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Inmate achievements celebrated with 761 certifications awarded at Central Mississippi state prison

PEARL – Nearly 800 certificates reflecting educational and vocational skills were handed out Friday to one of the largest groups of graduating inmates at the state prison in Rankin County. Most of the 263 inmates at the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) will be able to use their certifications to obtain jobs across a wide range of fields upon their release.

A graduation was held for the inmates in the gymnasium at CMCF. A total of 761 certifications were awarded, including 11 high school equivalency diplomas.

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

Deputy Commissioner for Institutions John Hunt described the inmates' achievements as part of the transformation of the facility and the prison system itself.

"This is a really good day. This is your day and I am proud of all of you," Hunt told the inmates. "What we have here now is historical. You decided to help make your lives better and you deserve congrats for that. You are the agents of change here."

As the keynote speaker at the ceremony, Steven Maxwell, director of the MDOC Corrections Investigation Division, emphasized to the inmates that the actions that led them to prison do not define who they are now.

"You were born, created, with a purpose. What you have done up to now is not your life. It is a part of your life. It's not who you are. You have the opportunity right now to close that distance between [now and] who you were born to be," Maxwell told the inmates.

Maxwell commended the inmates for their commitment to doing what is needed to build better lives for themselves through the vocational programs.

"The decisions we make and the actions we take shape and frame the environment we live our lives in. You have more life in front of you than you do behind you," Maxwell said. "It's not about the years, but what you do within those years. This graduation today is an example of what you can do."

Family and friends of the inmates were allowed to attend and witness them receive their completion certificates.

Mary Daniel of Sand Hill, an aunt of one of the inmates, said her nephew's participation in the vocational programs has improved his life during incarceration.

"This means so much to our family and to him because he has worked so hard. We are very proud of him," Daniel said. "The programs have helped him, and he is a changed person for the better."

Superintendent Matthew Reynolds noted that the day was all about the inmate graduates. He described the 761 certificates as "awesome" by inmates who have "put the work in" to make graduation possible.

"You guys are a living testimony of what everyone at this facility can do when they put their hearts and minds to do it," Reynolds said. "I'm proud of you. You're giving yourselves hope that you will go home better than when you got here."

Deputy Commissioner Kelley Christopher, who oversees programs, education, and reentry, commended the leadership at CMCF for contributing to the inmates' achievements.

"With this many recognized, this is an outstanding graduation, and I am proud of all the inmates," Christopher said. "This is a credit to George King, all the instructors, and Superintendent Matt Reynolds."



