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Mobile Welding Training Center moved to another prison; New class of inmates will learn skills for future jobs

JACKSON – After five months of helping to train 32 incarcerated women at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility in Rankin County, the MDOC’s Mobile Welding Training Center is now moving to another location to train more inmates.

On Monday, the mobile unit pulled out of the facility on its way to the South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) in Leakesville in Greene County. There 32 inmates – all men — are next to train for the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER).

Meanwhile, the women met with Deputy Commissioner of Re-entry Programs Pedro Moreno to talk about what the welding program means to them. They gathered near the site where the mobile unit had stood since its introduction in December.

The women have completed a 3-month course using high-tech welding simulators and, thus, comprise the first-phase class to complete the welding program. They will finish their training on real welding machines, a process that will take about one more month.

Inmate Rebecca Pennington said she appreciates the opportunity to participate in a program that has already turned her life toward a better future. A native of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, she plans to seek employment at the shipyards putting her welding skills to use after release.

“I’ve got a lot of knowledge and confidence to get out and do better. Having a skill will help make that happen because the life I was living, I had no skills and no way to make money. Now I can be a productive member of society and be free,” Pennington said.

Inmate Brecker Johnson said she plans to use her skills to start over. “Upon release, I want to further my future with welding and just build my future up better, because I’m going out of here with nothing. And with welding, there’s a lot of job opportunities out there and I plan to grab a hold of as many as I can with what I know.”

After welding on actual machines, the women will take proficiency exams and, if they pass, will get the same certification as professional welders set by the NCCER.

Ingalls Shipyards in Pascagoula announced last year that it needed 3,000 more welders. That’s when Commissioner Burl Cain retrofitted a Mayflower moving van into a Mobile Welding Center containing eight high-tech welding simulators, instead of building expensive welding classrooms at each prison. Both the trailer and program were created without the use of taxpayer funds.

Participants receive the training free of charge, and the classes are led by offenders who are certified to instruct in the field, many of whom have worked in the welding industry previously. The program also includes moral rehabilitative components to provide a comprehensive service to participants in order to fully prepare them for successful re-entry into society.

CAPTIONS:

Photo 1 - group of women:

Deputy Commissioner of Re-entry Programs Pedro Moreno talks with female inmates at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility about what the welding program means to them. They gathered Monday morning near the site where the mobile unit had stood since its introduction in December.

Photo 2 – Mobile Welding Training Center:

The MDOC’s Mobile Welding Training Center on Monday moved to the South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) in Leakesville in Greene County. There 32 inmates – all men — are next to train for the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER).



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