

THE ECHO

Created by incarcerated people

NEWS
FROM
THE
INSIDE



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UNFOLDING MEMORIES

DSU's Christmas Origami Ornament Contest Held in December

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

The winning three-tiered present ornament by Mitchell Hunsaker hangs on the Christmas tree on Dec. 16, 2024 as part of a contest held in DSU. This ornament was colored using powdered juice packets.

Most families collect Christmas ornaments. The ornaments, decorating Christmas trees year after year, are akin to family heirlooms, passed down generation to generation.

At the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, residents of the Disciplinary Segregation Unit were offered a little taste of holiday nostalgia and an unfolding of memories on Dec. 7 and 8, when the annual Christmas Origami Ornament Contest was held.

The contest required participants to be housed in DSU, and was originally created by security staff as a way to bolster spirits during the holidays.

A small Christmas tree was placed on a table in the officer's area where the handmade ornaments would hang. Eighteen residents and three staff participated in the contest. The participants were provided with two sheets of

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FROM PRISONER TO REPORTER

Author and Journalist Keri Blakinger Visits The Echo

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

The Echo news team met with author, Pulitzer Prize finalist for feature writing, and criminal justice journalist Keri Blakinger on Monday, Dec. 16, 2024. Prior to becoming a journalist, Blakinger was an Ivy League college student, a former competitive ice skater, and a heroin addict. In 2010, during her senior year at Cornell University, she was arrested for possession of six ounces of heroin valued at \$50,000, which subsequently led to her two and a half year incarceration in New York State.

Blakinger's experience led her to focus on journalism and trying to improve the U.S. prison system through her reporting. She currently works for the Los Angeles Times and met with The Echo team via video phone call.

Blakinger, who previously worked for New York Daily News, the Houston Chronicle and the Marshall Project, made the incredible transition from prisoner to reporter. She said that making the transition was diffi-

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The Echo Team

Phillip Luna | Editor

Chris Ainsworth | Staff Writer

Brooklyn Sasso | Staff Writer

Shane Goins | Correspondent

Kurtis Thompson | Correspondent

James Paulk | Contributor

Juan Sanchez | Proofreader

Seth Mathews | Illustrator

Patrick Gazeley-Romney | Emeritus

ODOC Staff Support

Ray Peters | IWP Coordinator, Supervising Editor

J. Stewart | OS2, Research and Support

Advisor

Berit Thorson | East Oregonian, Journalist

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The Echo - Mission Statement

To serve the incarcerated community by providing monthly news and other important information, while highlighting the human experience in the carceral setting.

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SILVER MAPLE

Carpentry Shop Completes 14 Cabinets for Prison Brews

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

Cabinetry for Prison Brews, EOCI's new coffee shop on D2, has been completed.

The carpentry shop completed the 14 cabinets needed for Prison Brews in December. The cabinets will be sprayed by the paint shop and then installed sometime in the near future.

AIC carpenters Bryan Booth, John Clark and Aaron Marshall constructed the cabinetry.

Clark, who has been employed in the carpentry shop for two months, said, "The hardest part was all the math."

Carpentry Shop Supervisor Bartlett said the wood used for the cabinets was "a silver maple from a tree that was cut down in front of EOCI."

Bartlett cut the boards from the



Photos by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Fourteen cabinets made for EOCI's new coffee shop, Prison Brews, sit in the carpentry shop on Dec. 26, 2024 waiting for paint and install. The cabinets are made from a silver maple tree that was cut down in front of EOCI.

logs on a saw mill and the carpentry shop put everything together.

Currently, the carpentry shop is working on the serving counters for Prison Brews – a live edge counter top also in silver maple.

The coffee shop is part of the Food

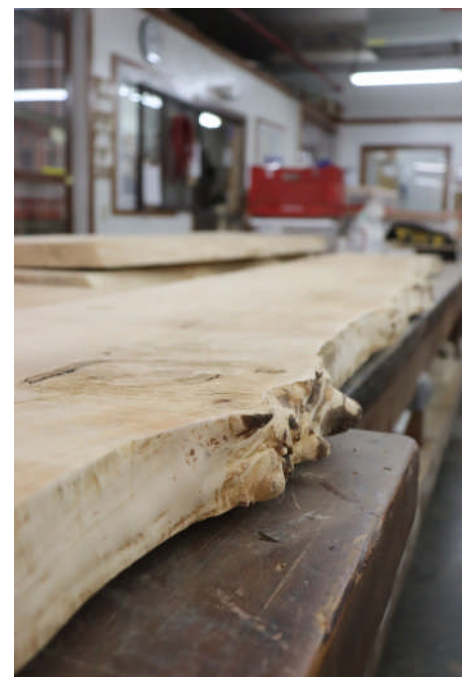
Service department, similar to staff dining, and will employ AICs.

In addition to coffee, Prison Brews will also serve pastries which will be made in-house by the baristas.

Hiring for baristas is expected to start in January 2025. | **ECHO**



John Clark, left, poses with Aaron Marshall on Dec. 26, 2024. Clark and Marshall worked with Bryan Booth, who no longer resides at EOCI, to construct the cabinets.



A section of silver maple that will become a live edge serving counter for Prison Brews.

AROUND EOCI

CIVIL WAR, CELEBRATION FOR VETERANS, OR BOTH?

Recreation Department Holds Veteran's Event - A Viewing of Army/Navy College Football Game

Written by Chris Ainsworth, Staff Writer



Everett Collection/Shutterstock

The Army versus Navy college football game began in 1880, back when footballs were pigskins and helmets were optional. The Navy won 24 - 0 in the first meeting.

Army versus Navy may sound like a civil war waged between two branches of the United States' armed forces on the silver screen, with mammoth buckets of popcorn washed down with giant sodas. However, this conflict was waged on the gridiron, not in a movie theater.

On the second Saturday in December 2024, EOCI's multipurpose building held an event that honored incarcerated veterans with a viewing of the 125th edition of the Army versus Navy college football game projected onto a 50-foot screen.

The veterans-only event was a gathering to enjoy popcorn, snow cones, cotton candy and Snapple – provided free by the Recreation Department – and root for their chosen military branch as the two teams battled for supremacy.

“At EOCI, we have never done

anything to single out people who have served in the armed forces,” said Travis Garton, one of EOCI's two recreation specialists. “We wanted to do something for them.”

“It was peaceful, and sometimes you need that peace,” said Navy Boats Mate Third Class Christopher Johns. “You looked around and everybody had a story but it wasn't the time for that.”

Johns was deployed during the Gulf War aboard the USS Goldsborough during his four years of service. He hopes eventually EOCI will have a traditional Honor Guard that will see the raising and lowering of the flag each day.

The first meeting between the Army Black Knights, or Cadets, of the United States Military Academy in West Point, N.Y., and the Navy Midshipmen of the United States

Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., was held on Nov. 29, 1880. The Black Knights were shut out in the first installment of the iconic rivalry, with Navy winning 24-0.

Staff like Garton and Jerrad Templin, EOCI's other recreation specialist, are working to hold more events honoring veterans in the future. They hope that events like this will “build awareness” so vets can take advantage of the benefits the military provides and become aware of their rights. They are also trying to organize an AIC Honor Guard, like Johns and other veterans hope for.

“Guys have volunteered to teach. It is important to understand our traditions,” said Templin. “[It is] important to understand the flag and how the country got here.”

Sadly, only 27 veterans were approved to attend the EOCI event, even though 87 signed up. Many were not verified through Veterans' Services.

“I feel if we could get more [veterans] verified, future events, if they have them, will be a lot better,” said Marine serviceman Michael Altherr. “It would be really awesome if we had an actual veterans club here that turned around and donated to veterans' issues.”

Altherr served four years in the Marines, achieving the rank of Lance Corporal. He sees the benefit of giving back to his “brothers” and thinks a club could raise money for a range of veteran issues, from the local community to veterans across the nation.

“Seeing a club like that be born

here, not just to help veterans out but to give back to the community,” said Altherr. “I think it would be really awesome and really beneficial, not just for us but the community as well.”

The process to verify with Veterans’ Services starts by sending a communication request to Executive Support Specialist of Special Housing Taylor Greene. A questionnaire is provided, and once returned the veteran is put in touch with a VA representative for the facility who can help answer questions or assist with benefit related issues.

The Recreation Department hopes that future appreciation events will include an Office of Veteran’s Affairs representative.

The Army/Navy game is one of the most traditional and enduring rivalries in college football and has been televised nationally since 1945. The rivalry has only been held on the campus of either academy seven times, with the first four games hosted on the parade grounds of the respective academies. For all but three years since 1899 the game has been held at neutral sites to accommodate the large crowds that attend.

Since its inception, the Army-Navy game has been held at 20 different venues, with the demolished John F. Kennedy Stadium, formerly known as Municipal Stadium in Pennsylvania, hosting 41 games – more than any other in history.

The game has been held annually all but ten years with an uninterrupted streak dating back to 1930. Currently the Midshipmen lead the series 63-55-7, but the Black Knights had been victorious in 2022 and 2023. This year, however, Navy had Army’s number – winning 31-13. |ECHO

BLAZING TRAILS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

Three Students Complete Pilot Program for First Online College Classes Offered at EOCI

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

Three students from the New Directions Education Project, a scholarship-type program that allows incarcerated people to take college courses, completed online classes in the fall term. The classes were part of a pilot program for online education in the NDEP program.

Students in the program were scheduled five days a week for the computer lab in the Education Department, but could attend as they needed. The online portal to the Treasure Valley Community College dashboard allowed them to work on assignments at their own pace.

Nickolas Vega, a student with NDEP, completed a business administration class online.

“It’s important to learn the technology,” Vega said. “It keeps us current. It includes us in the contemporary world.”

Vega started with NDEP in 2013

expects to graduate next year with an associates degree.

NDEP has long been the only college program at EOCI, allowing students to take one class per term.

For NDEP students, the road to a degree has been slow. Vega said he would have to wait several terms for a specific class to be offered. After almost 12 years in the program, Vega is one year away from earning what is typically a two year degree.

“They always try to offer something almost everyone could take,” he said. “But you need certain classes for a degree.”

Vega said the online classes offer a way forward, perhaps allowing students to take multiple courses or ones not offered in-person. He believes online courses will help students earn degrees faster.

Fernando Pelayo completed Music Appreciation 105 in the fall term, the

first online class he has taken since starting in the program in 2014.

“The music I experienced,” said Pelayo. “Wow, I didn’t know that existed. It’s a wonderful thing.”

Pelayo has approximately 60 credits towards his degree, two-thirds of the way completed.

He said he hopes his success will allow and encourage other NDEP students to try an online class.

“It was difficult to get the hang of at first,” he said. “Other students could have taken an online class, but they worried about the challenge.”

Pelayo is encouraged, however, to see that in the winter term there are more students taking an online class.

“We’ve shown them we can do it, so they know they can too,” he said.

Pelayo and Vega will have an instructor-led class in the winter term - American Literature. |ECHO

AROUND EOCI



ENRICHMENT CLUB FUNDRAISER

Club Raises Funds for Ronald
McDonald House Charities

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

In the multipurpose building from Dec. 10-12, the Enrichment Club handed out chicken strip and potato wedge meals and an assortment of donuts to 549 people. The meal was part of a fundraiser for the Ronald McDonald House Charities.

The Enrichment Club, EOCI's fundraising group, held their final event of 2024 from Dec. 10-12.

The club sold a meal of chicken strips, potato wedges, and two beverages with an add-on of half a dozen assorted donuts to raise funds for Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC). The meal was prepared by the local Safeway, picked up by EOCI staff and handed out by the Enrichment Club in the multipurpose building over three days.

"We broke the meal up over three days to make it easier to handout," said Enrichment Club President Ben Edwards.

EOCI residents had the option to purchase the chicken strip and potato wedge meal (which included two

beverages) for \$26, and add on a half dozen assorted donuts for an additional \$8. Each item was priced above cost to generate funds for the charity.

Participants could also purchase the donuts alone, but, according to Edwards, only a handful of people ordered donuts without buying the chicken and potato wedge meal.

The club sold a total of 549 meals, according to Edwards.

"We expect to raise between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for charity," he said.

Edwards said they selected RMHC because of all the good work the organization does.

RMHC is a non-profit organization

whose mission is to support programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children.

For more than 50 years RMHC has been caring for families. There are over 380 Ronald McDonald Houses near major hospitals which accommodate families with hospitalized children.

Another notable program of RMHC is their family rooms. RMHC has over 260 Ronald McDonald Family Rooms in 28 countries. These are inside hospitals and allow families of children with serious or life-threatening medical conditions to stay beside their children.

"I've known people who have had to stay in their family rooms," said Edwards. "Ronald McDonald even

has a wing at Doernbecker Children's Hospital in Portland."

RMHC began in Philadelphia in 1974 when Fred Hill's daughter was diagnosed with Leukemia. Hill (a football player for the Philadelphia Eagles) and his family were inspired to support other families struggling like they had after the Eagles General Manager raised funds for Hill's daughter.

Hill and oncologist Dr. Audrey Evans, and through their shared interest, co-founded the charity.

The Enrichment Club's purpose is to raise funds for charities like RMHC. Edwards said it is easy to become focused on the items or meals that residents of EOCI can purchase, but that is not why the club exists.

"Don't join because you want extra food," said Edwards. "The purpose is to come up with charities to raise money for. It's the charities that matter."

The Enrichment Club currently has 17 members, but intends to expand in the near future. Membership to the Enrichment Club must always be ap-



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Enrichment Club members Jeremy Bonsignore, left, Zack Schrader and James Renfro pose for photo during the fundraiser meal handout on Dec. 12, 2024.

proved by EOCI administration.

"We have nine more guys pending approval," said Edwards.

Edwards said the club hopes to return to meals cooked in the EOCI kitchen next year. Meals made at EOCI are less expensive than meals purchased from an outside vendor, which ultimately means more money

can be raised for charity.

"There are a lot of things we hope to bring back next year," said Edwards, "Backpacks and family events would be one. Overall, it is just important for everyone to know that we try to do whatever is best for EOCI and that raises the most for charity."

| ECHO

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cult, but some publications are very aware that having someone who has been incarcerated lends to fuller coverage of the justice system.

"Try to use your past to your benefit," she told The Echo team.

After her incarceration, Blakinger finished college at Cornell, earning a Bachelor's in English in 2012. Her writing career includes multiple articles that have impacted the justice system and authoring a memoir.

Despite her success, Blakinger said she still experiences bias in the journalism field because of her record.

"People are never going to let you forget," she said. "But I find it funny when law enforcement holds it against me. They are essentially admitting the system doesn't work, but I think that nuance is lost on them. If the system worked, then I am rehabilitated."

Blakinger's transition to reporter after her incarceration was the focal point of the meeting, but she also provided insights on real-world journalism.

"Keri is a very down-to-earth person and a wealth of knowledge," said Kurtis Thompson, a correspondent

for The Echo. "Both her description and demeanor gave me an idea of what to expect in the journalism world."

Blakinger's career in journalism is most notable because of the impact her writing has had on the justice system. In 2016, while working for the Houston Chronicle, she reported on Texas prison policies regarding dentures (or lack of) for incarcerated people.

In Texas, prisoners were being denied dentures. Blakinger's reporting caused the Texas prison system to

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AROUND EOCI

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reform their policy, including allowing people lacking teeth to have 3D printed dentures.

“When I started I was very worried about seeming like an activist or being biased,” she said. Blakinger explained that when the Texas prison started 3D printing dentures because of her reporting, she was unsure if she should tweet the policy reform in a celebratory way or not. She was worried about showing bias if she celebrated something that benefited incarcerated people.

“Then the head of the Houston Chronicle tweeted it in a celebratory way,” she said. “I thought ‘I’m overthinking this.’ Some things are objectively good. A person getting a body part is objectively good. I am not being biased by celebrating people getting a body part.”

The impact of Blakinger’s journalism also includes reporting on the sexual assault of a female prisoner at Rikers Island that subsequently resulted in the charging and conviction of a corrections officer in 2015.

In addition, while working for The Marshall Project, Blakinger wrote her feature “When Wizards and Orcs Came to Death Row,” which shared the story of Dungeons and Dragons being played on death row in Huntsville, Tex. Blakinger was a finalist for the 2024 Pulitzer Prize for Feature Writing for her story.

In 2022, Blakinger authored her memoir, “Corrections in Ink: A Memoir.” In her book she described major events in her life, from her youth as a competitive figure skater, to her addiction, arrest and her time in prison.

In preparing for the meeting, all



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Blakinger’s memoir, “Corrections in Ink: A Memoir” was published in 2022. In her book she writes about major events in her life, from her youth as a competitive figure skater to her addiction, arrest and her time in prison.

members of The Echo team were provided with Blakinger’s memoir.

“It’s raw and real,” said Shane Goins, sports writer for The Echo. “It’s one of the best books I’ve read this year.”

Chris Ainsworth, a staff writer for The Echo, said, “Talking with her made me realize that there is not a lot that separates us. It makes me want to make the transition to reporter.”

While many of The Echo team members have writing aspirations beyond the incarcerated setting, Blakinger is not so sure there will be stable employment, but still considers journalism a worthwhile investment.

“It’s a really hard to give any kind of journalism advice,” she said. “Anything I say now almost feels like it may not be relevant in six months.”

Blakinger was referring to the currently precarious state of print journalism. A study from Reuters showed that 2.5 news outlets closed per day

in 2023, largely as a result of the increase of digital footprints in the news field.

“I worry about whether or not I will still have employment when I am 50, and not being able to make the jump to another field,” she said. “But journalism experience, the connections you get and the skills you learn are helpful anywhere.”

For many of the incarcerated writers, the goal of working for The Echo is to develop skills that make them more employable in a variety of jobs.

“What we learn can be beneficial outside of journalism,” said Brooklyn Sasso, a staff writer for The Echo. “Communication, writing and networking with people are skills that can be beneficial in many careers.”

The meeting with Blakinger was arranged by East Oregonian Journalist Berit Thorson, an advisor for The Echo who conducts writing workshops and meets with the team twice monthly. | ECHO

THE HOLIDAY SEASON 2024

A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE SALVATION ARMY

9th Annual Angel Tree Event Held at EOCI

Written by Phillip Luna, editor



Photo provided by Leslie Halbert/ODOC

On Dec. 15, 2024, volunteers from the Salvation Army pick up Christmas gifts in the EOCI rotunda. EOCI has been a part of Angel Tree nine times.

EOCI's 9th annual Angel Tree event was held in December 2024. The Salvation Army's Angel Tree program allows Department of Corrections employees to purchase holiday gifts for underprivileged children in the Pendleton and Hermiston area.

On Dec. 9, a Christmas tree was erected in the front lobby of EOCI. The tree was decorated with Angel

Tree tags, and each tag correlated to one child, listing their age, gender, and a wish list of gifts. Some gifts requested were necessities, such as shoes or clothes, and others are more extravagant items like video games or a dollhouse.

ODOC employees can pull tags from the tree and purchase the gifts. These gifts are placed under the

Christmas tree and picked up by the Salvation Army prior to Christmas.

“Over the year, law enforcement agencies have been very successful at bridging divides with the general public in ways like this,” stated a memo sent to DOC employees by Leslie Halbert, Executive Support Specialist. “It shows compassion for others and that our staff genuinely cares about the community, which further supports the ODOC mission.”

Ages ranged from two years old to 17. Apart from low-income levels, many of these children are from single parent households, the foster care system, or the child of an incarcerated person.

Chaplain DiSalvo, who helps residents with Project Angel Tree, described it as, “A great outreach for people to provide the local kids items they need and want whose families couldn't otherwise afford it.”

Traditionally, EOCI is one of the biggest contributors for Angel Tree.

“EOCI has been the largest donator of gifts in our area for several years now,” stated the memo from Halbert. “Thinking of the smile on a child's face after opening Christmas gifts they weren't expecting to receive, now that's the magic of the holiday season.” | **ECHO**

HOLIDAYRECAP

UNFOLDING MEMORIES continued from page 1

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

The DSU's small Christmas tree sits in the officer's area on Dec. 16, 2024. The tree is decorated with origami ornaments made by DSU residents as part of the annual contest.

regular paper and two days to complete their origami ornament. Staff members were exempt from winning the contest.

Upon completion, the ornaments were collected and added to the tree. Security staff judged the contest and selected first through sixth place. The winners received popcorn, soda and the chance to watch a movie out of their cell – a welcome respite from the 23 hour a day lockdown DSU residents endure.

For many incarcerated people, holidays are a difficult time because options for maintaining connections with family are limited in the carceral setting. DSU exacerbates those conditions.

Patrick Gray, who entered the contest this year, said the hardest part of serving DSU time during the holiday was “not being able to see or talk to my kids.”

Gray grew up making snowflakes or stringing popcorn to hang on trees, so he has experience with homemade ornaments.

“We were poor, with not much,” he said. “So we improvised.”

Gray added that prayer also helps him stay positive during the holidays.

“With prayer, I’m able to see past the bad,” he said. “This is a learning lesson and only I can change my actions, so I’m not back here again.”

DSU residents don orange jumpsuits and shackles when they leave their cells. Programming and recreation is limited and most residents are eager for activities to pass the time – residents like Keyshawn Jones, who participated in the contest this year.

Jones came up with his ornament design from a memory of his youth – a grade school class activity.

“When I was in elementary school,

I saw somebody make a star for the tree,” he said. “Everyone else was making something from the animal kingdom.”

Jones said the event was a chance to do something different. He also said he stays positive during the holidays by exercising and remembering that “it could be worse.”

In cell exercises, such as burpees and other body weight movements, are common ways to fill the time in DSU because residents don’t have access to typical activities such as playing sports, jogging the track or lifting weights. But some residents find writing letters a more cathartic process than exercise.

Austin Sifuentes, who made an abstract three dimensional Christmas tree ornament for the contest, said, “When I feel sad, I write to my family as if they’re sitting right there, next to me.”

Residents like Sifuentes utilize their imagination to stay connected with family.

Fortunately for many residents, sanction time in segregation has reduced in recent years. The 180 maximum sanction has been reduced to 90 days.

In addition, many programs, such as Mindfulness, a class for meditative therapy, and Roots of Success, an environmental literacy course, have been introduced to the segregation unit. These programs, as well events like the ornament contest, are how Jairo Vicente fills his time.

Vicente said, “The best way to do DSU time is to apply to any program offered.” For him, that included the ornament contest.

Vicente made a heart-shaped origami ornament.

“Maybe six or seven years ago,” he explained, “I would write my nieces letters and they enjoyed it when I would fold their letters in the shape of a heart.”

Some of the first ornaments ever made were heart-shaped. Christmas ornaments, invented in Luscha, Germany in the 16th century, were originally pastries in the shape of hearts, stars or flowers. Trees were also decorated with apples and white candy canes.

Although there were 18 participants in the DSU contest, only one won first place.

Mitchell Hunsaker’s winning ornament was a three-tiered Christmas present in color and adorned with a paper ribbon.



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Mitchell Hunsaker poses with his ornament on Dec. 16, 2024 in the DSU unit. Hunsaker placed first this year and third in a previous year.

“I thought of presents and remembered as a kid trying to sneak around and catch Santa putting presents under the tree,” Hunsaker said.

He added the box was a challenging piece of origami. “I didn’t even know how to make a box,” he said, “and I had to think and figure out the color.”

Hunsaker colored his white paper using yellow and red juice packets. Residents of DSU are provided fortified juice packets for lunch and dinner meals. The juice packets provide vitamin D, which helps counter the effects of prolonged lack of exposure to sunlight.

Last year, during a previous stint in DSU, Hunsaker placed third in the ornament contest. “It’s kind of a tradition now, gotta stick with it,” he said.

He also said it is easy to become depressed during the holidays, but for him – unlike many incarcerated people – he finds DSU time easier than time in the general population.

“I would rather be alone with my thoughts and really think on why I don’t want to come back to prison,” he said. “It’s really the only place I can be alone with my thoughts and process my emotions.”

Hunsaker said he has 10 months left on his sentence, so this will be his last year participating in EOCI’s annual Christmas Origami Ornament contest. | ECHO



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

An origami butterfly ornament hangs on a Christmas tree in DSU. Eighteen DSU residents and three staff members participated in the Christmas Origami Contest.

HOLIDAY RECAP

CHRISTMAS PHOTOS HELP FAMILIES STAY CONNECTED

EOCI's Holiday Photo Event Draws in Nearly 800 Participating AICs

Written by Brooklyn Sasso, Staff Writer

December has come and gone, and with it holiday photos in the multipurpose building. This event took place on Dec. 2-4 and included all housing units. AICs were allowed to have friends called from other units to join the photo, and in total there were approximately 800 AIC participants.

When notices are sent out that Christmas photos will be starting, AICs rush to submit CD-28s. The CD-28 is a form used to order photo tickets, the only way for a person in prison to have pictures taken.

EOCI's photo ticket sales increased drastically during the month of November and up until the day of the event.

Prior to the December event, Recreation Specialist Travis Garton said, "There's going to be a big uptick in

photo sales."

Garton hoped to make the event more user-friendly by selling photo tickets during the event as well.

For the first time, AICs were allowed to order photo tickets on the day of the event. In previous years all photos had to be pre-purchased.

Christmas photos are popular because AICs have the chance to interact with the props in their photos (which is normally prohibited) or to have the seasonal background.

AICs can take pictures with a mock fireplace and chimney in the background or look as if they are riding a sleigh. The holiday props and backdrops make the experience unique.

Some AICs have to plan out how

to take photos with friends because administrative rules only allow four people per photo.

Incarcerated people may be housed far from home making visiting difficult, especially during winter months when traveling is harder due to the weather conditions. Christmas photos are special as they provide a way to stay connected.

Roy Foix-Jones, resident of housing unit G2, said, "I am going to be sending mine to my grandma. The fact that I am so far from my family, it's a way for them to know that I am doing okay."

Foix-Jones is one of many AICs whose families are hard to reach. His family is in Oregon, but due to travel complications, visits are rare. Photos help him stay connected. |ECHO

16th ANNUAL HOLIDAY SING-A-LONG

Recreation Department Hosts Holiday Caroling on Dec. 23, Cookies and Cocoa Provided

Written by Chris Ainsworth, Staff Writer

Song lyrics were projected onto a 50-foot screen behind 10 AICs, some of whom held guitars while others sat behind a keyboard or drum set. The Christmas Choir had been working on the musical arrangement for the 16th Annual Holiday Sing-a-Long event since summer - compiling songs, organizing the order and practicing as a group.

EOCI's multipurpose building hosted the song-a-long on Dec. 23, 2024. Tables were arranged and more

than 50 AICs sat in the audience singing along with the Christmas Choir to a playlist that included familiar songs steeped in tradition, uncommon holiday music, and even a few original alterations of well-known compositions.

Luis Del Rio, a member of the choir, added a hip-hop flare when he remixed "Sing We Know of Christmas" by adding a rap version of "'Twas The Night Before Christmas" to kick off the event.

"If you take the music and singing too seriously it becomes a tragedy," said Del Rio. "But if you can find humor in it, it becomes a joyous event."

When the event began, songs were conducted primarily by the choir who organized the music, but as the evening went on nearly everyone in the crowd could be seen singing along to the holiday tunes.

"'Mary Did You Know' is an un-



Photos by Phillip Luna/The Echo

EOCI's Christmas Choir performs at the holiday sing-a-long event on Dec. 23, 2024. The 10 member group played for about two hours, with a brief intermission to hand out cocoa and cookies.

Added to the evening's music was historical information about some of the commonly known Christmas music.

In 1906 the first music to be played over the radio was "O, Holy Night." The man who created the AM channel wished everyone a Merry Christmas then played the first two verses on his violin and sung the third and final verse.

Some hymns have over 50 different versions while other songs were set to music over 500 years ago.

Planning for the musical numbers for next year has already begun. Practicing, however, will probably not start until fall of 2025.

| ECHO

popular one, but we had it on a CD at home," said Parker Whitsett who was in attendance for his first time. "It reminded me of Christmas with my family."

When the holiday canteen list came out, offering seasonal items for the month of December, Timothy Taylor set to recreate the familiar "Twelve Days of Christmas."

Taylor's version modified the "true love gave to me" line, changing it to "my cellie gave to me." For each day a photo was displayed on the screen behind him of AICs holding the item paired to the day - like five gouda smoked cheeses or one French vanilla cappuccino coffee.

"Every year I try to come up with some modification to 'The Twelve Days of Christmas,'" said Taylor, who has hosted the event every year except three. "I actually found out

last year that through the centuries people have modified the song to include things people had within their community or region."



AICs at the Dec. 23, 2024 event enjoy cocoa and cookies while singing along to Christmas classics like "The Twelve Days of Christmas." The words for most songs are projected on a 50-foot screen while the Christmas choir plays.

HOLIDAY RECAP

STOCKINGS FILLED WITH HOLIDAY GIFTS, AND LOVE

Annual Event Provides Free Stockings and Gifts to the Children of Incarcerated People

Written by Chris Ainsworth, Staff Writer



Photos by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Captain J. Walker embraces the holiday spirit and poses with funny holiday glasses at the Dec. 6, 2024, Stocking Stuffer event.

Men gathered around tables and worked meticulously to fit personally selected items into a stocking before they signed a holiday card and nestled it into the packed stocking. Correctional Rehabilitation staff donned holiday glasses and sat at a nearby table ready to place the stockings into a priority shipping box to be addressed and sent out to loved ones.

On Dec. 6, 2024, with holiday music playing in the background, staff and a few AIC volunteers dedicated the day to help the men at EOCI select items for the annual Stocking Stuffer event. Stockings were filled and sent to children and family members under the age of 18.

This is the fifth year running of the popular and free event.

“The event enables us to show love for our family members,” said Victor

Tejeda after sending out two stockings. “It shows them that we still think about them even when we are not able to directly give stuff or go shopping in person.”

The Stocking Stuffer event provided an opportunity for almost 80 AICs to connect with family by selecting items (paid for from the AIC Cares Budget) from tables covered with close to 30 options before attempting to strategically fit the items into a holiday stocking.

“This event has become a tradition and my kids get excited when the box arrives,” said father of two, Beau Wilcox. “When I called home, my son was running up the stairs and throwing the parachute guy off the balcony and running down to do it all over again, while my daughter was making a tea cup with play dough.”

The gifts provided were for children ranging from newborn to 17, with items like teething toys, holiday themed socks, LED Santa rings, holiday key chains, facial masks, holiday scented lotion, or even cologne and perfume.

“It feels really good to have the option to come down here and pick out some things for your kids,” said Robert Brown, who sent out stockings for the first time this year. “I feel like I am getting to do something for them.”

The event isn’t just important to AICs who are provided the chance to send out holiday gifts to their families. Staff enjoys the opportunity to run events that bring families closer together.

“Family is super important to everybody involved in this event,” said Office Support Specialist Emma Munsterman. “It means a lot to me. Family is very important, especially in a setting like prison.”

Munsterman has been working at EOCI for almost two years. She has participated in the Stocking Stuffer event since her employment began.

“It gets us out of our office and face-to-face with people we don’t typically have interactions with,” she said. “Sometimes they give us stories about their kids or their loved ones or anybody. I think that’s really cool.”

Munsterman was joined by Taylor Greene, Executive Support Specialist, and Correctional Rehabilitation Manager Bryan Clark along with three AIC volunteers, Seth Mathews, Kea-



On Dec. 6, 2024, Juan Diaz, left, and Keaton Stephens help participants select items to fill stockings for their family members at the annual Stocking Stuffer event.

ton Stephens, and Juan Diaz. The event couldn't function without the combined effort of staff and AIC volunteers.

Events like this provide staff a different opportunity to interact with AICs they may not get the chance to see or talk to. It also gives them the chance to give back and feel a sense of community.

"I am really big into volunteering. I like to help people," said Greene, who is experiencing the event for her first time. "This event helps create a nice environment and helps them do something for their families."

Sending out stockings grants fathers, uncles and brothers the chance to hear the excitement when speaking with their loved ones about the presents received when they talk over the phone during the holidays. Some are given the rare opportunity to see their family open the stockings during a holiday video visit.

"I will probably have a video visit and get to watch them open up their presents and stuff like that," said Wil-

liam Cutshall, who has participated in the event both years of his incarceration. "I love my kids, anytime I send them a card, a bracelet, or anything that comes from dad it fills an empty space."

Family events are just as important for loved ones dealing with an incarcerated family member as for the person serving time in prison where maintaining connections are difficult.

"The event means a lot," said five-year participant Raymond Enko. "Because my son doesn't necessarily get a lot from me, but in here you can only do so much."

Prison creates a disconnect between those who are incarcerated and their loved ones. Any opportunity AICs have to bridge that gap are met with appreciation and gratitude by those participating.

"I have been involved in work like this myself so I understand how thankless some of the behind the scenes stuff can feel," said James Clark, who sent a stocking to his 12-year-old nephew. "I have nothing but the utmost gratitude for the staff and AICs who volunteer their time to provide these opportunities."

The event, open to all AICs regardless of incentive level, is held every year at the beginning of December. If AICs want to participate they need to make sure their children, step children, siblings, nieces and nephews are on their approved visitor list prior to the event and sign up when the event is posted on the bulletin board around the end of November. |ECHO



Staff members Taylor Greene, left, and Emma Munsterman pose with Correctional Rehabilitation Manager Bryan Clark in holiday glasses at the Dec. 6 Stocking Stuffer event.

HOLIDAY RECAP

THE TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS COOKIE

Several Cookie-Related Events Occur in December

Written by Chris Ainsworth, Staff Writer



Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

James Paulk showing off frosted cookies in EOCI's visiting room with his step-daughter Kaylee on Dec. 20, 2024. Paulk's step-daughter travelled from The Dalles.

A Brief Cookie History

A tall glass of cold milk sits next to a plate of cookies, depicting various holiday items, next to a blazing fire, long after many families have gone to bed for the night. Making Christmas cookies is a family tradition in many households across the United States. Often cookies are left for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve. The tradition doesn't stop there, with some families leaving treats for reindeer too, like apples or carrots.

Modern Christmas cookies can trace their lineage back to recipes of Medieval European biscuits, when rare ingredients such as cinnamon, ginger, black pepper, almonds and dried fruits were introduced to western cultures.

In the 17th century the Dutch introduced the earliest examples of Christmas cookies to the United

States. Following a change to importation laws between 1871 and 1906, cookie cutters were made available to American markets making stylized depictions of Christmas trees, candy canes, holly leaves, stars, angels and reindeer commonplace for the average household.

The tradition of leaving cookies for Santa started in the 1930s during the Great Depression as parents wanted to instill in their children a sense of thankfulness and appreciation.

When aromatics (such as cinnamon, vanilla, nutmeg and ginger) that had once been isolated in regions throughout the world became more widely available, they were used in holiday baked goods. Combining the prized ingredients - which at the time weren't always affordable - with butter and sugar became a tradition during the holidays.

Decorating cookies with frosting began in the 1600s when bakers realized a cooled mixture of sugar and egg whites had the look of ice. The sugary depiction of ice was used on completed gingerbread houses.

Decorating Kits Handed out on Dec. 6 to AICs

Red and green frosting paired with sugar cookies cut into holiday shapes were handed out during EOCI's dinner meal service on Dec. 6.

After the hand out, AICs could be seen decorating their cookies in the dayrooms of their respective housing units.

Decorating techniques varied with some using a spoon to spread a single color of frosting on their cookies before scarfing them down, while others used plastic sandwich baggies for piping bags and decorated their sugar cookies with multicolored designs so fancy you would expect them to nibble the cookies with a pinky raised.

Andrea Neistadt, Assistant Superintendent of Special Housing, said, "The little things are important and can be impactful. We want to provide unique, interesting and fun opportunities for AICs, even small ones."

Gospel Echoes Brings Grandma's Cookies to EOCI on Dec. 9

A line of people wishing holiday merriments greeted AICs as they entered the dining halls at EOCI on Dec. 9. Behind them was a group of carolers singing Christmas songs. Gospel Echoes' volunteers handed out address books, a package of Grandma's cookies and signed Christmas card before they shook hands with the prison population.

Each year Gospel Echoes works with local churches to put on a special event known as the Cookie Pro-

ject. The event is a special outreach project that brings churches into local prisons just before Christmas.

Gospel Echoes visits over 450 prisons annually. Their goal is to bring cheer and hope during one of the loneliest times of the year. Thousands of families work together to write and color Christmas cards and, in some states, bake homemade cookies to be delivered to prison populations in the United States and Canada.

The facilities that do not allow homemade cookies are offered Grandma's Cookies, an iconic brand.

After the handout, dayrooms were filled with AICs enjoying cookies and conversation, sometimes trading a cookie with someone who received a different flavor. The Christmas cards could be seen displayed on tables inside cells or used as book-

marks in a current read.

The event went off without a hitch, but presented an unexpected surprise – Grandma decided to do a little re-branding since last year. The packaging took on a slightly different look as Grandma's iconic photograph was replaced by a cartoon depiction.

Decorating Cookies with Family: A Visiting Room Event on Dec.19-20

Decorating and eating cookies wasn't just an event isolated to AICs. Dec. 19 and Dec. 20 are days in the winter with a high number of families and children visiting, according to the Correctional Rehabilitation Department.

The Correctional Rehabilitation Department decided to extend the tradition of decorating cookies to friends and families who come visit

before the holidays and chose these two high traffic days to maximize the impact.

Everyone attending the event was provided two cookies to decorate along with three colors of frosting – red, green and white – in bags ideal for perfectly piping holiday designs.

“Decorating two cookies may seem insignificant to some, but for others it brings back memories of family, connection, nostalgia, holidays past, and creating something together,” said Neistadt. “The cost of two cookies and frosting per person is nominal, and comes out of AIC Cares Budget.”

The tradition of holiday cookie baking and decorating is shared by young and old. Though there are few traditions better than eating the decorated deliciousness. |ECHO

JUST A LITTLE SOMETHING EXTRA

GOGI Club Prepares and Delivers Mini-Candy Bars to About 1340 Residents on Dec. 23

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

The GOGI club handed out bags of six mini-candies on Dec. 23 to approximately 1340 EOCI residents.

Members of the GOGI Club Gonzalo Barbosa-Salgado, Juan Diaz, Gerardo Cabrera and Keaton Stephens handed out bags of candy from the E1 activity room and the multi-purpose building before travelling to the Physical Plant, Garment Factory, IWP and other locations to reach AICs who were at work during the initial handout.

“It's just a little something extra,” said Keaton Stephens.

The bags included mini Hershey's, Crackle, and Goodyear bars. The items were paid for by the GOGI club. |ECHO



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

GOGI President Gonzalo Barbosa-Salgado poses in the IWP building with Christmas treats on Dec. 23, 2024.

HOLIDAYRECAP

AN A CAPPELLA SILENT NIGHT

Mennonite Choir Performs at EOCI on Dec. 14

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Correspondent



Photo provided by Chaplain Zuleta/ODOC

The Grande Ronde Mennonite choir performed Christmas carols in the chapel on Dec. 14, 2024 for 63 attendants. The choir has been performing at EOCI for 26 years.

Sixty-three residents of EOCI gathered on the evening of Dec. 14 to hear the annual Mennonite Choir volunteers sing Christmas carols. Consisting of 18 men and 13 women, the devout members traveled more than an hour over snowy hills to bring their message of Christmas to the largest gated community in Pendleton, Ore. According to volunteer Pete Martens, the Grande Ronde Mennonite Church has been faithfully volunteering at EOCI for approximately 26 years.

The high-ceilinged facility chapel appeared to be illuminated by oil lanterns due to the subdued lighting and warm air. Attendees found bookmarks with the Scripture John 3:16 in small white lettering over a nature background and caroling music

sheets on their chairs.

Wendell Roher, a volunteer who is one of the recurring Mennonite service hosts, greeted everyone and said, “It’s a pleasure to be here to sing about Jesus.”

Martens, who is also a recurring Mennonite service host, said they come this far to share their belief in the true meaning of Christmas and salvation through Jesus Christ. He said this is their driving motivation for having made trips like these to EOCI since 1998.

“We knew there were lonely hearts and lives here,” Martens said. “Being able to do this confirms what Christ has done for me.”

During the service, each carol was sung *a cappella*, with the only instru-

ment being a tuning harmonica used to assist the choir in finding their vocal pitch. This sans-instrument performance is typical of Mennonite congregational worship singing. Some Mennonite churches may use an organ, but most prefer *a cappella* song.

Martens said that congregational singing means there’s no dedicated choir at their church. Every year for the caroling performances, they gather volunteers from their church who practice singing together as a traveling choir.

The carols performed included, “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear,” “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” “O’ Holy Night” and many others. During a choir break, one volunteer led the attendees in “Silent Night,” giving the appearance of residents caroling to the Mennonites.

Attendees were invited to sing along with all songs, but most paid rapt attention to the skillful performance of the Mennonite choir.

At the service’s end, volunteer Roher complemented the facility and said, “I have a hard time stopping singing because the acoustics here are so good, and I love singing.”

Mennonite religious services are held every second and fourth Wednesday of each month. | **ECHO**

BRASS NOTES TO SOUND THE HOLIDAY SEASON

Russian Baptist Brass Concert Performs on Dec. 8

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Correspondent

The atmosphere was jovial the Sunday afternoon of Dec. 8 in EOCI's D3 chapel. Fifteen volunteers came from Russian Baptist churches in Salem, Seattle and Walla Walla to perform holiday music. Wind, brass and percussion instruments consisting of one hand drum, one normal drum set, one symbol, two trombones, two trumpets, one tuba and one clarinet provided a majority of the music. The chapel piano was played by a volunteer whenever there was singing, but the rest of the music was played with the instruments brought by the volunteers. The concert was from 2-4 p.m., attended by 55 EOCI residents.

Volunteer Andrey Ozerov was the primary speaker who opened service with a prayer. Ozerov spoke with a smile and Russian accent.

"Music is a language we can all understand," he said.

The songs consisted of familiar hymns like "Joy to the World," "Angels We Have Heard On High," "Silent Night," and included some instrumental songs with Russian titles that Ozerov explained. One song, "Как прекрасно всё то что Твоё," he translated as "How Wonderful Everything That is Yours," which he says was composed by his friend Pavel Petrenko.



Photo provided by Chaplain Zuleta/ODOC

The volunteers from the Russian Baptist churches in Salem, Seattle and Walla Walla perform holiday music on brass, percussion and wind instruments on Dec. 8, 2024 for EOCI residents.

Ozerov and others delivered admonishments and encouragement between songs, extolling Christ-like behavior of loving God and neighbor and sharing faith in salvation. Attendees were receptive, responding positively, with some who called out encouragements to the speakers. Whenever songs resumed, the audience either sang in harmony or listened intently.

Volunteer Yelena Cherkasova of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Walla Walla said the group of churches have been volunteering at EOCI for over 15 years. Ozerov added that out of all the prisons in Oregon, the group is currently only performing for EOCI.

One of the travelling women volunteers showed signs of early pregnancy, which led to the joking sug-

gestion that there were actually 15 ½ volunteers that Sunday.

"Fifteen and a half volunteers, that's fair," Ozerov said with a laugh.

The woman was a relative of Ozerov's who traveled despite the discomforts of pregnancy during car rides.

The service ended with collective prayer and closing words from the volunteers and Chaplains Zuleta and DiSalvo. Attendees expressed their gratitude, warmly thanking and shaking hands with all the volunteers as they left.

Ozerov said that he hopes to have concerts at EOCI every second Sunday of every other month, along with Bible study every fourth Sunday of every month. | ECHO

HOLIDAYRECAP

LIGHTHOUSE PUPPET SHOW

Lighthouse Pentecostal Service Holds Puppet Show at EOCI

Written by Brooklyn Sasso, Staff Writer

On Dec. 21, the Lighthouse Pentecostal Christian service put on a puppet show for residents of EOCI. The show was put together by the service's volunteer Mrs. Schuette, husband Brian and son James.

The show was held in the chapel for about 70 participants. The show consisted of words from Pastor Brian Schuette, then songs led by Mrs. Schuette, who is also an EOCI educator with Treasure Valley Community College, and a sing-a-long with the puppets. Closing the event, James Schuette, a formerly incarcerated in-

dividual, gave a sermon.

Officer Williamson was staffed to oversee the event.

"I really do like [the show]," said Williamson. "It's worthwhile for the AICs. It brings positivity back into a place that is negative."

The Schuettes put on their regular services every week; Pastor Schuette said he feels at home here when doing his sermons.

"It's what God asked me to do," he said. "Believe it or not, I do feel at home in this place."

Mrs. Schuette used her talents and signed each song for any hearing impaired audience members.

The puppet show consisted of six puppets singing seven songs.

After the show, son James gave a sermon about love and guidance.

He shared a story from his childhood about when he went dumpster diving for cookies. He compared the notion that just because something appears bad doesn't mean it is. James drew parallels between incarcerated people and thrown out cookies.

One audience member, Melvin Street said, "I think this is awesome and has a good message. It's about unity with God and brings people together. And it's about rehabilitation." | **ECHO**

A STORY BEHIND THE STORY: PUPPETS

Service Led by EOCI Teacher and Her Formerly Incarcerated Son

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

James Schuette, left, poses with his mom, an educator at EOCI, and his dad, a pastor for Lighthouse Pentecostal Christian service on Dec. 21, 2024.

For many EOCI residents, Mrs. Schuette is the teacher with seemingly boundless positive energy.

What some may not know is that Mrs. Schuette and her husband are a justice-involved person in more ways

than one. While Mrs. Schuette teaches GED and ESL classes for incarcerated students, and her husband is a church leader for the Lighthouse Pentecostal service, they are also parents of a formerly incarcerated person.

The Schuette's son James was released in 2018.

At the Dec. 21, 2024 Lighthouse Pentecostal Christian service, Schuette's son returned to EOCI for the first time to led the sermon.

"This is the first time he has been able to return since his release," said Mrs. Schuette. "It's been six years."

Mrs. Schuette said her experience has caused her to see the good in everyone, although her son's incarceration is not something she openly talks about.

"No matter what you've done, God still loves you," she said. "He has a purpose for your life. James is great example." | **ECHO**

YULE EVENTS IN DECEMBER

Wicca and Asatru Members Celebrate Yule Meal on Dec. 21

Written by Brooklyn Sasso, Staff Writer

On Dec. 19, Religious Services held the second annual Yule celebratory meal for Asatru and Wicca practicing AICs.

The Asatru meal was held from 10:30 a.m. to noon, and the Wicca meal was from 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Yule is a pagan festival at the winter solstice, which occurred two days after the meal on Dec. 21.

For Asatru, the meal is to celebrate ancestry and honor the gods.

AICs gathered in the EOCI chapel around 10:15 a.m. to set up and pre-

pare the tables for dining.

Before participants began to enjoy the festivities, the group held a rite called Sambal, which is a three-part ritual, referred to as rounds.

Sambal begins with a hailing of the Asatru god Woden/Odin, followed by a second-round hailing of a patron god like Thor or Hel, then the final round is hailing the ancestors which continues until all who hailed have had a chance to hail everyone they wanted. Then, the feasting begins.

For Wicca, beliefs are tied to the seasonal harvest and its relation to

the life cycle of all living things.

Wiccans celebrate the harvest as well as each follower's chosen gods. At the celebration they ask the spiritual beings of nature for a good harvest and warm spring next year.

The food served for both meals included pork loin, potato salad, corn, butter, rolls and apple pie.

There was apparent camaraderie between Asatru and Wiccan believers at the event as they interacted with one another in their earth-based religions.

MHU resident Arlen Arcoren, a practitioner of Wicca, said that Wiccan services at EOCI are limited due to lacking a public volunteer, so having events like Yule helps him feel more equal and represented. | **ECHO**

A STORY BEHIND THE STORY: ASATRU

Asatru Holds First Blot Ceremony at EOCI on Dec. 21

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor



Asatru group holds first Blot ceremony on Dec. 21, 2024.

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Members of Asatru held their first Blot ceremony on Dec. 21, 2024.

Gathering on the west compound,

the group surrounded the four large boulders each placed in a specific cardinal direction (north, south, east

and west). The boulders are supportive of nature-based religions.

Blot, a ceremony of the winter solstice, was observed for the first time at EOCI, but the ceremony is the result of a long standing effort to increase religious offerings at the facility.

Chaplains Zuleta and DiSalvo visited other correctional facilities at the start of 2024 to better understand how EOCI might provide service for nature-based religions.

The Chaplains have struggled to offer Asatru and Wiccan services because there have not been volunteers to lead the services.

Zuleta said, "There are no volunteers. That is the main issue."

Adding the four boulders to the west compound was a challenging process, but created the opportunity for nature-based religious ceremonies. | **ECHO**

HOLIDAYRECAP



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

The bakery team poses for a photo on Dec. 23, 2024. The bakers include Devin Killion, Dwight Eubanks, Andre Chaikhane, Michael Scott, Jason Garmoe and Travis Straight. Also pictured is Food Service Coordinator Gilbert.

1400 CHERRY PIES AND HUNDREDS OF POUNDS OF BREAD

EOCI Bakery's Busy Season Comes Every December

Written by Phillip Luna, Editor

Each year, EOCI provides holiday treats to the incarcerated population on Christmas and New Year's Eve. In 2024, nearly 1,400 hundred cherry pies were baked and handed out with a 20 oz Coca-Cola on Dec. 23 and the same number of S'mores bars, long with a 20 oz Dr. Pepper was handed out on Dec. 30.

The desserts were made in EOCI's bakery department by the nine person crew. December is the busy season for the bakery, and the holiday treats add to an already heavy workload.

A Typical Day in December

Work in the bakery starts before dawn – the earliest work hours an incarcerated person at EOCI can have.

“As soon as you get here at 3:45 a.m., you start working,” said baker Michael Scott.

Scott has been working in the bakery for almost a year. He has experience before his incarceration working in his aunt's bakery, The Brunswick.

“On an average day we are making between five and seven hundred

pounds of bread,” said Scott. “This week we also have 1,400 pies and then 1,400 S'mores bars. Then you throw in pizza shells, cornbread, all the desserts [and] the breakfast pastries.”

The bakers work from 3:45 a.m. until 10:30 a.m., Sunday through Thursday. Scott said the early hours are an adjustment at first, but the time goes by quickly.

In the holiday months, however, the bakers sometimes work until 2 p.m. to accommodate the needs of the



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

On Dec. 23, pies are filled with cherry filling and topped with crumble. The pies were handed out on Christmas Eve to the EOCI residents.

facility. In addition to the longer hours, kitchen workers are sometimes assigned to assist the bakery in the busy season.

Working in the bakery is enticing to many kitchen workers as it provides an opportunity for higher pay and to develop more skills. For the bakers, a busy December is just a chance to bolster their experience.

The Experience Earned

On Dec. 23, while the bakery was crafting 1,400 cherry pies in addition to their regular workload, Dwight Eubanks was on his second day of work in the bakery.

“Honestly, it’s my second day,” Eubanks said. “But I’ve been working in bakeries for about 3 years and I worked for Dave’s Killer Bread [prior to incarceration].”

Eubanks plans to continue working in the confectionary world upon release. He said, culinary work – whether in kitchens or bakeries – is often felon-friendly employment.

In EOCI’s bakery, the employees

rotate through areas in order to gain as much experience as possible.

“I’ve been doing desserts for four months,” said Travis Straight.

Straight has been a baker for 10 months and is currently in charge of the desserts for mainline meals.

Every three to six months the bak-

ers rotate positions in order to gain as much experience and knowledge as possible. Roles range from desserts, to staff dining, to breads, crusts and pastries.

“For me, it’s not so much about the pay, because we work long hours,” said Straight. “I think it’s more that it gets me out of the cell most of the day, but it’s also the experience.”

Eubanks said the thing he enjoys most about working in the bakery is the experience and the personalities.

“These are really good guys here and I believe in second chances,” he said. “These guys are 100% on their way to becoming the best version of themselves. You can bake the bad boy out of ya.”

The EOCI bakers hope the experience gained will lead to gainful employment upon release.

According to ZipRecruiter, hourly wages for bakers can reach as high as \$20.91 per hour. Oregon ranks 22 out of 50 states for average baker salaries. |ECHO



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Johannis Hunter, left, and Michael Flanigan, both kitchen workers, help in the bakery on Dec. 23. Hunter and Flanigan shaped pie crusts for the 1400 cherry pies needed.



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

EOCI Basketball in December

Written by Shane Goins, Correspondent

The 2024 EOCI basketball season has been dramatic to say the least, with many December games being decided by the closest of margins.

On the west side of the institution, one notable game was B1 defeated by B4.

The game came down to one last shot in a sudden death overtime. B1 was toppled 50-49 on a free throw made by B4's Shawn Hartley after being fouled by B1's Maciel Munoz in the act of shooting.

A1 played A2 in a battle for A-wing supremacy on Dec. 12.

A1 center Josh Quattlebum, who has 60 rebounds and 71 points, easily won the tip-off. A2 point guard, Anthony Mack, who has scored a total of 132 points so far this season along with 93 rebounds and 43 assists, stole the ball and made an easy lay-up.

A1 eventually lost to A2 59-60.

With a roster including scoring leader Shawn Weisner, whose 234 points this season make him the top

scorer in the institution, and Edgar Contreras-Garcia, who has 17 assists and 77 points along with 11 steals, A1 is poised for a deep playoff run, despite their close loss on Dec. 12.

Not to be outdone, B3's Tahirim Brown has 226 points this season and is showing no signs of slowing down. Brown's teammate Julius Sumter is leading in rebounds at EOCI with 113. Their rebounding has most teams reeling as they lead the facility with a staggering team total of 392.

Lurking in the shadows is B4, a sturdy dark horse team led by Mar-shawn Edwards, with a league-leading 52 assists and 25 made three-pointers this season. Edwards' three-pointers make up a little under half of his 171 points. Teammate Gabriel Munoz leads his team in rebounds with 39.

C1, led by Nicky Chavez and his 21 rebounds and 12 assists, are still struggling to find their first win.

On the east side of the institution, G4 is still undefeated, even after los-

ing Adrienne McFadden who had 87 total points with 20 rebounds and 21 assists. G4 was believed to be weakened by that loss, but it has not been the case so far.

Led by Joseph Cardoza, who has 14 three-pointers, 11 rebounds and 69 points on the season, and teammates Eric Evans with 70 rebounds, 19 assists and 70 points and Mike Altherr with his 68 rebounds and 89 points, G4 is still undefeated.

On Dec. 11, F3 beat H1, 57-45, in a very physical game. F3 is on a roll as of late. They've beaten H1 and G3 handily. That's mainly due to point guard Benjamin Marquez and his facility-leading 30 steals this season (Anthony Mack has second with 29).

G3 has gotten some serious help in the big man department with two huge additions to their line-up. Joshua Schoen (from C1) is 6'8" tall and has 59 season rebounds. He has major help in Mauricio Duran (formerly of MHU). Duran is a defensive-minded baller. He leads the institution with 15 blocks.

MHU's Robert Castillo has made 28 three-pointers this season which has helped him gain a total of 118 points. The addition of Frankie Aguilera has proven fruitful as he's amassed a total of 40 rebounds.

H1 has had its struggles, but has not been daunted. While losing to F3 was hard, it did not deter them from looking forward to the rematch on Monday Dec. 20.

With Carlos Ramirez's 44 rebounds and head coach Michael Epperson's rebounding, the result might be different this time.

With 143 total points, 27 rebounds and 17 three-pointers, H2's Zackery

Mersch is clearly the leader of this team. The additions of Dylan Sanchez (seven made three-pointers and 54 points) and Clinton Theall with his 35 points on the season, will H2 be a threat?

A Closer Look at a Commonly Misunderstood Rule

The clock will not be stopped for foul shots, held balls, out of bounds, etc. during the final two minutes of the first half. During the last two minutes of the second half and during overtime the clock will stop each time the ball is out of play only if the teams are within 10 points of each other. |ECHO



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

A1's Shawn Weisner makes a layup during Dec. 12, 2024 match up against A2. A1 lost to A2 by one point.



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

EVENT PHOTOS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE

AICs Can Purchase Photos From Events by Contacting Multi

The Recreation department and The Echo have partnered to make sports/event photos easier to purchase. AICs may now purchase photos taken at sporting events or other activities throughout the year.

Photo tickets must be purchased

through multi by properly filling out a CD-28 for \$2.00 per photo ticket and writing Acct# 2590 in the "Pay To" section (example: three tickets are \$6.00).

For AICs that have photo tickets and want to purchase the photo,

please send a kyte to multi asking to review the multi-snapshots binder. AICs will attend a call out with their photo tickets to review the multi-snapshots binder.

A few notes:

- The Recreation Department and The Echo team will take photos throughout the month.
- Due to limited storage, photos are removed every 90 days from the snapshot binder.
- Please do not interrupt the photographers during events.
- In most cases, AICs that are featured in The Echo will receive a free copy of their photo starting in November. Photos containing other people's families or staff will not be printed.

Contact the Recreation Department to purchase photo tickets and set up a time to review the multi-snapshots binder. |ECHO

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

A CULTURE OF PASSION

Artist Spotlight with Oscar Chavez Mandujano

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Correspondent



“Now that I’ve picked up [art], my mind is just wrapped around it ... It’s saving me.”

Photo by Chris Ainsworth/The Echo

Oscar Chavez Mandujano draws on his unit on Dec. 30, 2024. Mandujano draws mostly Chicano art, inspired by his culture and experiences, and portrait artwork.

Inside razor-wired correctional facilities, identity, individualism and culture can be fleeting. A sense of self is difficult to maintain while incarcerated. Everyone must dress the same, carry the same identification lanyard and purchase personal items like shoes from the same vendor as their neighbors.

Despite these limitations, individuals like Oscar Chavez Mandujano, 31-year-old G2 resident, choose to stand out artistically. Mandujano comes from a gang-related background and is incarcerated for the third time since 2022 on a day-for-day charge. He has since decided to use art to express his heritage and

connect with family. He has cut a creative path since 2016, from practicing shading on simple roses to photorealistic art he spends hours on each day.

At age 10, he realized his interest in art after seeing his older brother draw a picture of a broken-up Titanic sinking into the ocean. Before art truly impacted him, however, his life took a harder path.

The gang lifestyle began as early as seventh grade for Mandujano. He looked up to older cousins who were in gangs, and was drawn in. This left little room for artistic pursuits, but he credits this history in part for fueling some of his creative expressions today.

Mandujano had a daughter at 18 and

realized early on that he wanted to protect her from walking the dangerous path he had. While he was in not ashamed of his past, he wanted to show her a safer way to live.

This parental desire ignited his passion for art, which he started taking seriously in 2016. He started by shading pictures of roses, then decorated his niece’s white shoes with Mickey and Minnie mouse and finally evolved into doing collage-art pieces of Chicano culture.

Chicanos, or Mexican Americans, celebrate both their cultural heritage and unity as a people. Chicano art, heavily influenced by the Chicano Movement (El Movimiento) of the 1960s, has changed over the years to represent current and past struggles, to inform youth and to unify culture and histories.

Chicano art may depict images related to civil rights and social issues, police brutality and the judicial system, or perhaps important events in their individual lives.

Mandujano loves Chicano art and encourages his daughter, who is 13 now, to follow in his artistic footsteps. He said she is a talented artist

who can draw from her imagination, and she inspires him when she says things like, “Look dad, I can do that, too.”

Mandujano has family in mind when he works his craft, and plans to use all his incarcerated time until release in 2030 to increase his artistic skill. He said his wife sends him art references he uses in his pieces and that she is his biggest supporter.

In one Chicano-style piece, Mandujano created a blue-inked image of a Chicano man in a plaid button-down shirt with headband and joker mask in hand. Surrounding the person is the image of a beautiful woman, a set of prison bars with a skull behind them, a ski mask and a fully blossomed rose. He completed this piece prior to improving his shading skills, notable in the photorealistic images he creates today.

Mandujano said that the blue-inked art piece would be easily interpreted by anyone from Chicano culture. It is a project he created to express himself and show his heritage. In addition to Chicano art, Mandujano reimagines existing images into custom photorealistic art.

Art is like a part-time job for Mandujano. He spends between three and four hours every day, seven days a week, working on art projects and

improving his skills. He said this is a big change for him compared to how he lived life before his third time in prison.

“When I wasn’t thinkin’ art,” Mandujano said, “I was just thinkin’ about



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Mandujano created a blue-inked image of a Chicano man in a plaid button-down shirt with headband and joker mask in hand. Surrounding the person is the image of a beautiful woman, a set of prison bars with a skull behind them, a ski mask and a fully blossomed rose.

what I could get away with ... but now that I’ve picked up [art], my mind is just wrapped around it. It doesn’t leave room for me to think about negative things. It’s saving me.”

He said getting his art recognized and appearing in publications like The

Echo are a calling card from his new selected destiny. It is important to him that his family and others see this constructive path to success he has chosen.

There is an added impact to his pursuit - mentorship.

Whenever Mandujano does art in a public setting, he invites others to participate with him. He said that he loves being able to pass down what he’s learned and that trying to impact others with his art is important to him.

Mandujano hopes his prosocial activities will impact his friends who struggle with substance use, that perhaps artistic endeavors will break the cycle.

He believes filling time with positive things and being productive might be the keys to their success, but said, “You gotta want it, man.”

He does want it, and is throwing himself into his passion.

Mandujano spends any time he can with artists of higher skill than him, hoping to learn from them. He credited Christian Tolentino, an artist and resident on F3, for giving him advice on shading that he immediately put into practice.

Besides spending hours a day drawing and shading, he invests many more analyzing his works. Mandujano said he sometimes places works-in-progress where he can see

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

ARTIST SPOTLIGHT continued from page 27

them as he drifts off to sleep.

He said he works on his art constantly, even during commercials on the few occasions when he watches television.

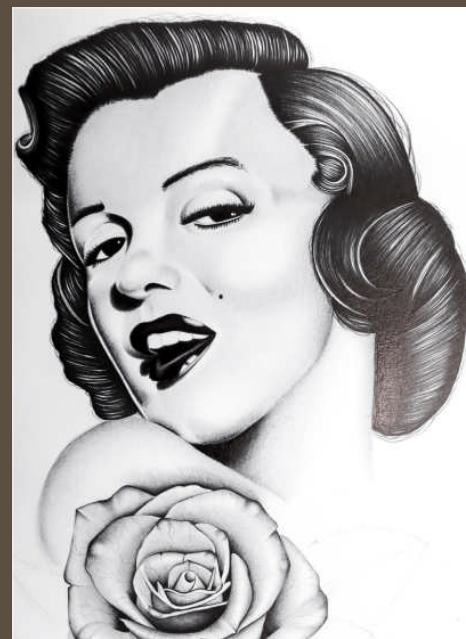
He wants to take any art classes he can at EOCI and plans to enroll in art school prior to his exit day. Mandujano wants to be an entrepreneur to

support his family, including airbrushing images onto Airforce One shoes to market and offering custom paint work for interior design. He also intends to approach Hispanic-owned stores to create advertisement art for them to attract customers.

Mandujano intends to turn his art into an enterprise. “I like expressing

my art,” he said. “I love it.”

“Why settle for a job that I don’t wanna do, when I could just do a job that I love to do and get paid for it,” Mandujano said. “Consistency is key. I believe if you stay committed to your craft, you’ll evolve in a way you won’t see until you suddenly realize you’re good.” | **ECHO**



Oscar Chavez Mandujano, 31-year-old G2 resident at EOCI, first began taking art seriously in 2016 prior to his incarceration in 2022. He credits his personal background and cultural heritage as inspirations for the Chicano and photorealistic recreations he does in either Bic blue ink, graphite or colored pencil. Scheduled for release in 2030, Mandujano has plans to enroll in art school and use his skills as an artist to support his family.



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Nate Bell has been incarcerated for 11 years and is a few months from release. A man of many trades and a go-with-it mentality, he is looking forward to being able to hug his family outside the fence and enjoy a nice home-cooked meal. He is anxiously awaiting his return to his home near Beaver Creek, Ore., and locating some Asian cuisine establishments.



Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

With Nate Bell

Interview by Brooklyn Sasso, Staff Writer

One thing that surprised me about prison was... How well everyone got along. Surprisingly, [this] is not what the movies make it seem like. Maybe other places are, but this place it's easy to get along with people.

Some advice I would like to give someone just starting out is... Don't be afraid to listen, but listen to the right people. Sit down and talk to the elders. When I say "the elders," I am not talking so much about age, but you'll see it [in] the guys who have done the time. The guys who have been in and out of segregation for 10 years and now they're on the straight and narrow for the last five, ya know? They can tell you all the horror stories so you don't have to go that road.

The best thing for someone to buy off canteen is... Hygiene, like a toothbrush, toothpaste and deodorant. Shoes are another thing, I get that shoes are expensive, but get a cheap pair and get out of the cruisers [state-issued shoes]. That will help new people blend in more and make life a lot easier.

One thing I wish I had never bought... The keyboard for the MP3 players. I bought it thinking I was going to use it a bunch, but the fact is I only used it a handful of times and now it just sits in my drawer.

Food that I can't wait to eat on the outside... Anything homemade. I am a big home-cooked meal kind of person.

Though I am a fan of Asian food and no one in my family really knows how to make it, so I am going to have to find a couple good places around town to go to.

What I have learned the most about the people in prison is... Don't judge them by the crime they committed, but the person they are. There will be times that you work with someone, but how well do you really know that person.

The change that I would like to see most in the prison system is... We live a certain way in here. We get up at a certain time, go to work at a certain time, check the callouts at a certain time, eat at certain times, and so on. When there's a change, say a new officer on the unit who doesn't announce things, it really messes with some people. That's their schedule. That is their thing. So, when you get an officer that comes on duty at 8 a.m. he should know if there's going to be yard or not and give everyone the heads up early. I feel that it would take a lot of the stress and anxiety out of the situation and people can plan around it better.

Advice I wish I would have gotten when I first got to prison is... Don't worry about the dumb stuff. Don't worry about the little things, like changes to the menu. Just go with the flow. It has made my life so much easier when I started just going with it. That's one thing people have to remember, this isn't really all that bad. It could always be worse.

| ECHO



Photos by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Troy Kirk, a recent purchaser of AEW Fight Forever, demonstrates the gameplay on Dec. 11, 2024. AEW Fight Forever, first released on June 29, 2023, is newly available for purchase to the EOCI population for \$74.

GAME KEEPER: JANUARY

Game Review for AEW Fight Forever

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Correspondent

Cue the showmanship! AEW Fight Forever, currently the best pro-wrestling game for the Nintendo Switch, is now available from FLE for \$74. First released on June 29, 2023, this game showcases over 48 different pro-wrestlers and allows players to create total custom competitors, tag teams and arenas.

AEW fans will recognize the faces of Kenny Omega, Jon Moxley and Chris Jericho, but one of the most notable characters that can be unlocked is AEW cofounder Cody Rhodes himself. Submissions, finish-

ers and signature moves are on full display and can be ported over to custom characters.

Character customization includes options like height and weight, but also has things like muscle-to-fat ratio. Uneditable faces, skin tones and hairstyles are somewhat limited, but combined with different outfits, eye color, demeanor, moves and more, players have decent creative leeway to dial in just the right look and feel of their wrestlers.

Players are able to customize their

wrestler's grand entrance to their matches. This includes the entry music, fireworks, laser lights, character motions and swagger, entry staff and other props that all add flare and panache familiar to the pro-wrestling scene. Custom arenas can also be created and modified with different props, weapons and more.

AEW's simple controls give it the feel of an arcade-style martial game. The face buttons (A, B, X and Y) control punch, kick, grab and run, where the shoulder buttons L and R are for countering strikes or grabs. The style of an attack, like punch for example, will change if the player tilts the directional stick towards their opponent or holds the button when they are striking.

Unlike many fighting games, AEW has no health bar and instead uses a system called “momentum.” Momentum is built up throughout a match by landing successful attacks which in turn reduces an opponent’s momentum. Having higher momentum means faster recovery from hits and greater chances of pinning, submitting or finishing an opponent.

There are multiple modes of play in AEW Fight Forever, including Road to Elite, 1 vs 1, 2 vs 2, 3-Way Match, 4-Way Match, Casino Battle Royal, Exploding Barbwire Deathmatch, Ladder Match, Mini Games and more.

Road to Elite is the main campaign that offers 12 different stories available to find, where the story you get depends on the path players take. Gamers enter multiple matches across their selected pro-wrestler’s first year, leading to a Pay Per View event.

Exploding Barbwire Deathmatch is unusual but fits in with that over-the-top pro-wrestling sensationalism. The player and opponent are facing off in a ring that has electrified, exploding barbwire wrapped around the ropes, and even the smallest contact will damage the wrestlers. If the timer for the match runs out, the barbwire all around the ring detonates and both wrestlers are KO’d. The ending is worth seeing at least once, with its multiple replay and loud explosions.

Of the mini games, players can do things like play AEW trivia, gather falling poker chips and even have a dance-off.

The AEW trivia covers the wrestlers, their history and information about the television show where players can test their knowledge. In the



Troy Kirk, left holds his Nintendo Switch Lite up for a photo as The Echo Correspondent Kurtis Thompson looks on. Kirk is showing off AEW: Fight Forever, which he recently purchased. The game features 48 wrestlers and allows for custom creation.

second mini game, players are rushing to collect poker chips falling from the sky while avoiding falling bombs. The dance-off is all about hitting the right buttons at the right time to tap out a winning performance.

There are multiple difficulty settings and wrestling matches are graded, like in A’s or B’s. The higher the grade, the higher the pay, and players are able to spend their hard-won cash on moves and customizations at the in-game store.

There are daily and weekly challenges apparently updated from an internal offline list, so despite not having internet access, AEW can still have some online feel.

H1 resident Troy Kirk purchased AEW Fight Forever recently and poured well over 40 hours into the game in four days. As an AEW fan himself, he said he is very pleased with the game and that it is well worth the \$74 price tag.

“My favorite thing about the game

is the customization,” Kirk said.

He recommends playing preexisting pro-wrestlers first in order to build up money and unlock all the store items before creating a custom character. That way, a gamer’s custom wrestler will have all the customization options available from the start.

For ODOC residents first purchasing a Nintendo Switch, it would be wise to get this game at the same time in order to receive any available updates. There are some minor, non-game-breaking bugs, such as frame rate drops and instances of AI or story confusion that might have been solved outside the walls with an update. As with any game, it is always possible that free new content could be available as well. Just as is, though, AEW Fight Forever is fun and easy to play.

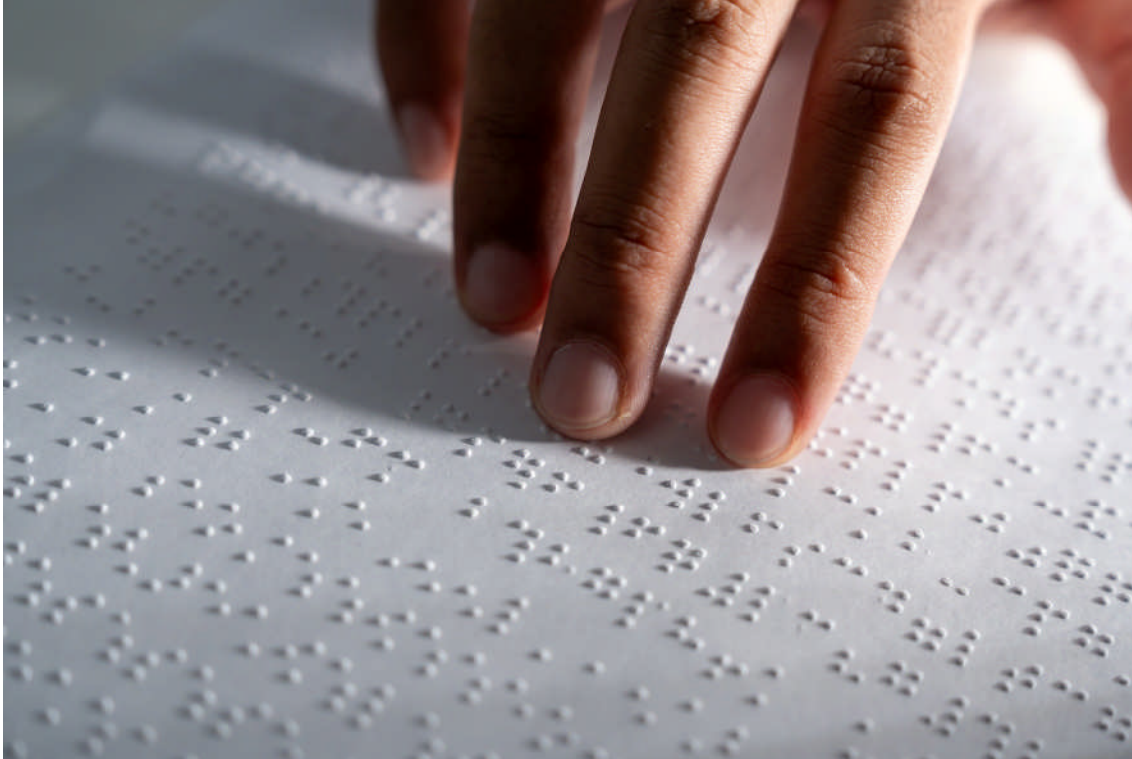
Estimated play time: about 20 hours for speed run, 30+ for 100% completion. | ECHO

AROUND THE STATE

HOW SIX DOTS CAN OPEN UP WORLDS

Braille Translator Program at Oregon State Penitentiary Recruits Statewide

Written by Chris Ainsworth, Staff Writer



GBJSTOCK/Shutterstock

Oregon Correctional Enterprises reintroduced the Braille certification program in 2024. The first cohort of students started the self-study course in July at the Oregon State Penitentiary. Completion of the course earns a Literary Braille Certification through National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped and the Library of Congress.

Developed by Louis Braille at fifteen years old after losing his sight in a childhood accident, what the world knows as Braille was originally created in 1824. The code was based on the French alphabet as an improvement to a style of writing that allowed soldiers to communicate in the dark without the need for a light known as Night Writing.

In 2024, Oregon Corrections Enterprises reintroduced a braille certification to Oregon with the first class starting in July. The self-study course provides tactile graphics training that earns a Literary Braille Certification through National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handi-

capped and the Library of Congress.

Not only does the course offer training in a future career but provides AICs an additional way to connect with loved ones.

“My dad has lost his eyesight from diabetes,” said David Washington, who has been in the program for close to six months. “This was something that pushed me toward learning braille. To have a better relationship, a better bond.”

Washington was housed at EOCI for 13 years before reading about the job posting in the ECHO. He believed it would be an interesting skill, took a chance applying and “thankfully got the job.”

Braille transcription provides a vital service, bridging the gap for visually impaired communities and empowering individuals to access literature and education. Oregon Corrections Enterprises has developed a certification program at Oregon State Penitentiary. The program is built to equip AICs with highly valuable and marketable skills.

“We partnered with the National Braille Prison Network and there are currently 44 prison programs in 36 states,” said Jennifer Starbuck, one of the two Oregon Corrections Enterprises’ em-

ployees who helped develop the program. “They link all these braille prison programs together, but also create opportunities for individuals who graduate.”

Prisons around the country have provided certifications dating back to the 1960s when the first two prison Braille programs were established. According to Starbuck, OSP originally had a program in the late ‘60s or early ‘70s.

In combination with the national organization, OCE developed a new certification unrelated to previous programs in the state. The Braille Transcription Training and Certification program is designed to provide

an opportunity to obtain the skills and certifications necessary for braille transcription, with a focus on achieving the Unified English Braille literary certification.

“All of the certifications that every transcriber in the United States has the opportunity to get the AICs in our program will have the opportunity to get,” said Stasha Kellogg, the second mind behind the creation OCE certification program. “If they would want to get a career in this and are not participating in the prison program, they

go through the exact same course work.”

The course teaches AICs very basic braille code, Nemeth (a mathematics and chemistry code), music braille, literary braille, literary proofreading and Nemeth proofreading.

Braille is generally read off embossed paper but, thanks to modern technology, computers and smartphone devices can now connect to refreshable braille displays.

Successful applicants will be re-

sponsible for: Transcribing printed materials into braille, ensuring accuracy and readability of braille texts, adhering to braille standards and guidelines, proofreading and reviewing transcribed braille materials while maintaining timelines and meeting deadlines.

To apply, complete a work application referencing OCE Braille Program and submit it to Lastasha Kellogg at Oregon State Penitentiary. Applications are always accepted for future cohorts and openings. |ECHO

BOOKS TO READ

TWO MUST-READ BOOKS FOR 2025

Books About Changing Criminal Mentality and Reaching Beyond Your Past

Written by Kurtis Thompson, Correspondent

Changing from a criminal mentality can be a tremendous challenge, especially for those who have grown up in the lifestyle. Despite that, there are justice-involved individuals who have found ways to reach beyond their past. Here are two books that may be inspirational for those of an open mind and a desire to change and succeed in a legitimate manner.

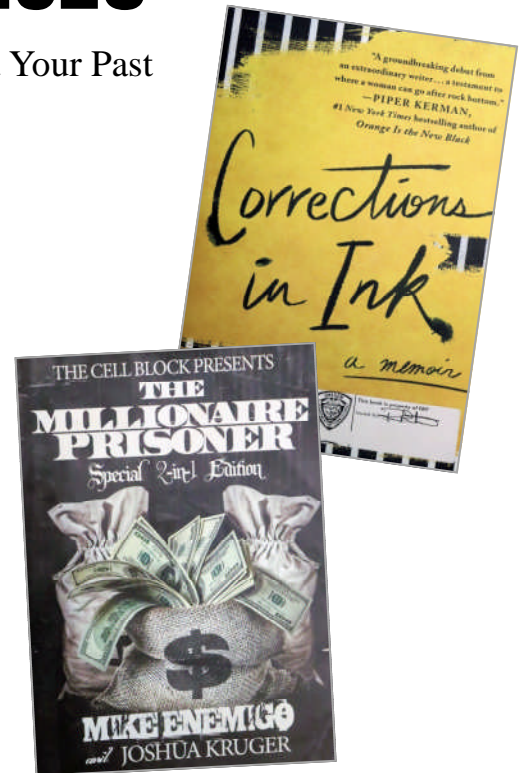
Corrections in Ink

Written by Keri Blakinger, this memoir tells the incredible, heart-breaking but hope-inspiring story of a woman who has seen a harder side of life in the United States despite her privilege. She came from a well-off family, but grew up with a self-destructive dark side she kept hidden for many years. Blakinger went from being a successful straight-A student with her sights on Olympic pair skating to homelessness, prostitution, an addiction to heroin and eventually prison. That might sound like the end

of any chance at a successful life, but it was not. Blakinger is now a reporter working for the Los Angeles Times, someone who has even reached out to aspiring journalists at EOIC. She pulls no punches in her book about what she has been through, from her time on the streets to the insanity of a broken judicial system she was at the mercy of, and beyond. A true success story.

The Millionaire Prisoner: Special 2-in-1 Edition

Published by The Cell Block, The Millionaire Prisoner: Special 2-in-1 Edition was written by Mike Enemigo and Joshua Kruger, both who have been sentenced to life without parole since 2002 and 2003 respectively. This book is one of many in The Millionaire Prisoner series, and gives advice and resource information on being an entrepreneur while incarcerated. Readers will find guidance on subjects like attitude, habits,



marketing, networking and more. Terminology and instructions are not overly complicated, making this book more accessible than some complex self-help guides. Follow their A through Z chapters that teach profitable habits and share resource information that people incarcerated can put to practical use immediately. |ECHO

SUDOKU

Puzzle 1: Moderate

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| | | | | | | 3 | 4 | |
| 9 | 4 | | 6 | | | 7 | | |
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Puzzle 2: Difficult

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| 2 | | 9 | | | | | | |
| 3 | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | 3 | |
| | | 2 | | | 4 | | | |
| | | 5 | | 8 | | 6 | 7 | |
| | | 8 | 5 | 4 | | | | 9 |
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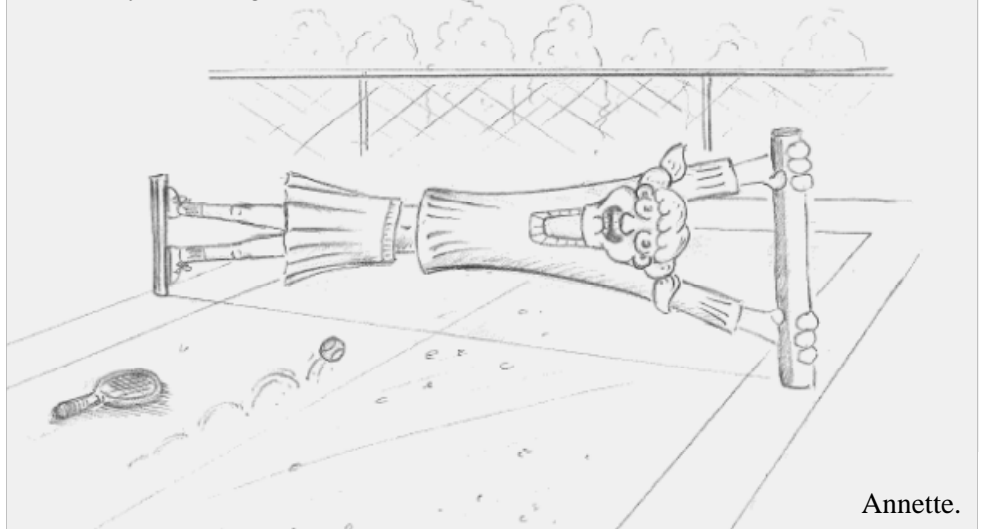
COMICS OF THE MONTH

Created by Seth Mathews, Illustrator

Where does a sheep go for a haircut?



What do you call a girl in the middle of a tennis court?



CHEESY CHICKEN RICE BURRITOS

Provided by Brooklyn Sasso, Staff Writer

Recipe Ingredients

- 1 (one) package of chicken
- 1 (one) bag of rice
- 1 (one) bag of jalapeno chips (crushed)
- 1 (one) package of chicken flavored Ramen soup
- 1 (one) package of flour tortillas
- 1 (one) package of squeeze cheese

Step 1:

Put the chicken while in package into a pitcher of hot water to heat up. Next, once the chicken is warm open chicken and drain the juice. Then place in a bowl and finely shred.

Step 2:

Open the rice and empty half the bag into a second bowl with the season-

ing package from the chicken Ramen soup. Add enough hot water to float the rice. Cover and let cook for five or more minutes or until soft.

Step 3:

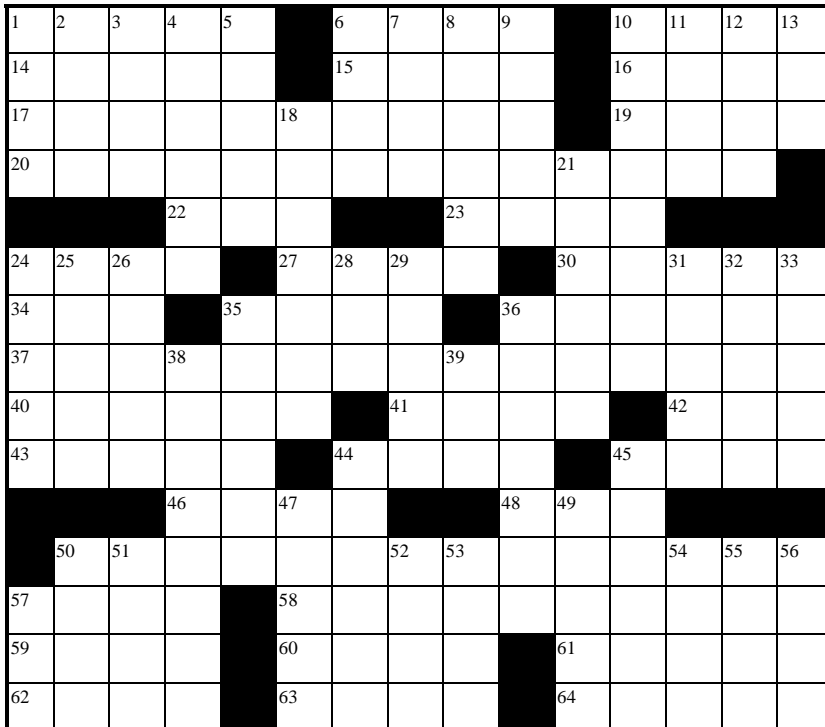
Mix the jalapeno chips, the cheese squeeze, and chicken together. Mix thoroughly.

Step 4:

Once rice is done, open tortillas and place ingredients on each of the tortillas. Roll and serve.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Theme: It's a Wrap



From USAtoday.com

Puzzle created by: Jim Curran

ACROSS

1. Washington Follower
6. Finish third
10. Bounders
14. "__c'est moi"
15. Fashion name
16. Pass over
17. It has true grit
19. Assess
20. Wrap
22. Key contractions
23. Some degrees
24. Beach-goer's catch
27. Duffers' triumphs
30. Gene Vincent's "Be-Bop-__"
34. Important time span
35. Be visibly dispirited
36. 1781 discovery

37. Wrap
40. Duty
41. Erstwhile acorns
42. A Nike's perch
43. Untouchables, for one
44. Epitome of grace
45. Parker of "Old Yeller"
46. It doesn't take much?
48. Cry of amused surprise
50. Wrap
57. Panache
58. F, to the Board of Health
59. Perplexing path
60. Name in early T.V.
61. Brief in speech
62. Earned a warning, in a way
63. Checked out
64. They may be deserted

ANSWER KEYS

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 5 | 2 | 3 |
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| 3 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| 2 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 4 |
| 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 9 | 3 | 6 |
| 7 | 7 | 3 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 6 |
| 7 | 8 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| 1 | 9 | 6 | 1 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 7 | 3 |
| 7 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 3 |
| 7 | 3 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 2 |
| 4 | 5 | 4 | 6 | 1 | 9 | 8 | 2 | 5 |

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| 4 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 2 | 9 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
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| 4 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 8 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 2 |
| 1 | 7 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 8 |
| 9 | 8 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 3 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 7 | 2 | 8 | 6 |
| 2 | 4 | 9 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 3 |
| 8 | 6 | 7 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 9 | 4 | 5 |

DOWN

1. Knighted Guinness
2. Singer sample
3. "Got two fives for__?"
4. She never got cold feet
5. Arrange hair
6. Multitude
7. Famous diamond
8. Many many
9. Far from the best
10. Popular side dish
11. Father's word
12. Intentional loss
13. Hog heaven
18. Allege
21. Swiss beets
24. Archaeologist's find
25. Wine-taster's consideration
26. Kennel Sounds
28. LAPD alter
29. Start the second crop, e.g.
31. Bring together
32. Publishers Henry and Clare
33. Sackcloth partner
35. Capital of Lesotho
36. Anonymous
38. Took a liking (to)
39. Battery type
44. 2000 Olympics city
45. Skills
47. Get away from
49. Country on the island of Hispania
50. Word with stick
51. "Purple __"(Hendrix tune)
52. To be, in Roma
53. Sneak attack
54. Earthy deposit
55. Certain Scots
56. Some food grains
57. Ends of a midterm

ANSWER KEY

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| S | E | S | L | E | S | I | D | E | Y | E | D | E | P | S |
| E | S | R | E | T | E | S | I | D | E | S | E | Z | M | A |
| Y | A | R | I | T | A | R | Y | A | S | N | U | N | E | L |
| R | E | R | M | E | R | W | A | R | W | A | R | O | H | A |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| S | S | E | F | N | A | W | S | E | T | S | V | A | C | A |
| E | T | E | S | A | K | O | T | S | O | P | O | I | M | P |
| H | C | I | W | D | N | S | A | B | R | A | W | O | L | O |
| S | N | U | S | U | R | A | N | P | E | O | M | O | E | R |
| A | L | U | L | A | S | A | L | S | P | A | R | Y | S | A |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| E | N | E | C | E | A | S | D | E | A | S | C | N | O | N |
| Y | L | E | V | R | E | P | A | P | Y | R | E | R | E | M |
| T | I | O | M | O | C | O | C | O | C | O | T | A | T | L |
| A | D | S | W | O | H | S | A | M | S | S | H | O | A | D |

NOTICES

CHANGES TO THE MAIL RULE

Provided by Mail Room Administration

Effective Jan. 13, 2025, the mail rule has been revised to address concerns regarding safety, security, and the well-being of both Adults in Custody (AICs) and staff. Mail post-marked after this date will be subject to the revised rule.

Some of the new requirements that friends and family of AICs should be aware of include:

- Incoming mail must be in pen, lead pencil, or be typewritten or photocopied.
- Incoming mail must be written on standard weight (20 pound or less) white paper. This is standard copy/print paper.
- Incoming mail must be enclosed in a commercially produced envelope using standard weight (20 pound or less) white paper that is no larger than 9" x 12".

Examples of items that will be refused:

- Any non-white envelope
- Envelopes larger than 9" x 12"
- Envelopes that are not commercially produced
- Envelopes made of cardboard, padded, corrugated, or tear-resistant material
- Envelopes constructed of heavy weight paper (that is, greater than 20 pound) or with security screening features
- Cardstock (such as is used for greeting cards and postcards)

Greeting cards and postcards are not allowed.

There are no changes to the legal mail requirements

This information is also being provided to your friends and family in the visiting lobby, via the F&F emailed newsletter, and on the DOC Facebook page.

LIBRARY HIRING

Orderly Position Open

EOCI's Library is currently hiring for an orderly position.

Criteria:

- 12 months of clear conduct
- No record of staff assaults
- Willingness to take direction
- Ability to work on your feet
- A self-starter

Position starts at 5 PRAS points and works regular office hours. Holidays and weekends off.

Send fully completed application to IWP.

BOOK ROTATION

A Notice from the Library

Book rotation for housing units will not occur in January. The library is in the process of reorganizing.

Rotation will restart in February.

COMISSARY NOTICES

Provided by the Commissary Operations Manager

Commissary News:

Commissary has received a replacement on the Religious Storage Containers. These will be available for purchase at \$2.71 once our current inventory is depleted. Commissary forms will be updated with this information soon.

Postcards are being discontinued. Get your postcards while supplies last.

Commissary Reminders:

Soda tickets will only be credited if an AIC has been transferred to a different facility.

The AIC has 30 days from the date of transfer to submit an AIC communication form requesting a credit from the commissary where the soda tickets were purchased. You must include the unused soda tickets and a receipt as proof of purchase. The receipt may not be more than 90 days old from the date of request.

Commissary will not issue credit for damaged tickets or issue credit if the soda machine takes your ticket without dispensing a soda.

Please write legibly and include your full name, SID number and institution when submitting a commissary order form, communication or suggestion form to Commissary.

Commissary appreciates all suggestions and requests. Unfortunately, due to the extreme volume of suggestions and requests Commissary receives, we cannot respond to each request individually. Please watch your newsletter for periodic updates regarding items

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being added or discontinued. If a product is approved, you will see it added to the Commissary list. We strive to keep updated quality products and to remove unpopular items from Commissary. Please continue to submit your suggestions and requests.

OREGON CANTEEN SHOE WARRANTY INFORMATION NOTICE

Make sure the shoes or boots fit before you accept them. There is no DOC canteen warranty, and all sales are final. **ACCESS VENDOR WARRANTY:** We offer a 30-day limited warranty on all shoes. If the shoes have a manufacturer's defect, do not have worn soles, do not show signs of abuse and were purchased within the 30-day period, send the shoes, sales receipt, package authorization slip and a brief explanation for the return to:

Keefe Group Customer Service
ATTN: Oregon Canteen Shoe Returns
55-101 Vista Blvd.
Sparks, NV 89434

If the shoes are determined to be

defective and fall within these guidelines, we will replace them with the same shoe at no charge. If the same shoe is out of stock or discontinued, we will replace them with a similar shoe in price and style. There will be no cash refunds.

Any shoe over 30 days old will not be replaced or repaired. Please do not try to return shoes that are over 30 days old; they will be returned at owner's expense. Vendor offers a 30-day warranty for manufacturer defects. Commissary is not the warrantor. No manufacturer warranty applies. ODOC adults in custody are not allowed to return their shoes to the manufacturer for repair or replacement. **DISCLAIMER:** Every effort has been made to show and describe the merchandise and all information as accurately as possible. However, many manufacturers make changes in design, color, and style during the year.

We regret any changes that may occur. All shoes are subject to DOC approval and can be removed at any time.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS UPDATE

Provided by Health Services

The EHR Project Team is still working hard to scan all paper medical records into the new electronic health record (EHR) system. This important work helps you and the people who take care of your health at ODOC because your scanned medical records are quickly and easily available.

We wanted to give you this update and share important things to remember:

- We have now scanned all overflow paper medical records.
- For now, you will still have a

paper medical chart where Health Services will keep your important health information.

- When Health Services starts using the HER, any remaining paper medical records will be scanned.
- You still request medical records the way you always have in your institution.

The EHR Project Team will continue to keep you updated throughout the project.

If you have an EHR questions, send a kyte addressed: Ask EHR

PREA INFORMATION

Sexual abuse and harassment are never okay. Tell Someone. GET HELP.

Call the Inspector General's Hotline:

1. Pick up a handset
2. Press *999 to leave a message

All PREA Calls are confidential.

Send a letter to the Governor:

Governor's Office, State Capitol,
Room 160, 900 Court St., Salem, OR
97301

The Oregon Department of Corrections has a zero tolerance policy for sexual abuse and harassment. AICs family can report on their behalf by contacting the Inspector General's public hotline at: (877) 678-4222.

El Abuso sexual y el acoso sexual nunca son aceptables. Avisele a alguien. CONSIGA AYUDA.

Llame al Inspector General:

1. Al numero de ayuda:
2. Levante el teléfono, marque *999.

Todas las llamadas a 'PREA' son gratis y confidenciales.

También puede reportar a la oficina del Gobernador por escrito.

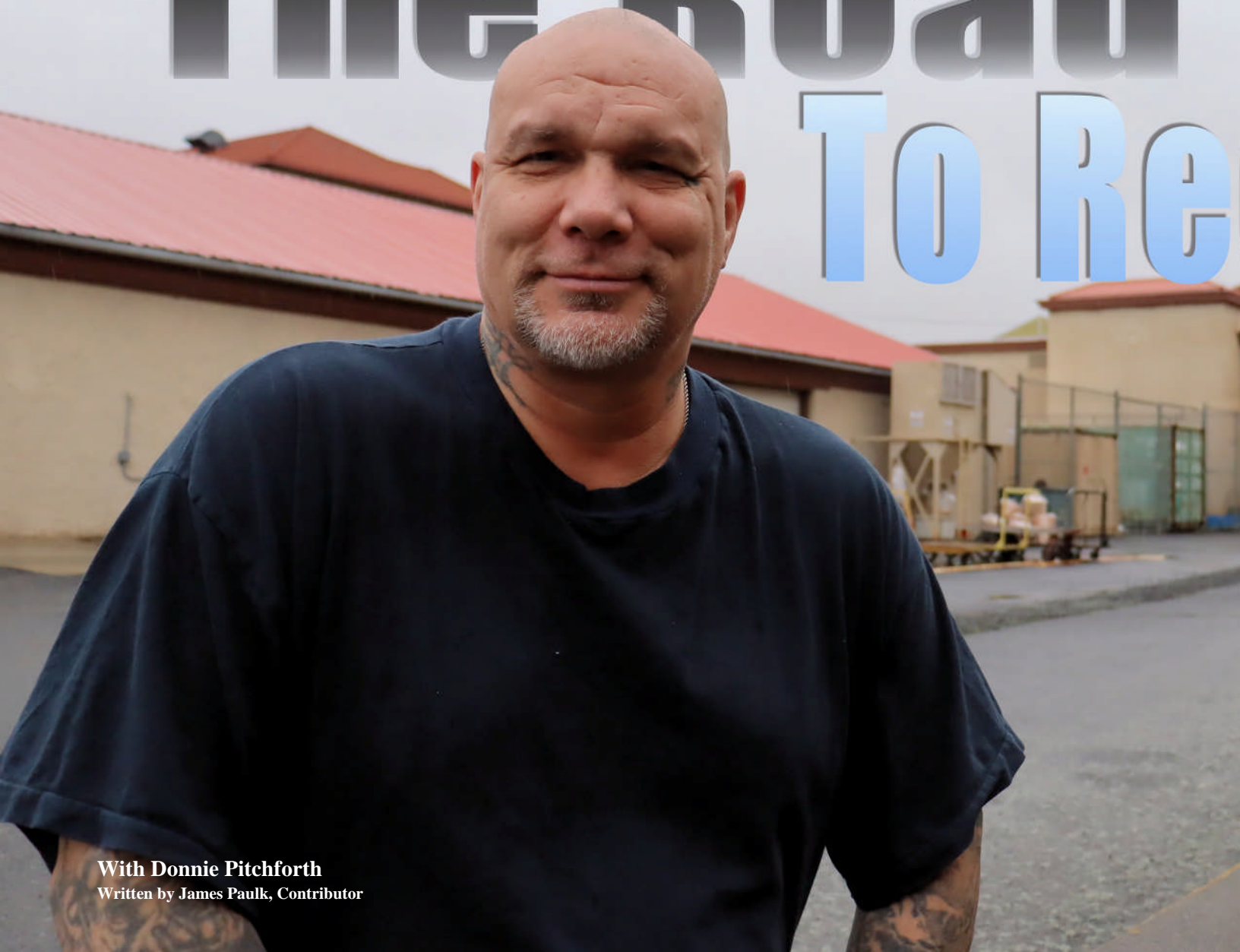
Governor's Office, State Capitol,
Room 160,
900 Court St.,
Salem, OR 97301

Sus amigos o familiares pueden hacer un reporte llamando a la línea del Inspector General al 877-678-4222.

PREA Advocate:

You may write the PREA advocate at:
ODOC PREA Advocate
3601 State St.,
Salem, OR 97301

The Road To Re



With Donnie Pitchforth
Written by James Paulk, Contributor

Photo by Phillip Luna/The Echo

Donnie Pitchforth at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution on Dec. 27, 2024. Pitchforth celebrates eight years of sobriety.

Donnie Pitchforth is a mentor for the AMEND program, facilitates mindfulness classes in segregation, and attends a 12-step meeting regularly. He is employed in the garment factory in a highly paid and sought after job at EOCI. Pitchforth attributes his successes to eight years of sobriety, an extraordinary milestone for anyone who suffers from the cunning and baffling disease of addiction - but it was not always that way.

Pitchforth began using alcohol and drugs at age eleven. “Everyone was doing it” he said.

He did not realize that he was numbing the pain from childhood trauma.

Pitchforth grew up in an abusive home and used substances to mask his experience. He feels the distress he knew as a child contributed to his substance use disorder as an adult.

In his adolescence he became a bully, creating trauma and pain for others.

While most criminal behavior results from a variety of factors, data from the U.S. Department of Justice indicates childhood trauma and substance use disorder increases the likelihood of committing a violent crime.

Pitchforth was 18 the first time he went to prison. He was sent to Washington States’ McNeil Island, or “The



RECOVERY

His prison sentence did not end his substance use disorder, nor did it stop his violent criminal behavior.

At OSP, Pitchforth joined the boxing program where he said he learned self-discipline. However, his antics in prison would eventually lead him away from OSP, and Oregon all together.

“I went from being Donnie the boxer to Donnie the dope-fiend,” he said.

Incarcerated people who exhibit extraordinarily disruptive, violent or dangerous behavior can be subject to interstate transfers in order to maintain the safety of a facility. In 2008, Pitchforth was sent to the New Jersey State Penitentiary, more than 2,900 miles away from Oregon and his family.

“They told me I’d be there for the rest of my natural life,” he said.

But that was not the case. He returned to Oregon a few years later. Being in New Jersey, so far away from his family, made him realize how important it was to stay sober.

“I’m not the only one that pays the price when I get loaded,” he said. “My family are the people that truly suffer.”

Pitchforth said that when he returned to Oregon, the real changes began. He had started getting sober in 2005, but sobriety was a long-term goal.

He is a father of six and a grandfather of five. Pitchforth said the secret to his sobriety is making family first, but also understanding that sobriety is a daily process.

In 2016, he relapsed, but he does not consider this a failure - only part of the process. He has learned to forgive himself for his missteps.

“I have no reservations now. No matter what, I can’t get loaded,” he said.

When Pitchforth thinks about using drugs, he remembers his family and how important they are to him.

In addition to family, programs also played a role in his success. Pitchforth credited a program he took around 2016 at the Two Rivers Correctional Institution, called Personal Rehabilitation Development. He described learning to take accountability for his actions and learning empathy for others, including the victims of his crimes.

According to Pitchforth, change always comes with growing pains.

“I had to learn to ignore the critics and the noise that comes when you make positive changes after living a criminal lifestyle for so long,” he said. “Your peers do not always want you to change.”

Pitchforth expressed that often sobriety and changing your lifestyle can be difficult because of the people around you.

“Misery loves company,” he said. “People are like crabs in a bucket, always trying to get you back in.”

He did not have a support structure for recovery inside of prison - he only had so-called friends that continued to offer him drugs.

His children and a potential chance at overturning his life sentence one day drove his desire to change.

“I try to be available for the hopeless today,” he said. “For the people that were once like me and saw no reason to change.”

Pitchforth explained that he did not have a sober role model, so wants to be that for others now. |ECHO

Rock” as he called it.

“I was scared to death,” he said.

Pitchforth described being involved in a race riot that was “the scariest thing” he had ever been through.

At 22, after years of committing crimes and drug use, Pitchforth was behind bars again at the Oregon State Penitentiary. In 1995, he was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for aggravated murder.

THE ECHO, VOLUME XIII - ISSUE 74

Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution

2500 Westgate

Pendleton, OR

97801

COME AND WORK FOR THE ECHO

The Echo is currently seeking to add a correspondent to the masthead, with potential for advancement. This position starts at 11 PRAS points.

Criteria:

- Must be NCI level 2 or higher
- Must work well with staff and AICs of many different backgrounds

Duties include:

- Incorporating writing feedback and taking direction
- Will include article writing, conducting interviews, and researching various topics
- Attending training sessions with outside journalists and other field experts
- Completing weekly homework assignments on AP style writing, news article structure and grammar and punctuation
- Work within the guidelines of ethical journalism, as set by the Society of Professional Journalist
- Ability to be impartial and to look at a topic from multiple angles
- A positive attitude and outlook. The Echo does not publish articles that are unnecessarily disparaging to the institution, the Department of Corrections or other incarcerated people

Hours of Work:

Correspondents are scheduled on weekdays. They may also be sent on assignment during evenings and weekends (covering sporting events, multi activity nights, religious service events, etc...).

To Apply:

Send a communication form (kyte) **and a job application** to IWP.

If you have not completed an application in the last three months, please resubmit.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Do you have a story of sobriety and recovery you would like to share with The Echo and its readers? Contact IWP: The Echo via communication form and let us know.

The Echo's "Road to Recovery" articles are written by contributor James Paulk.

Paulk has been sober for 12 years and completes 12-step programs. He has struggled with substance use disorder for most of his life. He hopes to share stories of successful recovery in the incarcerated setting.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Are you interested in sharing what you've learned during your time in prison? Edging closer to that release date?

Send a communication form to IWP and let us know. You may be featured in next month's "What I've Learned" section.

The Echo and 1664 are publications of the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution.

Direct questions and comments to EOCI Institution Work Programs (IWP). All views and opinions expressed are those of the contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Corrections.

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