



3 Our Stories Matter  
The value of sharing success stories

December 2024

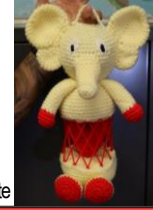
Wildlife Conservation Month

2 Let the Music Play

David Rodríguez discusses the pleasure of an afternoon spent listening to residents perform music on the yard

4 The Craftsmen of Crochet

Jason Davis talks to the men of Facility E who are part of a growing trend of crochet artists



Elephant, by Jose Duarte

2 Secretary Visits MCSP

CDCR Secretary Jeff Macomber visits Mule Creek State Prison in September to usher in the new California Model



one, California

Established 2018

## To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

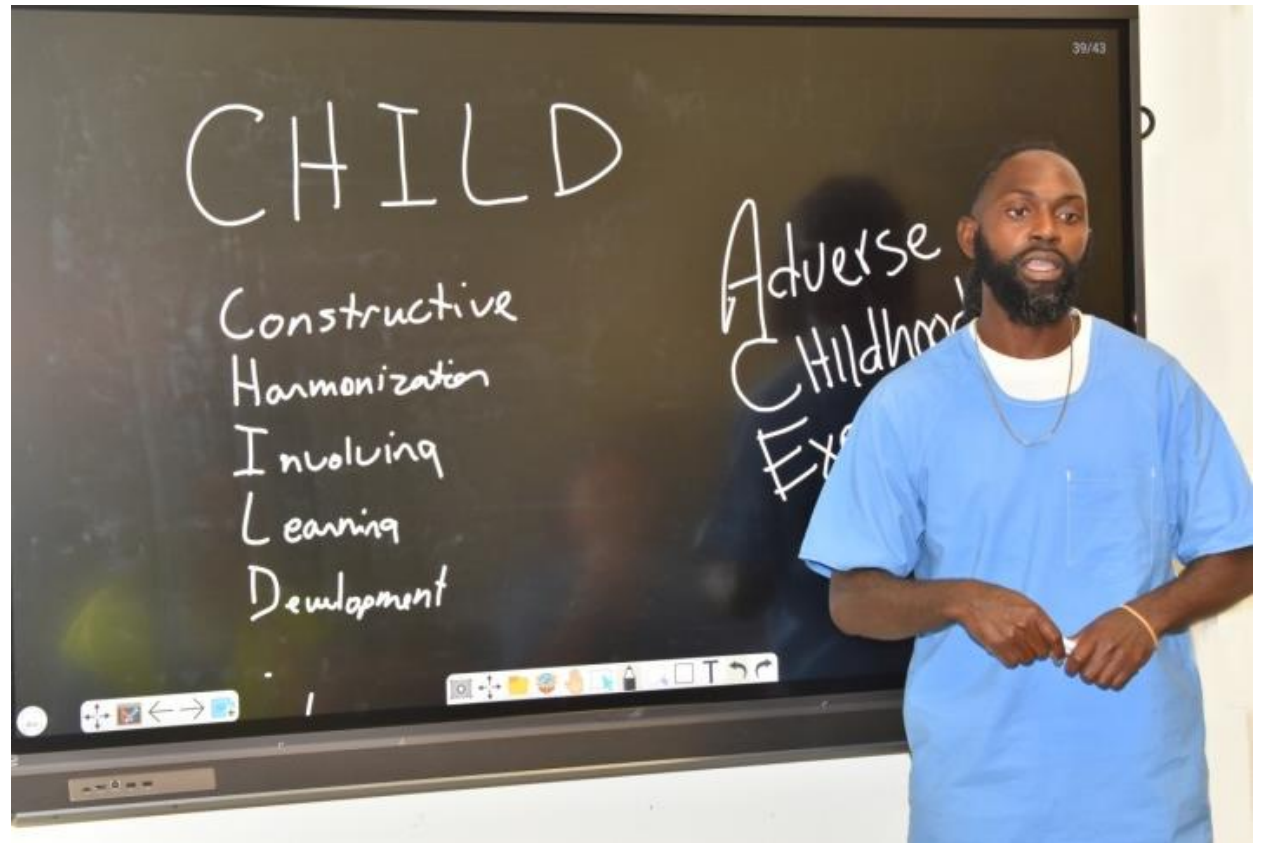
AS ONE YEAR ends and 2025 begins, we face the future with renewed hope and optimism while the department transitions into its new carceral vision: the California Model.

The California Model brings with it an emphasis on *Dynamic Security* — promoting positive relations between staff and inmates; *Normalization* — making in-prison living more closely resembling life in the community; becoming a *Trauma-Informed Organization* — educating staff to recognize the impacts of trauma and ensure the safety of staff and the incarcerated; and *Peer Support* — training incarcerated individuals to support in recovery and rehabilitation. These foundational pillars have been found to be essential in the Norwegian Model on which our new system is so heavily based.

We urge and invite our readers to participate and engage in the process. From experience, we know that any real change has to begin from within each of us.

Pollen Initiative is certainly doing its part towards pro-social change. Its hands-on approach to expanding incarcerated journalism and transforming the information landscape by supporting CCWF's *Paper Trail* and MCSP's *Mule Creek Post* emphasizes the importance of allowing incarcerated individual's voices to be heard.

Check out the *San Quentin News*, *Paper Trail*, and *Mule Creek Post* on Edovo, and keep those submissions coming; guides on page 4.



Jessie Trevon Moore facilitates the CHILD program he created on Facility E of the Mule Creek State Prison.

(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

## CHILD Making a Difference at MCSP

By Earl S. Breckenridge, Feature Reporter

“WHAT JESSIE IS doing in this program goes beyond what he’s doing for this community,” said Jason Davis, a recent graduate of Constructive Harmonization Involving Learning & Development (CHILD). “Bringing awareness to childhood trauma helps

heal future generations,” he added. This was CHILD’s second cohort of 24 participants who completed the 16-week program created by Jessie Trevon Moore at the Mule Creek State Prison in 2023.

Humble, unimposing, and soft-spoken, Moore is serving a 32-to-life sentence that began 13 years ago at the Deuel Vocational Institution, in Tracy, California. “I was good in school growing up,” Moore recalled. “However, when my stepdad called me a nerd, I never went back.”

Like many incarcerated individuals with juvenile records, Moore assimilated the prison culture. However, while working in the coffee plant for the California Prison Industry Authority (CalPIA), a couple of correctional officers said he had potential for something better, and Moore took this to heart. He participated in the self-help groups presented by the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC) and Criminals and Gangmembers Anonymous (CGA), where he said, “Step #5 and [K.] Bednarski [of the community resource manager’s office] encouraged me to delve deeper.”

Moore enrolled in Feather River and Coastline colleges where he ultimately received an A.A. degree in social & behavioral sciences, an A.S. in business, and an A.A. in American studies. He is currently working toward his bachelor’s degree in communication studies from California State University, Sacramento.

“In route to my rehabilitation,” Moore writes in his program’s brochure, “I discovered that my being misled as a child/youth led to my dysfunctional way of living. At a certain point during this revelation, I realized I needed to give back to my community in an effort to protect childhoods and future childhoods, from developing maladaptive processes that generate dysfunction.” Among the various goals the program offers, he writes “CHILD focuses on three aspects of development:

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## The Journey Makes Us One

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

THE INAUGURATION OF a seminary college to further support a culture of moral learning in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) was years in the making. The daylong event at the Mule Creek State Prison’s (MCSP) Facility E on Saturday, September 28, was understandably a celebration of those years of hard work, faith, hope, and vision. It was a heartfelt investment in community.

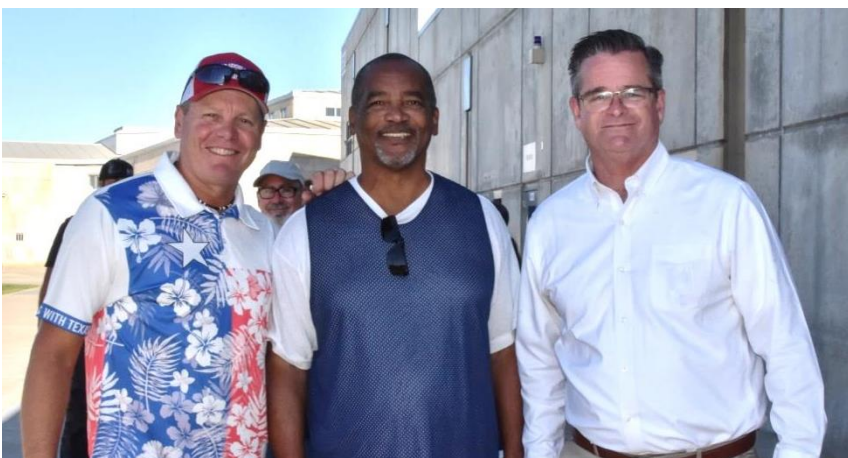
As the day’s festivities came to a close, the student seminarians, their professors, supporters, and hosts retired to the chapel to reflect on their journeys, personal and professional. If you

asked any person present in the room that afternoon, they would likely describe the day’s closing seminar as the logical convergence of a lifetime of prayer. They felt called to this moment to humbly serve one another as community. Pastors and professors, staff and administrators, custody officers and recovering criminals, secretaries and directors, bikers and incarcerated seminarians all joined in prayer.

Burl Cain, the high-profile ex-warden of the infamous Louisiana State Prison at Angola and present director of the Mississippi Department of Corrections, was the first dignitary to address this assembly — the first 23 incarcerated seminarians in the history of CDCR.

Cain began, “I’ve been a lot of places, and seen a lot of things.” He assured the

(continued on page 4)



Mule Creek’s Chief Deputy Warden Bryan Holmes, seminary student Earl Breckenridge, and Director of the Division of Adult Institutions Ron Broomfield at the Sept. 28, 2024, inaugural event. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



Burl Cain and CDCR Secretary Jeff Macomber. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



Vision performing one of their songs. From Left—Robert Taylor, Corey Robertson, Sean "Sharif" Neal, Daw aun King. (Photo by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

## Let the Music Play

By David Rodriguez, Mule Creek State Prison

IT WAS A beautiful September day for a yard concert at the Mule Creek State Prison. Every couple of months we're entertained here on Facility E with some great music. It's so enjoyable to just sit and listen to the many genres at play. I'm there from the moment the music starts until the last note of the day, and make it a point to let each band member know how much I appreciate their performance by clapping and cheering.

There's a long list of performing acts on this day: New Life, Integrity, SNRGY, Vision, Tone Time, Poquito Mas, Joint Aires, I Am Azeez, Black Berry Jam, and Destiny.

As I enjoyed their music, I tried to imagine what must go into the preparation before a show — the show before the show, so to speak — getting there before yard opens as Juan Arredondo and his crew set up the stage, plug in cords, test the mics, make sure the sound is just right.

I asked Arredondo about what goes into this setup, assuming it's just the setup and performances.

"The performance is the icing on the cake," he said. "The real work begins months in advance, from getting permission for the use of the equipment to organizing the practice times for each group — their dedication to practice three or more hours a week until the concert — the setup time and the sound system."

I was amazed at all that it takes for a day of pleasure, not just for me but the others here on Facility E. This insight allowed me to sit back and enjoy the sounds even more.

So, the next time you see a flyer announcing a yard concert, come and support the entertainers. Just remember: It's more than the music at play here; it's acknowledging each one's effort and talent. Enjoy.



Juan Arredondo (Photo by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



Andy Austin performing a song. (Photo by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



Black Berry Jam. From Left—Omar Azeez, Steve Waters, Kevin Davis, Albert Bell. (Photo by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

## CDCR Secretary Visits MCSP

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

DRESSED DOWN IN khaki shorts and a black short sleeve shirt, one might have easily mistaken California's corrections secretary Jeff Macomber for someone attending a weekend barbecue. Flanked by a mini-entourage of similarly clad Mule Creek State Prison officials — including Chief Deputy Warden Bryan Holmes and Facility D Capt. C. Elston — he exited building 21 on Facility E Saturday morning, September 28. The trio stepped onto a crowded yard that was, in fact, the scene of a hotdog barbecue and bike-show bash hosted by Soldiers of the Cross and the Prison Seminary Program. Greeted by a trio of *Mule Creek Post* reporters, Macomber couldn't have been more accommodating, patiently fielding questions beneath the shade of a convenient handball wall.

The motorcycle show, barbecue, and visit by approximately 75 guests celebrated the inauguration of Facility E's seminary program, the first of its kind in the state. Macomber is a vocal advocate for program expansion within the state's 32 prisons and said, "We like to keep the population busy and engaged in positive programs and rehabilitation. While some aren't ready, when they get there it gives them a chance ... whether it's college, groups, or religious organization involvement." He proudly pointed out that 12,000 incarcerated students are involved in college programs, with more classes being added.

Asked whether he thought of the seminary program as an affirmation of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) commitment to the new California Model, Macomber said that it fits well into the dynamic security pillar, and admits, "Introduction of the California Model is a slow process and not nearly fully implemented. It's still developing and rolling out incrementally throughout the CDCR. It's not an 'us versus them' institutional dynamic now ... the old custody culture." He added that he understands that getting custody staff on board is key and will take time.

Macomber visited Norway in 2021, along with a contingent that included members of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association (CCPOA), victims' rights groups, former prisoners, and others. He points out that it took Norway a decade or more to convert its system, but the benefits for staff and incarcerated individuals are enormous. "It's stressful working in a prison, or living in one," he says, "and the California Model is designed to ease some of that stress." Working with Amend out of the University of California, San Francisco, the CDCR is cooperating with Norwegian penology specialists and other countries and states such as Oregon to normalize the California Model.

Staff training, based on the Scandinavian system of incarceration with an emphasis on sociological teachings, will be maximized in 2025, with staff at more facilities becoming familiarized by the end of the year.

The CDCR was forced to strike \$750 million from a budget of \$14.5 billion earlier this year, but funding for implementation of the California Model doesn't add to the budget. "It's a matter of prioritizing and maximizing the efficiency of the funds we have," the secretary said. "There is a growing elderly and handicapped population; we see that and are expanding our ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] capabilities, as well as reentry programs." He emphasized that while there are no plans to further reduce the overall prison population, the fact that parole board grants have increased from 4% 20 years ago to a current approximate rate of 25% is progress.



Chief Deputy Warden B. Holmes, CDCR Secretary J. Macomber, and Facility Capt. C. Elston (Photo by J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

### The Mule Creek Post

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The Mule Creek Post's mission is to present content and messaging that encourages rehabilitation and pro-social values, and enhances a sense of community, creativity, and positivity.

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The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the facility or the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

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# Paid In Full: A Mission for Change

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter  
and Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

**T**WENTY-FIVE STUDENTS of SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary got their start at the Mule Creek State Prison working toward a bachelor's degree in theology, thanks to the efforts of many caring and compassionate people, and the creation of Paid in Full-California.

The nonprofit organization is made up of six board members who have made it their "mission to change the moral culture of the California prison system," says Bob Morris, the company treasurer. Paid in Full began working on creating the seminary program in the institutional setting early 2023; by July 1 the board filed for 501(c)(e) nonprofit status. "The essence of what we are doing is an outreach program," he adds.

Joe Stewart, the director of the organization, previously worked at the California State Prison-Sacramento for 25 years before retiring as an associate warden at Richard J. Donovan Correctional Facility in San Diego. With his history working in the prison system and long-time friendship with both Jeffrey Macomber, the state's corrections secretary, and Bryan Holmes, Mule Creek's chief deputy warden, Stewart was able to receive support when he pitched Paid in Full's mission.

"This is just the beginning," Morris says, as board members Mike Broyles and Jonathan Melilly are currently working on creating a Southern California chapter of the program in another institution. The idea is to have 150 students going at any given time. That is no small feat, as the program requires substantial financing: \$180,000 per year for each cohort of 25 students. However, as its name implies, Paid in Full covers all the costs of the entire program for the students. This requires a tremendous amount of commitment and faith, not just by the nonprofit, but by the sponsors and donors. "This is all a leap of faith," Morris adds.

Melilly, who also works with the motorcycle ministry Soldiers of the Cross, has been instrumental in bringing the seminary college program to Mule Creek. Melilly was a chaplain at Louisiana State Prison in Angola before moving to California. Asked what role religion plays in the lives of incarcerated men, Melilly said, "For decades Angola was one of the most violent prisons in the U.S., and by bringing spirituality to the place, over the years the minds and hearts of the men changed." Melilly said a third of the members of Soldiers of the Cross were formerly incarcerated.



Seminarians Richard Gomez and Andrew Rivas. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Influential in the early success of the nonprofit were chief deputy warden of San Quentin, Oak Smith, and Paid in Full's secretary Jordan Jeske. The two look to the future of the program as moral rehabilitation. As an ex-offender, Jeske knows all too well the power of rehabilitation from the inside and outside; he got out of prison in 2010 after three years of incarceration. He and his wife, Antoinette, also provide couples counseling at their church.

When the first cohort of students graduates in three years, they will be relocated throughout the prison system in pairs as spiritual leaders and developers of a new prison culture.

If you are interested in contributing to Paid in Full-California or would like more information, write to or go online at:

**Paid in Full California**  
25005 Blue Racine Rd., Suite 318  
Folsom, CA 95630  
www.PaidInFullCalifornia.org

# Our Stories Matter: Telling a Story of Recovery and Triumph

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

**I** WAS A terrible alcoholic. This means I was a terrible *person*. From the age of 12, I spent decades under the delusion my drinking produced only good times for me and those who attempted to keep company with me. The truth is that — as a logical eventuality of my reckless drinking — I began devolving into a disgusting, degenerate, and dangerous version of the garden-variety drunk. *Not* drinking, and amending the damage caused by my reckless and selfish decision to drink, is now my full-time job.

I was, perhaps, a far worse drug addict. The decades I spent abusing illegal stimulants just gave me license to increase and extend my drinking and get into unnecessary mischief. Upon reflection and careful inventory, much of it was criminal. Now firmly in recovery, I am happy to report that my self-issued license to abuse illegal drugs has been self-revoked.

I was a tragic criminal, the result of undignified, unprincipled, and unrestricted selfishness. This means I understand a little about selfishness and selfish practices. Tragically, this also means that all of those people I victimized have acquired an intimate, detailed, and personal understanding of the depravity of my potential for selfishness. My crimes were not victimless. In recovery, I strive daily to live my amends. Evolving beyond a strict rehabilitative discipline, it has become a labor of love.

My journey toward rehabilitation began with a letter I received from the office of the district attorney while imprisoned at the Los Angeles County Jail. In the first two lines, the author forgave me for what I'll describe as the outrageous, misguided, and brutal murder of his brother. He was particularly gracious in including some of the details of his own journey of transformative redemption. Here's just a little of what he shared:

I hated everyone and anyone who didn't love me. I was so consumed with myself that anyone who I saw as a threat to my position or an obstacle to my advancement in this world became a victim of my venomous hate. Sometimes it was spewed out in the way that I spoke, sometimes through altercations, but it was always there like a dark cloud that hovered over me. It kept me in chains ...

Somehow, he understood my personal struggle. I took his words to heart. Following his encouragement, I made important and life-changing decisions. His testimony — his honesty, generosity, and demonstration of moral courage became both my roadmap and motivation — my solemn obligation towards rehabilitation and recovery. To this day, I keep a copy of his letter within reach.

I devoted myself to personal sobriety, began each day with prayer, and attended every rehabilitative group that fit in my calendar. I enrolled in college, became a rehabilitative mentor and recovery sponsor, and took a position working for the prison newspaper, the *Mule Creek Post*.

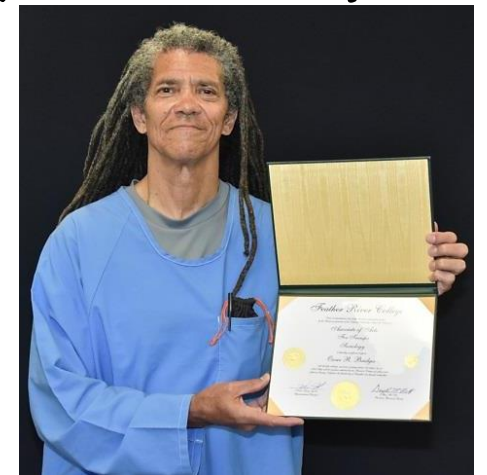
One day at a seminar hosted by the *Post*, I met the president of Feather

River College, Kevin Trutna, along with James Elliot, the president of the Phi Theta Kappa honor society (PTK). Elliot enjoyed the distinction of being the first previously convicted felon to preside over the honor society. After speaking at the engagement, both men encouraged me to transfer to the college and enroll in PTK.

Two members of our editorial staff at the *Post* were members of PTK and graduates of Feather River. I remember deciding that day that I'd transfer my college credits to Feather River College and graduate as a member of PTK.

Today, in my 10th year of continuous sobriety, I author this article as a grateful alumnus of Feather River, and a proud fraternal member of Phi Theta Kappa. I would like to publicly thank persons involved in supporting my personal recovery and education. This includes the forward-thinking taxpayers who are the people of California. I understand from each of your investments that my story is still being written, and, perhaps most importantly, that my story matters.

O. Rick Bridges is a feature reporter for the Mule Creek Post who earned his bachelor's degree in communication studies from California State University Sacramento in December 2024.



Bridges with his A.A. degree from Feather River College. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



Phi Theta Kappa President James Elliott, Mule Creek State Prison Warden Patrick Covello, and Feather River College professor Dr. Joan Parkin at the 2019 education roundtable. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



# Craftsmen of Crochet

By Jason Davis,  
Lead Reporter

PERHAPS NOT YOUR everyday pastime found in a men's prison, these needle-wielding men carry on in the centuries-old traditions of crafting in a variety of needlework, including crochet, knitting, and embroidery.

The craft of crochet has surged in popularity in the 21st century as a leisure activity, art form, and gifts for loved ones. For many, crochet is personally and socially meaningful, sustaining and transformative of personal wellbeing.

Kevin Castaneda describes various techniques and artistic skill involved in knitting, which has led to "some of my greatest achievements, proudest accomplishments, and yes, at times, disappointments." However, through disappointment and failure, he feels this is what pushed him to become a better knitter. When he first started knitting, he was looking for something that was unique, that would push his creativity, and give him a sense of fulfillment. "Knitting does all of that for me," said Castaneda. "It's also very therapeutic, and teaches me to have patience, resilience, and best of all gives me confidence, pride, and happiness."

For Joshua Ruoff, crochet began with the basics. Watching a friend crochet, he thought, "How hard could it be?" His friend taught him chain stitch, single, and double crochet. He made two hats. "They were both terrible," he admitted. Now, 12 years later, he has become the instructor, teaching others who want to learn.

Recently Ruoff's dad asked if he could make a hat for a friend who is going through chemo. "Those are the times I really feel connected, when I can send something I made to someone in need," he said. Ruoff added, "It can also be therapeutic, as I zone out counting the stitches."

In 2019, Jose Duarte first encountered crochet while working as a porter in the receiving and release area. Every month, a guy from the yard would mail home scarfs and beanies. Duarte found out they were being sent to support those in need in the community. "I'm always trying to find ways to give back to my community," he said. This inspired him as an artist and creator.

Years later, while in the High Desert State Prison, Duarte joined a program called Place for Grace that sponsored and facilitated family bonding. However, during COVID the program had to go virtual. They sent games and packages to the institution for the fathers to play along with their children over Skype. Within the package were included crochet hooks and yarn. For Duarte, this was an opportunity to learn something new he could share with his family.

Over the past year Duarte sent home many

gifts. He recalls his aunt saying, "I just want to touch something that you made." This speaks to the power of longing and connection. "It feels good to be able to send my family something I spent my time on," said Duarte. "I can send them a piece of my love."

Prior to his incarceration, Jarrod Wyatt joined an all-female group called Knit N' Kbits, where he began knitting clothes for his dogs — knitting was familiar as his grandmother and great-grandmother knitted clothes for the family. "I really enjoyed learning and creating things for my dogs," said Wyatt. The first item he made was a sweater for his Rottweiler.

Wyatt noted that people often comment on his appearance. At 6 feet 3 inches tall and covered in tattoos, he is not who one would expect to be wielding a crochet hook and ball of yarn. "It's a great feeling every time I complete something that was a challenge," said Wyatt, and he's looking forward to his next project. "A granny square blanket," he announced. "I really want to make one."

As this small group of crafters search for new techniques and challenges, they remind us there are no limits unless we limit ourselves. The possibilities are endless. Castaneda notes that it's never too late to test one's creativity. "Pick up some needles or a hook, and join [us] in creating memories for a lifetime."

(from **Seminary Program Grand Opening**, pg. 1) attendees that they would not see this type of heartfelt dedication to personal and professional duty anywhere else. He acknowledged the potential of professional risk that CDCR Secretary Jeff Macomber and Division of Adult Institutions Director Ron Broomfield might be taking in developing this vital social justice program and encouraged the seminarians to join him:

They've stuck their necks out. Your conduct needs to be beyond reproach. Don't mess up. Follow the rules. You are representing God. You need to be the change in culture that leads to a church. At church, the people are a gang, and the preacher is a gang leader. It's a good and moral gang. You need to challenge one another. I've seen it all work out.

Broomfield described the life of prayer, duty, and purpose that transported him to the chapel that day. He began:

In this position you get a lot of gratitude and credit for things that you don't deserve. My faith journey led me here today. I thought that I might like to be a pastor. Just like you, I didn't want to be in prison. It's about the journey. Trust what God is doing in your life. The relationships that God puts together, make things happen for us. My prayer is that each of you makes it across the [seminarian] finish line.

Macomber was reflective and, rather appropriately, spoke on behalf of the entire community. "You wouldn't have seen this 30 years ago in CDCR — with incarcerated and staff in the same room. I'd like to thank everyone for making this happen today."



Facility E crochet craftsmen. From Left—Kev in Castaneda, Jose Duarte, Colby, Jarrod Wyatt, Joshua Ruoff. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

(from **CHILD Makes a Difference**, pg. 1)

Biosocial, Cognitive, and Psychological. It consists of six parts — prenatal development, the first two years, early childhood (ages 2-6), middle childhood (ages 6-11), adolescence (ages 11-18), and emerging adulthood (ages 18-26)."

CHILD began on Mule Creek's Facility C, is currently on Facility E, and is expanding to Facility D. Moore notes the program's success could not have been possible without invested participants, Community Resource Manager J. Ross, CHILD coordinator and adult education instructor C. Villarreal, and teacher's aide/CHILD coordinator and staff sponsor A. DelToro.

"When I came to 'E' yard, the culture helped expand my vision," Moore said. Looking forward, he is in the process of having CHILD recognized by the National Anger Management Association (NAMA) as a parenting program. He also is in the process to get credentialing for certified parent training specialists (CPS).

## Life is What You Make It

Hey open your eyes  
It's been awhile since the last time you've done right  
Blinded by pride  
Twisted mindset razed your frail heart

Life is what you make it  
You're wrong reflect accept it  
Don't minimize it  
Life is what you make it  
Repent move on amend it  
Your whining won't fix it

You are free to do what your heart desires  
But in the end you'll pay the price

Hate lust and greed  
Betrayed you and now you live in misery  
You blame god  
and justify your actions you have the audacity

Life is what you make it  
Do good you won't regret it  
Life is what you make it

—Jason Rosacia, Post Reporter

## MULE CREEK POST

### Submissions

Freelance writers, staff, and others may submit articles or material to the *Mule Creek Post*, % MCIC AW's Office, P.O. Box 409090, Lone, CA 95640, or by interdepartmental mail if living at MCSP. Submissions may be edited for length and content and become the property of the *Mule Creek Post* (authors retain intellectual rights to original material). When submitting legal news articles, include source material documentation. Include your name, CDC#, and address.

For more information regarding the Board of Parole Hearings, write to:

## BOARD OF PAROLE HEARINGS

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www.cdcr.ca.gov/BOPH

or read the *California Parole Hearing Process Handbook* in the Free section of your state-issued tablet, under the "Newspapers" tab in the Facility Information app.



The Prayer Warriors Alliance (PWA) is a non-denominational organization of volunteers who will assist anyone of any faith with research. The PWA charges no fee; return postage (up to 20 pages per request) is paid by PWA. See the July 2023 edition of the *Mule Creek Post* for more information about the PWA.

PWA follows all departmental mail restrictions and guidelines. PWA cannot search for legal or case information or individuals. Donations are gladly accepted.

Prayer Warriors Alliance  
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