

Elmira Star Gazette

Results of shock incarceration praised at Monterey 25th anniversary celebration

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Inmates march past gathered dignitaries Wednesday during a 25th anniversary celebration at the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility. / JEFF MURRAY / Staff Photo



This poster was on display Wednesday during a 25th anniversary of the shock incarceration program at the Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Schuyler County. / JEFF MURRAY / Staff Photo

MONTEREY — Paul Cipra was going the wrong way with his life, but now that he's been "shocked," he's ready to pursue his dream of a career as a baseball pitcher.

Cipra was among the 205 inmates who displayed their spit and polish Wednesday during a 25th anniversary celebration of New York's shock incarceration program.

Cipra, of Batavia, was sent to Monterey Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Schuyler County after being convicted of third-degree burglary, and he is two weeks away from completing the six-month program.

"I didn't have much direction, but the program taught me to take responsibility for my life," said Cipra, 23.

"I realized my family was paying for my mistakes. I'd recommend this program even to people who haven't been arrested. It teaches about addiction, time management and setting goals."

Camp Monterey, as it used to be known, was already a minimum security correctional facility when the state Department of Correctional Services launched a pilot shock incarceration program there in 1987.

The program is similar to a military boot camp regimen and also incorporates intensive substance abuse treatment and academic education within a therapeutic setting.

The program has since been instituted at other facilities.

As of last July, more than 45,000 inmates have graduated from the program, saving taxpayers more than \$1.3 billion for possible longer incarceration, according to state corrections officials.

Since 2007, only 7 percent of graduates ended up back in prison within a year, compared to 20 percent for all releases during that period.

"It is a rigorous program, a lot of hard work, which they are not used to doing," said Capt. Matt Whitmore, of the Monterey staff. "The idea is to break them down and then build them up."

State Commissioner of Corrections and Community Supervision Brian Fischer and other officials gathered Wednesday to mark the anniversary.

Inmate Chadd Wise of Nassau County said he can't wait to get a fresh start when he graduates in two weeks.

Wise, who also was convicted of third-degree burglary, said shock incarceration turned his life around.

"I had a selfish attitude. I only cared about me," said Wise, 28.

"The program showed me how to work as a team player. It taught me to have confidence in myself and keep pushing forward and never give up."