

25 years of shock: Inmates, staff appreciate prison alternative

Camp Monterey inmates march through camp Wednesday.

The Corning Leader

September 13, 2012

Monterey, N.Y. —

Inmates Chadd Wise and Paul Cipra will likely be freed in the coming weeks.

Both men are eager to leave behind their state-issued uniforms and rigid living conditions, but neither wants to forget their six months of incarceration. And more than likely, neither will be able to forget their time as inmates, but it has nothing to do with cramped cells or a lack of freedom.

Wise and Cipra are inmates at the Monterey Shock Incarceration Facility in Schuyler County, where inmates are put through a military-style boot camp to reprogram their attitudes and teach them necessary skills for living on the outside.

The facility, an alternative to prison and the first of four shock camps in New York state, opened 25 years ago this month and has taught Wise and Cipra life skills they would not have learned at a traditional prison.

“Shock changed my life a lot,” Cipra said Wednesday during an anniversary celebration at Monterey. “Before, I didn’t have much motivation. Shock has taught me motivation and responsibility.”

Said Wise: “When I came here, I had a selfish attitude. Everything was about me. Now I have integrity and am a team player ... It’s taught me good insight, and I’m in touch with a higher power.”

Wise and Cipra, who are both serving time for burglary, are members of the same platoon and scheduled to graduate in two weeks. During their six months at the Beaver Dams facility, they have been subjected to the same regimen as all shock inmates - group counseling, intensive alcohol and substance abuse treatment, physical training, drill instruction and work crews. Their daily routine includes a long, early morning run and lots and lots of marching to a cadence.

“We break them down, then build them back up,” said Capt. Matt Whitmore, who’s worked at the Monterey facility for about six years. “We give them something to work for and tools for a better life.”

According to the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, since shock’s inception in 1987, about 75 percent of the 62,000 shock inmates graduated. Also, the three-year recidivism rate for 2007 and 2008 shock graduates was 26 percent, compared to 42 percent for all released inmates.

Both Cipra and Wise are grateful for their time at Monterey, they said, and it’s apparent both have taken to the paramilitary camp - they answer questions and commands with “sir,” and they follow instructions to a T.

Wise, 28, of Long Island, said he plans to use the skills he learned at Monterey to push through trade school to become an electrician - something he trained for at the camp. Cipra, 23, of Batavia, said he hopes to revitalize his baseball career upon release.

"I'd recommend this program even to people who weren't arrested," Cipra said. "It's a great way to get life on track."

DOCCS Commissioner Brian Fischer said shock's success can be attributed to the facilities' staff members.

"In recognizing the history and value of the Shock Incarceration Program, we need to understand that we are recognizing our staff - the people who have dedicated their lives to helping others develop into better members of society," Fischer said.

Wise agreed with Fischer's sentiments.

"Staff here, they care," Wise said. "They know how to push the right buttons."

Whitmore said he spent 24 on-and-off years at the Elmira Correctional Facility before joining Monterey.

"This place basically changed my life," he said. "I'd probably be retired if (not for Monterey). I always tell people that it's a great place for inmates, but it's a better place for staff."