

Register Star - Inmates repair bikes for charity

11/7/2015

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HUDSON — Inmates at Hudson Correctional Facility have tuned up almost 30 recovered bicycles to give out to local children for Christmas.

The prison started the current incarnation of the program in 2007, in which inmates use the facility's Small Engine Vocational Shop to repair abandoned bicycles recovered by local police agencies.

The program builds inmates' mechanical skills and allows them to contribute to society, said Deputy Superintendent for Programs Paulette Miller.

"They take such pride in [the bikes,] because they know they're giving back to the community," Miller said.

The bikes are given to local charities as Christmas approaches, Miller added, usually to Catholic Charities of Columbia and Greene Counties, but a glut of bikes this year had the program looking for other charities to accept the bikes.

Inmates repair facility machinery such as lawnmowers and chainsaws at the Small Engine Vocational Shop when not working on the bikes, Miller added.

Ron McDonagh, the vocation and education supervisor at the prison, said "soft skills" were taught at the shop.

"It's all about the ability to communicate," McDonagh said.

Inmates working at the shop must be punctual and neatly dressed, and must interact with other inmates in a professional manner, he said.

John Porto, the prison's vocational instructor, described the shop as "teaching inmates not only a trade, but life skills."

The bike program, which Porto called "a great success" is incorporated into the normal schedule of the machine shop.

"The inmates really enjoy it," McDonagh said, adding they liked to stay busy during their time in the facility and the shop allows them to acquire work skills, both vocational and soft, that can be used when they are released back into society.

McDonagh said the bike program has grown since 2007, both in the number of bikes repaired and the number of inmates participating.

Hundreds of bikes have been repaired and donated since the program's inception, Miller said.

Theresa Lux, the executive director of Catholic Charities of Columbia and Green Counties, said the charity reaches out to its workers to find the families that can use the bikes.

The charity has traditionally received seven to 10 bikes from the prison, Lux said.

"It takes a little time to distribute them," Lux said, as the charity wants to make sure they go to families that would benefit from them.

The charity works with parents in need of the bikes before and after the holiday season, she added.

The charity, based in Hudson, looks to "spread the joy" throughout the region, having distributed bikes in Chatham in the past, she added.

Hudson Correctional Facility, East Court Street, Hudson, is an all-male medium security state prison, according to the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision.