



Charleston County News Release

Release Number: 2848
Date: January 14, 2008

SEE PHOTOS: <http://www.charlestoncounty.org/NewsImages/welding.htm>

Local Prisoner Re-Entry Program Presented at National Summit

Acclaimed local welding program trained 63 inmates who are working, supporting their children, and contributing to their community.

Charleston County Government and the Trident Workforce Investment Board recently presented a local inmate welding program as a national model at the White House Faith-Based and Community Initiatives National Summit on Prisoner Re-Entry, which was recently held in Los Angeles, Calif.

Christine DuRant, Charleston County Grants Director, and Paul L. Connerty, Trident Workforce Investment Board Executive Director, presented information about the Charleston County Detention Center Welding Initiative, which has successfully trained 63 inmates who are now working and contributing to their community.

The Charleston County Detention Center Welding Initiative, a public/private partnership formed by the Charleston County Detention Center, readySC (formerly the Center for Accelerated Technology and Training), Trident Technical College (TTC), South Carolina Employment Security Commission (SCESC), and Trident One Stop Career System (TOSCS), was recognized for its success and innovative approach to providing a sustainable career in a high-demand industry to otherwise unskilled people who were detained due to failure to pay child support.

A recent surge in producing blast-resistant vehicles purchased by the U.S. Department of Defense created a corresponding demand for certified welders in the Lowcountry. Simultaneously, County officials at the local detention center were meeting with staff requesting job placement assistance for non-violent inmates.

"It was at this juncture that a connection was made," said DuRant. "There was a booming segment of businesses needing skilled, certified welders and an increasingly growing pool of people having difficulty obtaining employment because of a lack of skills and a criminal record. With that, a partnership was formed. A goal was set. A public-private venture was born."

U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao and Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Jay Hein also presented at the summit. The audience for the National Summit on Prisoner Re-Entry included top federal, state and local corrections officials, academics, media and nonprofit leaders.

"The challenges that face returning prisoners are so great that government can't solve this issue on its own," Hein said. "Dedicated faith-based and community nonprofits provide what government cannot: personal engagement, real hope and a fresh vision for life. It's the caring touch of groups like these that often makes the critical difference between returning to crime and a new start."

Each year, more than 650,000 inmates are released from federal and state prisons and return to their communities and families. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, more than two-thirds of returning inmates will be rearrested within three years of their release from prison.

Innovative partnerships between government and community- and faith-based nonprofits, such as the federal programs Ready4Work and the Prisoner Re-entry Initiative, are showing strong results in cutting crime and reducing recidivism.

Locally, the Charleston County Sheriff's Office played a large role in the welding training program, and officers were recently awarded for their successes and involvement.

"The Trident Workforce Investment Board's workforce system and the partners involved in this project have been an invaluable asset to the development of the detention center workforce," said Lt. Marvin Gallant, Charleston County Detention Center. "The inmates completing the welding training earn a credential and acquire a skill that will lead to employment opportunities well above minimum wage, enabling them to take care of their families and decrease the chance they will return to jail."

Charleston County Detention Center Welding Initiative results have exceeded all partner expectations. For example, the Charleston County Detention Center reports an 86 percent decrease in recidivism for inmates involved in the program.

Certified welders can earn \$12-16 per hour, and an annual salary can yield up to \$45,000 when overtime is included as part of a certified welder's income.

Some of the benefits and results as seen in Charleston County are:

- Inmates renovated the training facility
- \$161,280 paid in child support arrears
- Children of inmates added to employer benefit plans
- Significantly reduced rate of recidivism (only one inmate was re-incarcerated for non-payment of child support after leaving employment)
- Seven females entered the training program and completed training in non-traditional employment field

Charleston County's and the Trident Workforce Investment Board's partners in the program are:

- Charleston County Detention Center
- Trident Technical College
- readySC (a division of the SC Technical College System, the program was formerly known as Center for Accelerated Technology and Training)
- SC Employment Security Commission
- Trident One Stop Career System

SIDEBAR

- According to the Urban Institute in their publication, "Outside the Walls", prisoner re-entry is the process of leaving prison (or jail) and returning to society. All prisoners encounter similar obstacles and barriers to life on the outside. If the re-entry process is successful, there are multiple benefits in terms of an improved, safer public and long term reintegration of the former prisoner. Successful outcomes are seen in the labor force, in the community, in the schools, with family, and religious organizations. Overall, successful re-entry benefits the local community, the local economy as well as the broader society.

- The South Carolina Association for Continuing Higher Education also recently awarded the Charleston County Detention Center Welding Initiative with its 2007 Outstanding Continuing Education Cooperative Program Award.

For additional information about the program model, visit www.toscc.org or contact Paul L. Connerty, Executive Director, Trident Workforce Investment Board, at (843) 574-1815 or paulc@toscc.org.