



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Photos included

Date: May 9, 2024
Contact: Office of Communications
Phone: (601) 359-5701, 359-5289
E-mail: MDOCOfficeofCommunications@mdoc.state.ms.us

More than 100 inmates prepare to leave prison with new vocational skills

JACKSON – Hundreds of inmates are being trained to become welders, electricians, construction workers and much more when they are released from prison after completing courses in the Mississippi Department of Corrections’ Vocational Village programs.

The latest class of 102 inmates just completed coursework, 94 of them participated in a graduation ceremony at Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Rankin County. Vocations taught include auto repair, construction trades, metal working, welding, duct-working, horticulture and landscape design, small engine repair, fiber optics, computer and coding classes, culinary arts, electrical, carpentry, and others.

MDOC unveiled the centralized group of programs in May 2023 to “streamline the process for inmates, especially those who are eligible for parole, as well as for instructors teaching multiple classes across the vocational spectrum,” said Commissioner Burl Cain at the time.

Reuben Mayes, 31, who received two certificates, was among the first inmates to start the program. He is scheduled for release on parole in early June and is looking forward to pursuing construction and landscaping. His favorite course involved using a forklift.

“This program has given us a life. People can look at us and say ‘They did something in there. They didn’t go to prison and waste time. They’re coming home as better individuals,’” Mayes said. “We can do more. We accomplished this, and we can do anything. I’m looking forward to showing my home and community that I am a better person.”

Dasmond Howard, 32, an inmate speaker at the recent graduation, is eligible for release in 2025. He encouraged the graduates to take full advantage of what they achieved. He plans to seek a career in communications technology.

“Don’t put these certificates in a drawer somewhere. Use them. When we get out, people will be looking at us, watching and wondering what we’re going to do. The certificates we received (May 3) is part of what our future is,” Howard said. “Just because our shirts say ‘MDOC

convict,' that doesn't define who we are. We're better than what is on our shirts. Be proud of what you have done. Be proud of the classes you have taken and move forward."

Vocational Village groups many different vocations with study guides and equipment for hands-on instruction. Through MDOC-formed alliances, vocational instruction has been sanctioned and certified by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, and the National Center for Construction Education and Research – the national standard for training workers in the construction industry.

Program Director Christie Scott said the Vocational Village opened with four courses and has since added five more with another new one starting now for a total of 10 courses. Scott said the most recent graduate group combined with a graduation in January includes 17 inmates who completed the business technology class, four in carpentry, 156 in communications technology, 354 in NCCER Core, 253 in forklift, 13 in electrical, 32 in heavy equipment operations, 44 in ICEV computer based certification program.

CMCF Superintendent John Hunt told the May 3 graduates that other inmates are watching the program participants and the desire to learn can be contagious. "Our focus is on getting inmates certified to go out and get jobs. You guys are setting the stage. Other inmates are seeing you do this and they want some of it too," Hunt said. "I love watching you work. There is so much talent sitting right here and you need to be out there. Just because you went to prison doesn't mean your life is over."

Media note:

<https://www.facebook.com/MississippiDepartmentOfCorrections/>
https://twitter.com/MS_MDOC



More than 100 inmates prepare to receive completion certificates during a recent graduation of the MDOC's Vocational Village at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County.



Inmate Damon Hipps receives congratulations from Warden Jeremy St. Julian during a graduation program at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County. Hipps is among the 102 inmates who most recently completed courses in the MDOC Vocational Village.



Inmates at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County put their carpentry skills to the test during training in the MDOC's Vocational Village.



Inmates work on technology kits during hands-on training in the MDOC's Vocational Village at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.



Classroom instructions provide inmates at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility Vocational Village with the knowledge needed to enter a variety of jobs and build careers.



Participating inmates in the Vocational Village at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility put their electrical wiring skills to use with practice on demonstration structures.



Welding is one of many skills taught within the Vocational Village program at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility.