

Elmira inmates make signs for Ernie Davis Center

12-21

When **Curtis Brown**, a correction officer at Elmira Correctional Facility, noticed the Ernie Davis Community Center was in need of new signs, he knew inmates at the Hill could help.

The facility has a building and maintenance class, which offers inmates vocational training. Curtis figured they could make the signs and worked with **Paul Chappius Jr.**, the prison's superintendent, **J.J. Mizgala**, superintendent of programs, and **Chris Moylan**, vocational instructor, to make it happen.

Four inmates worked together to create the three wooden signs. Two of the signs will soon be placed outside the Ernie Davis Community Center. The third sign will be placed outside the center's Bistro, which is open to the public, said **Anita Lewis**, the center's vice president of community donations.

"Merry Christmas and happy New Year," Anita said

Friday morning when the signs were presented by prison officials. "This is a great gift."

With meticulous detail, the inmates hand-painted each sign. Since classroom time is limited, they spent three months working on the signs. "They were glad to do something for the community," Chris said.

But the project was more than giving back to the community. For the inmates, it was also a way to learn a new trade, boost self-esteem and perhaps make a lengthy prison sentence pass more quickly.

Since the inmates who created the signs



Inmates at Elmira Correctional Facility created these three signs for the Ernie Davis Community Center. Prison officials presented them on Friday. Pictured, from left, are Anita Lewis, Paul Chappius Jr., Curtis Brown, Chris Moylan, J.J. Mizgala and Tina Brown. JENNIFER KINGSLEY / STAFF PHOTO

are unfamiliar with the legacy of Ernie Davis, the first African-American to win the Heisman Trophy, Chris has plans to change that. He already has approval from Paul for a special lesson.

Curtis is also working with officials to have inmates help with another project for the center. It was music to Anita's ears.

The center relies on grants, membership fees and donations for many of its cultural, recreational and educational activities.

In fact, the Head Start program at the center has openings for 14 children ages 3 and 4, she said. To enroll your child, call **Mindy Gaieski** at (607) 734-6208. They would like to fill the spaces by Monday.

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