

DOC: Inmate apprenticeships provide valuable skills after release

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OSHKOSH – Wisconsin Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Cathy Jess and Department of Workforce Development (DWD) leaders visited Oshkosh Correctional Institution to tout inmate apprenticeship programs which prepare inmates for good-paying careers.

DOC Secretary Cathy Jess shared that “preparing inmates for success in the community is a key focus for the Department of Corrections.” She continued by noting that “apprenticeships are one way that the Department of Corrections can provide in-demand training which leads to employment upon release, addressing recidivism and enabling inmates to move down a new path to self-sufficiency.”

Inmates at Oshkosh can enroll in arborist and culinary apprenticeship programs. Across all Department of Corrections facilities, there are currently 40 apprentices learning occupations such as baking, architectural drafting, and cooking. The registered apprenticeship program blends classroom learning and on-the-job training to provide produce highly-skilled workers. In total, 45 inmates have completed a registered apprenticeship program in the last five years.

With more than 100,000 open jobs on the Job Center of Wisconsin website, inmates represent a vast pool of potential employees. As more than 8,000 inmates are

released from DOC facilities each year, providing vocational training gives inmates a significant advantage in finding employment and can reduce recidivism.

“We are pleased to have strong partners such as the Wisconsin Restaurant Association and the state arborist apprenticeship committee to assist in advancing the Registered Apprenticeship program in our correctional facilities,” DWD Secretary Ray Allen said. “With Wisconsin’s unemployment at historically low levels, it is paramount that we give transitioning inmates the tools they need for rewarding careers upon their release.”

Wisconsin’s rich history in Registered Apprenticeship started back in 1911, when the state created the nation’s first modern apprenticeship law. In that very first year, 625 apprentices signed on in Wisconsin. Today, Wisconsin hosts more than 11,000 registered apprentices as the state expands to new apprentice fields in growing job markets. The role of apprenticeships is crucial to keeping the state’s workforce strong.