The Lands Council is partnering with Sheriff Knezovich, business leaders and Geiger Community Corrections to launch an inmate Work Crew and education program designed to safeguard and enhance local waterways while providing inmates real-life employment skills training and in the classroom, the Lands Council is a Spokane area grassroots, non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and revitalizing the quality of Idaho North- west forests, water and wildlife.

Sheriff Knezovich, The Lands Council and Geiger staff hosted business invitees May 16 for a “Breakfast With The Sheriff” fundraiser at Mirabeau Point Park’s Center Place event facility. Sheriff Knezovich told how the fledging Geiger/Lands Council program, named “The Green Sleeves Project,” would continue the Council’s commitment to improve Spokane area water quality through the effort of inmate Work Crews while providing offenders with basic landscape and nursery skills training.

Sheriff Knezovich stated his office is very good at catch-and-release law breakers. “We haven’t been as effective helping offenders reshape their lives and preventing their kids from becoming offenders, too.”

He explained that while Geiger Corrections Center has done a great job re-establishing treatment, education and re-entry readiness programs for offenders, a constant challenge has been funding. “Captain McGrath and Lt. Lake have put together an effective group of programs to help offenders re-establish productive lives, and they’ve done it with minimal funding by partnering with business and non-profit organizations. There’s a huge need to expand those programs, but we can only do it with your help.”

Amanda Swan of the Land Council told how the emphasis of the program is providing inmates an avenue of growth and education while protecting Spokane’s grass, shrubs and trees along sections of Latah (Fancham), Deep and Coulee Creeks. “These creeks absorb a lot of runoff, but there’s not much vegetation along the shorelines. So when the creeks rise, erosion takes a huge toll. This not only degrades the ecological habitat of the creeks themselves, but poisons tons of soil and agricultural lands and enters into the Spokane River. “To establish grass, shrubs and trees along the creeks is to protect them from flood erosion, and provide valuable wildlife habitat at the same time.”

Additionally important, the program fosters an awareness of work ethic, belief in the ability to succeed, and perhaps an interest in pursuing ecological restoration or landscape vocation after release. Employment is the one biggest factors in successful offender rehabilitation and transition back to the community.

The Lands Council and Sheriff Knezovich invite all businesses and interested individuals to support the Green Sleeves Project. The program receives no direct public funding.

The joint Lands Council/Geiger native species nursery will be developed and organized on-site at Geiger by Lands Council members. Geiger Sgt. Jon Simpler will supervise its daily maintenance and operation. Sgt. Simpler also supervises the Geiger Community Garden, which is expanding to 16 raised beds this year. Last summer Geiger inmates raised and donated more than a ton of fresh vegetables to area non-profits.

Kelly first used meth at age 12. “Meth is completely addictive. It keeps you from believing in yourself or even knowing who you are—and you’re not even aware of it. When I was using, I was amazed how some people could keep it all together—work, family, friends, cars. As it turned out, they didn’t. Every one of those people eventually unraveled and ended up broken and convicted. They all go down.”

Geiger’s inmate education and re-entry readiness programs, presented in partnership with the Fulcrum Institute, continue to gain momentum and yield results. One recently released inmate who’s availing himself of all the resources available from Geiger and the Fulcrum Institute—and excelling—is Kelly McGirk. She completed several Fulcrum pre-release classes at Geiger, obtained employment through Fulcrum Job Search, and is now working with a mentor.

The Fulcrum mentoring program pairs post-release offenders with volunteers trained to assist, coach, motivate and support them in their efforts to find and maintain employment, remain clean and sober, and begin shaping a new life. Fulcrum mentors include judges, attorneys, reformed offenders, crime victims, relatives of offenders and others just wanting to help.

Kelly’s mentor is Samantha Brown. Samantha, in addition to mentoring, recruits for the Fulcrum Business Roundtable, helps post-release offenders prepare for interviews and assists their search for employment.

Kelly, now in her early 30s, has a 4-year-old daughter who provides unlimited motivation to keep moving forward. “I learned to like myself; believe in myself. Just change is possible, and it begins internally.”

Kelly was incarcerated for vehicular theft and malicious mischief. Kelly participated in Judge Harold Clarke’s Thera
dagnostic Drug Court, was sanctioned for treatment vio-
lations and eventually terminated from the program. “Even though I didn’t make it through Drug Court, Judge Clarke was supportive and gave me motivation. I remember his words to me after I failed the program. He was sincere and inspirational, and I owe him the world.”

She stayed at Geiger provided time to reflect, and the courage to examine poor decisions with an eye to the future. “The Fulcrum classes in Anger Management, Job Skills and Emotional Development were not only educational, but gave me confidence. I also graduated from Ms. Butterfield’s Breaking Barriers pro-
gram—including the optional Employment Essentials section. Her class is so cool I wanted to take it twice.”

Kelly knows she’s still at risk of relapse. “I’m current-
ly attending outpatient treatment. I like the pace of the program as it’s a bit slower than intensive outpa
tent. This allows more time to explore each lesson and become completely engulfed in the details of rehab. I learned to like myself; believe in myself. Just about everything I do now is aimed in some way at separating farther and farther from my past.”

Sergeant Kelly eventually was arrested for vehicle theft and used up the car and another drug user ended up tak-

ing the car and destroying it in Mead Lake. I was convicted of vehicle theft and malicious mischief.”

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dagnostic Drug Court, was sanctioned for treatment vio-
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Keith Cunningham, Geiger Community Corrections, was sanctioned for treatment violations and eventually terminated from the program. “Even though I didn’t make it through Drug Court, Judge Clarke was supportive and gave me motivation. I remember his words to me after I failed the program. He was sincere and inspirational, and I owe him the world.”

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Sheriff, Businesses Join Together On The Lands Council Inmate Project
Affable Work Crew Deputy Ron Tomsha Ready To Set Hook On Retirement

Geiger Work Crew Deputy Ron Tomsha’s is retiring. Ron has led Geiger Work Crew the past 11 years. He’ll turn over the keys to his International Harvester transporter, then catch up on some long-neglected relaxation and fishing. “I don’t have a lot of hobbies, but we’ll regroup hopefully catch some big trout and take some time to enjoy this beautiful area.”

Ron won’t be spending a lot of time travelling. “There’s more than enough to keep us busy right here locally. This is a special place.”

Ron hasn’t had much time to enjoy this most beautiful place on earth since beginning his working career over 60 years ago. He was with Kaiser Mead Works back in the heyday of aluminum smelting in Spokane, then signed up with Geiger in 2002. “Spokane and its job market have changed a lot since I first went to work at the Mead plant. Good paying jobs are harder to find, education and vocational training are more critical than ever, and the traditional trades unions are the exception.”

Ron explains that one of the reasons he came to cherish his role as Work Crew Deputy is “These guys are facing a tough job market, and a little direction and encouragement go a long way. The Work Crew offenders are hard workers who’ve typically not had a lot of constructive guidance and made some poor decisions. They’ll labor all day long on a sandwich and are able to maintain a positive demeanor despite the most daunting workload or working conditions.”

Ron vividly recalls the big snow winter of 2008. “Every day was an effort, and everybody we helped dig out genuinely appreciated the inmates’ effort. We didn’t take the chains off our work crew trucks for weeks. The inmates couldn’t have been more emotionally uplifted by the elderly and disabled they helped. While it was our most difficult winter, it taught the Work Crew a lot about themselves and a lot about others. Blessings come disguised in unlikely ways.”

For one of his final projects, Ron’s Work Crew transported literally tons of surplus Spokane County property to Post Falls for the annual Spokane County auction. “While collecting the salable items, I had the opportunity to meet people from nearly every county department. They’re some of the best people anywhere.”

Congratulations to Ron, who made a difference helping inmates realize their capabilities and explore new potential. He’ll have the fish cooperating in short order, just like his Work Crew.

Geiger-Fulcrum Job Skills class recently hosted guest speaker Don Russell, proprietor of Don’s Mobile Wash in Spokane.

Don’s Mobile Wash is a Fulcrum Business Roundtable participant, helping offenders make a new start through counseling, assistance in employ-ment placement and job retention.

Don explained to the inmates how he, with help, was able to break away from drugs and crime. “I became involved in the Fulcrum Business Roundtable because for me, giving back to those in need motivates and inspires. I give it away in order to keep it.”

Don has a unique business washing very large things. His business is touted as Spokane’s only mobile friction wash. One particular piece of equipment he uses is a huge vertical spindling “brush”—similar to what you’d see in a carwash. Only this brush is mounted on a wheeled base that can be maneuvered by hand to wash very tall and very large objects—like an entire semi-truck and trailer. In fact, he can clean an entire fleet of trucks in short order.

Don has the ability to clean heavy equipment, houses, roofs and mobile homes—and more.

Geiger thanks Don for sharing his path in regaining a stable and productive life, and helping motivate, encourage and advise Job Skills inmates.

Detention Services Realigned Under County Commissioners; Mission Unchanged

Administrative alignment of Spokane County Detention Services switched from Sheriff Knezovich’s Office to the Spokane County Board of County Commissioners on June 1. This change was the result of joint budgetary and administrative analysis by the Sheriff and the County Commissioners, and allows the Sheriff to better focus his efforts on law enforcement. The commissioners offer unrivaled public fund management expertise to facilitate increased departmental efficiencies and are actively participating in the current analysis of the local criminal justice community. That analysis will result in recommendations later this year regarding the overall organizational structure and operations of the courts, prosecutors, public defenders, Detention Services, Pre-Trial Services and probation. The goal is to explore opportunities to enhance services, streamline for better outcomes, improve communication between departments and increase efficiencies.

The County Commissioners and the Sheriff share the common goal of increasing public safety while reducing the recidivism. Geiger Corrections Center treatment and education programs were begun under Sheriff Knezovich. The Sheriff is very tough on crime and criminals. However, he gives unwavering support to offenders making the commitment to change their lives. That will remain our objective. I’ve never seen the Sheriff more passionate or grateful than when he’s speaking to one of our Breaking Barriers group classes. We are indebted to Sheriff Knezovich for his leadership, judgment and dedication. I assure you he will continue his special interest in Geiger inmates working to change their lives and become successful parents and productive citizens.

Sincerely, Geiger Lt. Joanne Lake