

Prison welding teaches, inspires

So say the inmates taking the class at Deer Ridge. For them, it's a reason to get up in the morning and, maybe, a trade they can use once they're outside.

By Lauren Dake / *The Bulletin*

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MADRAS —

Next week, the welding class at Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras will break for the holidays. The inmates won't have to be at class at 8 a.m., they won't be welding until late into the afternoon, and they can get through the week without working on any difficult math problems.

And they are dreading it.

"It's horrible; you just sit around," said Sam Hamby, 28, who has been in Deer Ridge for nine months for property crimes and is one of the tutors in the class.

Through Central Oregon Community College and thanks to a federal grant, a welding pilot program was launched this year at the state's prison in Madras. The inmates will graduate with an American Welding Society certificate. Next year, the students who graduate will receive college credit. The welding room has about \$300,000 worth of equipment. The goal of the class is to give inmates tools they can use once they have served their time. But inside, it also helps the 10 students and three tutors get out of bed and feel like there is a purpose to their day.

"It gives us something to look forward to when we get out," said Jason George, 24, of Klamath Falls, who is in prison for assault.

"(And) it gives us something to look forward to tomorrow," he said.

The inmates eligible for the class have to be between 18 and 35 and can't be murderers, sex offenders or someone who has committed a violent crime against children.

"A lot of these guys came in not knowing anything about welding," said Tucker Bauman, the professor who is an employee with COCC and contracted through DRCI.

But now, Bauman said, the men can build intricate birdhouses and they have built benches for a veterans memorial in Madras.



Rob Kerr / The Bulletin

Inmate David Rystedt 36 welds a piece of steel earlier this week at the Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras. The class is run through Central Oregon Community College and aims to give inmates a craft to follow once they are released. Inmates who graduate will receive an American Welding Society certificate.



Rob Kerr / The Bulletin

Deer Ridge Correctional Institution inmate Sam Hamby welds a bench earlier this week at the state's prison in Madras. Hamby said the welding class has given him a tool to use once he's released. He enjoys the design elements involved with welding.

A lot of them also came in without knowing much about education or formal classes. Some have received their General Educational Development (GED) certificate in prison. And now, through the class with COCC they have a taste of what education can be like.

"Since they have started here almost everyone of them says they want to pursue their education and get an associate's degree," Bauman said.

Matthew Krupp, 26, serving time for robbery, and Brandon Will, 28, in for assault, both said they hope their welding training will lead to jobs in the future.

"When you get out without any skills, it takes a lot to start with nothing and get on your feet," Will said. "We're being proactive, to make our life easier."

Krupp said he has a young family to provide for. "This is good for people who want to get out and make something for themselves and not go back and do the same thing," he said.

A lot of the men have never held down jobs, Hamby said.

"This gives guys a chance to do something. Before, a lot of them sold drugs and if they don't have a trade, they get out and are broke and fall back on what they know," he said. "Now they get out and have a trade. They see what it's like to know how to make money and not have to look over your shoulder all the time or feel bad about what you do."

Deer Ridge has capacity for both medium- and minimum-security inmates but the opening of the medium-security portion of the prison has been postponed indefinitely. Minimum-security inmates have less than 36 months left on their sentences. The prison also offers janitorial, food service, laundry and wood shop vocational programs.

"It makes us feel a lot better than sitting around lifting weights," Will said.

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