be supportive.”

Parolee Sullivan noted the challenges in obtaining meaningful employment with a criminal record.

“It took me three months of constant searching,” Sullivan said. “It’s hard to ask for help sometimes because our egos get in the way, but when I did my agent and the team gave me their full support.”

He went on to note that alongside having a job, maintaining his sobriety by working his recovery program was paramount.

“Once things came together and I was working, staying sober, and being productive I realized that the things (negative) I thought were important in the past didn’t mean as much to me anymore. Seeing the rewards of living a good life mean a lot to me.”

Established in 2014, this was the second graduating class; 31 parolees are still participating in the program.

The Allegheny Reentry Program is led by Parole Board Member Craig McKay and the Honorable Judge Anthony Mariani of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas. It includes parole board staff, court staff, representatives from local drug and alcohol and mental health services, and community-based providers Renewal Inc., Geo Services, and Gaudenzia Erie of Pittsburgh.

The program provides intensive parole supervision and substance abuse treatment to offenders for 12-18 months. Offenders move through four phases and parole contacts and drug testing decrease as they are successful. Inpatient treatment, employment assistance, team and peer support, life skills, drug and alcohol counseling and mental health services are available.

The Board’s Reentry Programs are based on the National Association of Drug Court Professionals model and provide individually tailored continuity of service, maximizing each parolee’s ability to succeed in the community.

The Board also established Reentry Programs in Lackawanna (2008), Berks (2009), Dauphin (2013) and Philadelphia (2014) counties.