

WALLA WALLA

Union-Bulletin

Sunday, May 5, 2013

\$1.50

WE BRING THE VALLEY TO YOU

Sustainable Practices Lab puts inmates back to work

Changes in the correctional industries system caused the sign shop to be shuttered and the garments factory to be moved to Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility.

By **ANDY PORTER**
of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — “Everything old is new again” isn’t just a song lyric here.

“Here” is the Sustainable Practices Lab at Washington State Penitentiary.

“It’s all about restore, repair and reuse as opposed to replace,” said Robert Branscum, the correctional specialist who heads the program.

Housed in what used to be the large building for the prison’s sign shop and garment factory, the lab and its workers are a testament to the old saying about necessity being the mother of invention.

Last summer, changes in the correctional industries system caused the sign shop to be shuttered and the garments factory to be moved to Coyote Ridge Correctional Facility.



U-B photo by **ANDY PORTER**

Herbert Rice, also known as “Chief Rice,” one of the inmates working at the Sustainable Practices Lab, poses next to bicycle frame parts he has repainted and decorated for donation to the Walla Walla County Sheriff’s Office D.A.R.E. program. “If you could have seen this bike before, you would have been amazed,” he said about the refurbishing work.

See **GOAL**, Page A4



Walla Walla doubles up

✓ Goal to expand program to 120 inmates by end of year

Continued from Page A1

As a result, "this whole building was vacant as of July 16," Branscum said. "We lost essentially 120 offender jobs" as well as at least five staff jobs.

The Sustainable Practices Lab was developed to replace those lost jobs with employment that allows inmates to develop and use skills to benefit themselves and the community. And it does that while recycling goods and materials that might otherwise go to waste.

At present, 72 offenders are working in the lab. "Our goal is to expand that number up to 120 by the end of the year with the opening of the new (minimum security) complex. This will help to fill the need for jobs for the offenders assigned there, as well," he said.

A bicycle repair program was one of the first endeavours to get under way. Old and broken bikes collected through partnerships with local law enforcement agencies, colleges and charities are being repaired and rehabilitated. They are then handed to the local Eagles Lodge, which gives them to underprivileged families and children.

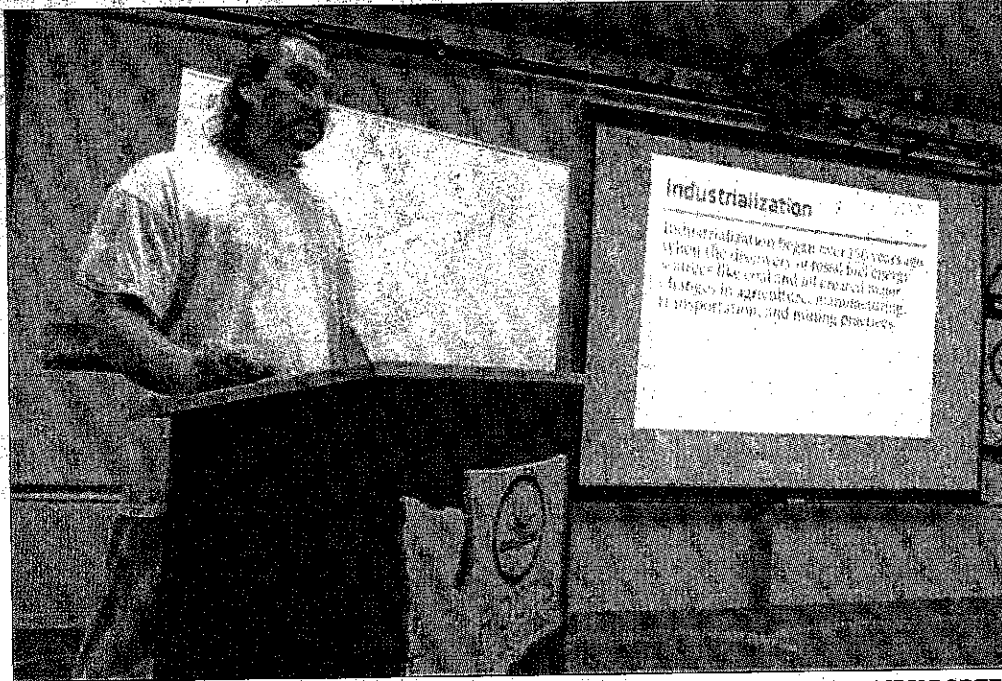
Since then, other activities using the same mantra of "restore, repair and reuse" have come into being. Included among them are repair and rehabilitation of furniture and exercise equipment, an extensive quilting and sewing shop, a wood shop and a vermiculture program.

The latter uses red worms, now numbering about 1.5 million, to eat about 700-800 pounds of food waste from the prison each week. The goal is to eventually have 10 million worms to turn 10 times that much waste into "vermicastings" and "worm tea" (another byproduct), which will go into the penitentiary's gardens as soil enhancements.

As with the other activities, the worm breeding bins and other equipment were built out of salvaged and recycled materials.

On another side of the building, the quilting and sewing shop is another example of turning one person's castoff goods into another person's gold — or at least a darn good teddy bear.

Working mostly by hand, inmates meticulously cut and sew everything



U-B photos by ANDY PORTER
Mike Hoover conducts a "Roots of Success" class at Washington State Penitentiary's Sustainable Practices Lab. The 10-week course, which began last week with 15 inmates enrolled, will teach students the fundamentals of recycling and how to translate those ideas into possible business opportunities in the outside world.



Scott Davis works on a quilt at the Sustainable Practices Lab at the Washington State Penitentiary. "I can see where people get addicted to it," he said about his work.

LAB PROGRAMS

- Bicycle repair — Repairs and restores bikes donated by law enforcement, colleges and charities. Bikes are then given to underprivileged families and children.
- Furniture repair — Cleans and repairs chairs, tables, desks and other office furniture that would have otherwise been discarded. Furniture is then reused at WSP or returned to the community.
- Quilting and sewing — Uses donated sewing machines, fabric, needles, thread, batting and stuffing to create quilts, stuffed toys and other items for donation to charities and nonprofit agencies.
- Wood shop — Uses wood and other materials recycled from pallets — donated or salvaged — to create signs, furniture and other goods for charities and to help support programs.
- Vermiculture — Uses worms to recycle food waste from the institution, saving disposal costs and creating by-products used to fertilize prison gardens.
- Future programs include a sign shop to create signs and banners for area charities and nonprofit agencies, a plant growth program and sustainability seminars for the general prison population.

from donated bedsheets and other items to donate to charities. They also save the penitentiary hundreds,

Program teaches job skills environmental literacy

By ANDY PORTER
of the Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — While the Washington State Penitentiary's Sustainable Practices Lab can be considered the "how" of recycling, a new course being taught alongside it is focused on the "why."

Labeled "Roots of Success," the 10-week program aims to help inmates become literate in the language of sustainability. That, in turn, could lead to a job in the "green" industry once they're released.

"We take stuff that has been thrown away, make it useful and then give it back to the economy," said Keith Parkins, an inmate and program instructor. "We're doing the same thing with inmates. We're giving them something they can give back to the outside."

The first class of 15 prisoners began last week, said Robert Branscum, correctional specialist. The classes are conducted by inmates who have trained

as instructors and themselves students.

"When they're not teaching, they're sitting in class as well," he said.

Created by Raquel Parkins, a professor with the Urban Studies and Planning Department at San Francisco State University, the course consists of 10 modules, each lasting a week. Among the topics are sustainability fundamentals, water, waste, transportation, energy, health and how to apply sustainability to business.

Parkins said that for the key element of the program is the concept that recycling applies not only to materials, but people as well.

Although he is serving life prison sentence, Parkins said, "I want to do whatever possible to help the people who can't get back out."

Andy Porter can be reached at andyporter@wwub.com or 526-8318.

if not thousands, of dollars by repairing and modifying clothes and garments used by prisoners and staff.

"The nice thing about this is you're doing it for charity," said Tony Williams, who normally goes by the name of Zeke.

"It's fun to do because you know you're giving back to the community."



Wanna buy a cowboy?



Come join us at: Hamleys Slickfork Saloon
May 9th, 2013 • 7:00
Proceeds support local students studying in Agriculture

www.cattlebarons.net



vibram® fivefingers®

Trunk Show
May 11 & 12

10% OFF!

Gifts with Purchase!

Drawing for a Free Pair!



SAAGER'S SHOE SHOP

"We Care About Your Comfort!"

Open Mon-Sat 8am-6pm • Sun Noon-4pm
613 N. Main Street • Milton-Freewater
541-938-5162 • saagershoeshop.com



All About Nutrition

is here to help you reach your nutrition goals.

To schedule an appointment, contact
Diane Benfield
Registered Dietitian Nutritionist
509-200-2062
allaboutnutrition@charter.net
Cash or insurance plans accepted.


M-F DRIVE IN
FM/AM RADIO SOUND • 938-4327

SHOWING FRI • SAT • SUN
Gates Open at 7:00 pm • Show Starts at Dusk

IRON MAN 3 PG-13

PLUS
OZ THE GREAT AND POWERFUL PG

www.m-fdriveintheatre.com



Boxed Chocolates for Mom!

Commemorating Verdi's 200th Birthday!



2012 - 2013 | 106th Season
Yaacov Bergman
Music Director & Conductor