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## **Graduations highlight educational and vocational achievements in state prison**

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PEARL – Many inmates are now leaving Mississippi prisons with training in multiple areas at the direction of Commissioner Burl Cain, who left a similar legacy in Louisiana.

At the same time, inmates are also earning high school equivalency diplomas and completing a variety of educational programs to help them have as many advantages as possible in the job market when they leave prison.

Take, for example, the large group of inmates who graduated on January 15 at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility. Many inmates received more than one certificate, reflecting mastery of multiple skills. Some of the certificates also included patches that they can sew on their attire, reflecting their achievement.

The programs are part of the Vocational Village where inmates can earn a high school education, and acquire skills in numerous industrial trades, including carpentry, electrical work, field safety, heavy equipment operations, heating and air conditioning repair and maintenance, business office technology, food services, and construction work.

Two inmates selected to speak on behalf of the graduates encouraged others to let their pride in their achievements speak for itself.

Inmate Michael Kimble, 57, suggested that the inmate graduates spread the word about what they have done, and others can do. “Taking advantage of these opportunities is a true blessing. When you go back to your rack in your area, that is an opportunity to show [other inmates] that it can be done and what really exists,” Kimble said. “The social, vocational, and industry-specific certifications are real. They will help make you more marketable...let your actions speak for you.”

Inmate Patrick Terrebonne, 51, told the assembly of inmates that their achievements extend far beyond themselves or the prison. The accomplishments are reflections of themselves.

"We came here today not just for acknowledgement for passing a class, but to say 'yes' to the men we were supposed to be. All of us could have made choices since we arrived that would not have led to this. It is much too easy to do wrong. Those of us standing here today have been blessed because of these programs," Terrebonne said.

"Let us prove to ourselves and those who love us that our time here was not wasted. The sacrifices our loved ones have made since we arrived here were not in vain. Hopefully, we will become the men we were meant to be and as God intended," Terrebonne concluded.

In addition to the distribution of certificates, the graduation ceremony included music provided by a recently established inmate band, "The Voices."

George King, programs director, pointed out attending guests who were formerly incarcerated at the facility and are now operating businesses and organizations designed to help those leaving prison.

Referring to one of the guests, King said, "he's out there every day making an impact in society, and he was right here doing the same things you guys are doing to transform his life. He didn't stop here...Nothing is impossible as long as you continue to grow."

Superintendent Matthew Reynolds noted how much the graduates' achievements extend to the operations of the prison overall.

"There are a lot of good things that go on here that get overlooked. These men have done something amazing. What they are doing now is changing this prison forever. Every single class you guys go to, every certification you get, every patch you get to sew on your shirt, that is a blessing and an outreach you are giving others to join the same as you," Reynolds said.

A graduation on January 13, also at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, marked the completion of the Re-Entry Program by 2,800 inmates since its launch in September 2023.

Of the 47 graduates, nine were in the last Re-entry Academy program for CMCF, and the other 38 received certificates for completing the Mississippi Rehabilitation Initiative (MRI) program. Future academy classes will be only at the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) and South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) for men and at the Delta Correctional Facility (DCF) for women.

Meanwhile, the MRI program, which includes individuals convicted of violent crimes, will be expanding. "This program will go into places where we have not had it before," Deputy Commissioner Kelley Christopher said about the MRI program.

Both programs are designed to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities upon release.



*Inmate Jamie Norris, right, receives his vocational program certificate from fellow inmate Marchenne Hatchett, left, before advancing to the stage for congratulations.*



*Inmate Cajmion Johnson receives his certificate as one of four inmates who earned their high school equivalency.*







*(FROM LEFT) Inmate Kevin Edison receives congratulations from Deputy Commissioner of Institutions John Hunt. Inmate Michael Kimble shares his thoughts about having completed vocational programs. Inmate Patrick Terrebonne receives one of the 221 certificates handed out during graduation. He also provided words of congratulations and encouragement for other inmates.*



A wide range of certificates, left, were awarded to inmates in high school equivalency, technology, construction, and other vocational trade programs at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility. Inmates receive box lunches, right, following a graduation ceremony.



*Another graduation ceremony at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility also included 47 graduates marking the completion of the Re-Entry Program by 2,800 inmates since its launch in September 2023.*