Project Green Sleeves Native Plant Nursery Sprouting At Geiger

Two thousand saplings soak up sun and water at Geiger Corrections Center, soon to be joined by thousands more. The fledgling trees and shrubs are part of the Project Green Sleeves partnership between Geiger Corrections and The Lands Council. This watershed rehabilitation project for Latah, Deep and Coulee creeks helps heal and stabilize water-sheds while connecting re-entry offenders to environmental-based career options through the “Roots Of Success” vocational initiative.

The Project Green Sleeves partnership, launched last spring with funds donated in large part by the Smith-Barbiera Progressive Fund, continues taking form with establishment of the native species nursery, a stream bank stabilization planting project along Coulee Creek and the startup of an environmental literacy program to connect Geiger offenders to the ecological and environmental careers.

Geiger Programs Officer Ray Gawenit and a crew of 20 inmate workers potted the bare root seedlings mid-May at Geiger. Tim Houtz, Geiger Maintenance, set up an irrigation system to keep the seedlings well watered through the summer months. These trees will not only stabilize eroding banks of Latah and Coulee Creeks, fish and wildlife will benefit and water quality will improve. Several streamside work dates have been scheduled this summer and fall for Geiger Work Crews to plant trees in both riparian and upland areas of the creeks, irrigate previously planted trees and protect new plantings by removing invasive shrubs and grasses.

Geiger inmates receive service credit for their work. Participation in the program outside the classroom satisfies court-ordered supervised community service sanctions issued by Superior Court’s Therapeutic Drug Court or volunteer labor hours required in Geiger’s cognitive behavioral therapy classes.

“Roots of Success” classroom curriculum is designed not only to pique offenders’ interest in safe-guarding and repairing watersheds, but provide basic environmental education leading to career opportunities in landscaping, ecology and botanical propagation. “Roots of Success” is active in 35 states. Eight-six percent of the program’s more than 10,000 graduates significantly improved their academic, work readiness and leadership skills.

Apple Health Providing Post-Release Substance Treatment, Mental Health Care

Apple Health is Washington’s new Medicaid. Washington State (and 25 other states) expanded Medicaid eligibility on Jan. 1, 2014. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) federal funding supports this expansion.

In excess of 60 percent of the jail and Geiger offender population has either drug or mental health problems, or both. Geiger Lieutenant Joanne Lake observed that new Medicaid eligibility criteria will directly address the needs of these offenders. “We’ve struggled for decades to find mental health care, addiction treatment and medical coverage for our releasing inmates. This is a game changer. Although ACA and Apple Health provide no financial relief for the jail and Geiger, these new enrollment provisions will directly benefit most of our inmates upon release.”

Previously, poverty-bound adults under age 65 without legal dependents were ineligible for Medicaid. This included the majority of Spokane County Jail and Geiger inmates. Apple Health provides coverage for these adults, whereas before, unless their condition was assessed as debilitating, care was typically unavailable.

Apple Health allows individuals and families earning up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level (individuals up to $16,000 a year, a family of four up to $32,500) free enrollment.

Spokane County, according to the Spokane Regional Health District, has a higher incidence of serious adult mental illness (8%) than the statewide average (5%). The SRHD suggests the higher rate may reflect the County’s poverty level.

LT. Lake notes that, by sheer numbers, Spokane County Jail is one of the largest mental health care facilities in the state. “Our Mental Health team and Case Managers in the past have attempted to refer these individuals to treatment and care resources in the community, but funding and placement were always a roadblock. With help from people like Phyllis Fernandez of DSHS and treatment coordinators in the community, we’d attempt to identify funding on a case by case basis before they were released. It was the best we could do. Sometimes it worked, often it didn’t. Now, with the inception of Apple Health, knowing they can be enrolled and will receive services upon release is huge—it’s literally help instead of handcuffs. It gives our Mental Health team and drug/alcohol evaluators immediate options. Most of all, it gives the offenders a viable way to make positive changes in their lives and stop coming to jail.”

Affordable Care Act pays 100 percent of the costs of newly eligible enrollees in states that expanded Medicaid. Previously, most Medicaid costs in Washington state were divided equally with the federal government. Total federal reimbursement runs through 2016, declining to 90 percent by 2020.
Sheriff Knezovich Congratulates, Inspires At Breaking Barriers Graduation Events

Spokane County Detention Services Community Corrections programs are fortunate to have Sheriff Ozzie Knezovich as a staunch supporter and advocate. It was under his direction in 2010 that Geiger’s reformation, re-entry education and substance treatment programs were re-established after falling victim to the recession and reduced funding in 2009. The Sheriff addresses each graduating class in Treatment (New Horizon Care Centers) and Re-Entry Education (Breaking Barriers, Fulcrum Institute). While he’s deservedly earned a reputation as being tough on crime, he’s wholly supportive of offenders working for positive change and delights in their success. “The payoff for me is when an offender greets me on the street and tells me their plan for change is working, then introduces me to their child. Our efforts to stem recidivism are as much for the kids and the community as the offender, because cause children of offenders become offenders. These programs are making a difference.” Typically the Sheriff relates a personal experience to the graduates, emphasizing the devastation arrest and incarceration have on the children of offenders. He also cites examples of success and accomplishment offenders have made by utilizing post-release help that’s available through the Fulcrum Institute. Thank you, Sheriff Knezovich, for your continued support!

How Many Volleyball Courts Fit In The Convention Center’s Main Exhibit Hall?

Spokane Convention Center’s sprawling main exhibit hall was recently transformed into the largest volleyball tournament venue ever seen in the Pacific Northwest, as the Girls’ Pacific Northwest Qualifier (PNG) tournament invaded Spokane and Cheney the final two weekends of March. Geiger Work Crew teams spent the day placing sport-court flooring and erecting netting. The Work Crews were able to fit 14 volleyball courts into the cavernous 82,000 square foot main exhibit area. Geiger Work Crews also set up 17 PNG courts at EWU in Cheney. The competitive event covered two full weekends and included nearly 600 girls’ volleyball teams from throughout the Pacific Northwest. Geiger Work Crew Supervisor Sgt. Jason Robison commented the Work Crews were anxious to begin, as this was their first big gig of spring. Sgt. Robison welcomes Spokane County Detention Services Community Corrections Officers Ken Conwell and Antony Durbin, chosen as new Work Crew Officers this year. Congratulations to them, the Work Crew inmates and all the Work Crew Officers for another impressive effort! They’ve since worked Bloomsday preparation and clean-up, and will work Spokane Indians baseball, the Interstate Fair, and Hoopfest, plus their on-going downtown L-80 beautification project and never-ending roadway litter detail.

Geiger Work Crews Key To Neighborhood Clean-Up Efforts

April 26 was the kick-off for this year’s Spokane neighborhood clean-up. Geiger Work Crews, in cooperation with the City of Spokane’s Neighborhood Council, assisted with community clean up events in the Hillyard and Lincoln Heights neighborhoods. This was an opportunity for residents in those areas to dispose of clean green waste, garbage and recycle materials free of charge. Geiger assisted residents in the unloading and sorting of materials into the appropriate dumpsters. Vehicles were lined up for blocks even before the start time and continued steadily throughout the afternoon. Geiger crews were credited with the smooth and orderly flow of the clean-up, and for their professional and polite interaction with the public. Geiger Work Crews have several other neighborhood clean-up events scheduled this year. Work Crew Officers Clint Barnett and Mike Egland supervised this effort.

Message Of Hope, Inspiration Shines Through Volunteers

Rev. Glenn & Dorothy Johnson lead Christian worship services and Bible study groups for Spokane County Jail & Geiger Corrections center, helping offenders turn regret and despair into hope and confidence through the love of God. The Johnsons are fully committed to the offenders they counsel, bringing the message that each has the capacity not only to break their pattern of criminal behavior and begin emotional redemption, but to share the message and lift others toward spiritual sustenance.

One Geiger inmate explained he enjoys the Johnson’s classes and group discussions because they relate to inmates as fellow brothers and sisters of God. “They help us cope with incarceration, but their greatest message is to look toward the future with an eye on helping others. Their message is strong because they don’t judge; they inspire.” The Johnsons leave impressions on inmates that endure. At a recent Saturday afternoon Geiger Bible Study, one offender commented he’d not seen them for several years—he’d been sent to prison—and was wondering if the medical challenge Dorothy faced turned out o.k. Glenn, not at all surprised by this inmate’s recollection, stated Dorothy did recover—then thanked the offender for his prayers. The other inmates applauded Dorothy.

Glen and Dorothy spent April this year on a mission project to the Philippines. This was their second mission to the Philippines. Glenn commented that while the Philippines have made strides in quality of life and that many sectors are advancing, a large segment of the population still languishes in poverty. The Johnsons serve the jail and Geiger as volunteers and are board members on the donation-funded Spokane Co. Jail Ministries, led by Chaplin Roger Swift.