

INMATE JOBS, from page 9

inmates, because this is my third time (incarcerated), and this is the only time that I've actually been given an opportunity to gain a skill, and this would be like a management skill," he said. "I feel like if I was given that skill my first time, maybe I wouldn't even be here this time."

Although, he said, he didn't learn a whole lot the 2 1/2 years he spent folding clothes before he moved up to management.

"I like the fact that they trust me, and that was missing in my life. I think I'm an asset here, and I think that they think I'm an asset here, so it's a good feeling to come into work knowing that you're needed," Pierce said.

"Ever since I got this job, it's made me think, maybe I can do something out there that's productive, so I actually started school here at Chemeketa," he said. "That one stepping stone made me think I could do more. And I should do more. So if I didn't start here, I probably would have never done any of that."

A disconnect

As a corrections counselor for the Multnomah County Department of Community Justice, it's Steve Ciccotelli's job to help former inmates find housing and employment upon release.

He said that among Oregon's former inmates, "some do get valuable skills, and some just do not."

Often, he said, former inmates lack confidence and self-worth, and they think the only work they can get mirrors the work they did in prison – janitorial, cooking or working in manufacturing, construction or warehouses.

"They'll start disqualifying themselves before they even turned in an application. That's the biggest barrier," he said. "I tell them, don't sell yourself short."

But he is able to help inmates released with a "binder full of certificates" to transfer those accomplishments onto a resume. Although, he said some of the jobs they worked in prison are dying industries on the outside.

"They are not seeing the changes in the job market," he said.

"Where it becomes complicated is where you have a small industry and you have the criminal history barrier," he said. "It really kind of shoots the person in the foot."

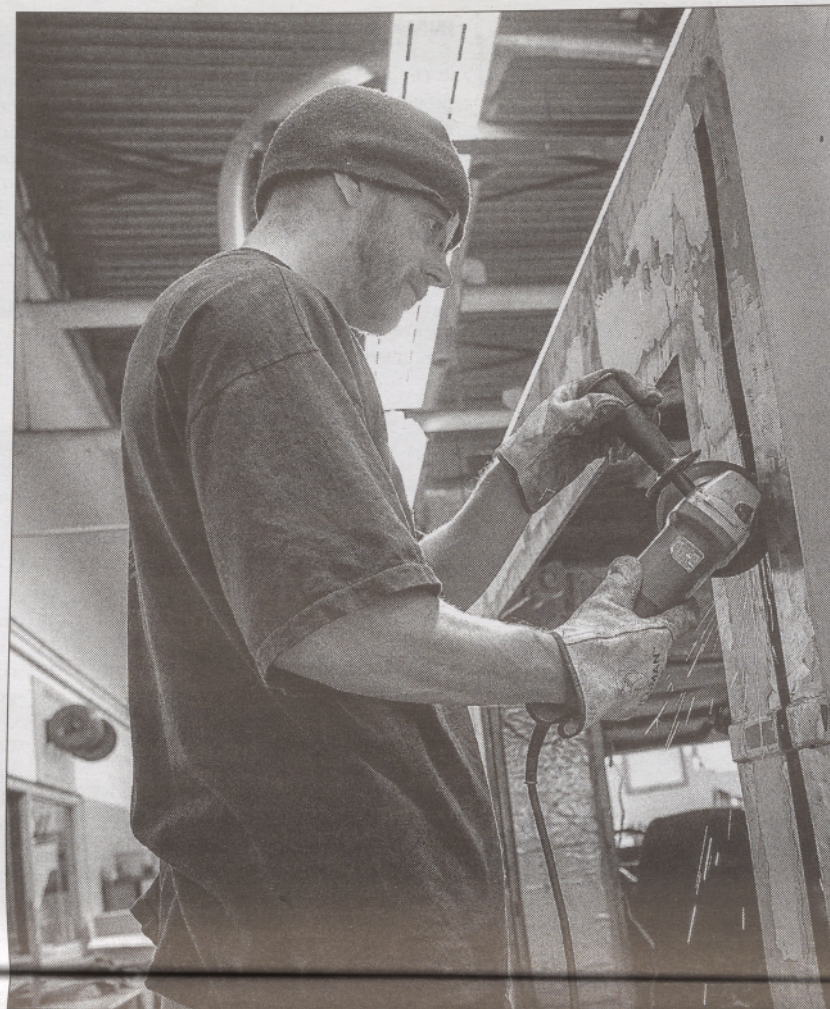
He noted that in his experience, inmates serving long-term sentences are more likely to have accessed beneficial technical training and work during incarceration than inmates serving shorter sentences.

For some inmates, getting that first job can be difficult, taking up to six months in some cases, which can mess with a former inmate's self-esteem, Ciccotelli said.

But there are employers willing to give convicts a second shot.

Todd Londin, owner of ABC Window Cleaners and Building Maintenance LLC, said he hires local workers with employment barriers, including former prison inmates with nonviolent convictions. He encourages them to find better-paying work once they have a few years of experience, he said.

He said for his company, some of the janitorial skills taught in prisons, such as floor care, stripping and waxing, are beneficial, but he can teach the necessary



An Oregon State Penitentiary inmate in training in the prison's educational autoshop. PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

skills to anyone who is willing to work.

"I have found that the majority of people that I give a second chance to work harder and last longer than people that come in off the street," Londin said. "They prove they want to be back in society, not be a drain on society."

Under new management

Ken Jeske took the reins of Oregon Corrections Enterprises in 2014 after its previous director, Rob Killgore, was fired amid financial woes and conflicts with the Department of Corrections.

Jeske has worked in corrections for more than two decades. He began as a corrections officer and most recently oversaw Oregon Youth Authority.

He said when he took the job with OCE, "it was kind of in a crisis mode."

In the two years he's been at the helm of the agency, he's boosted revenue by 24 percent and moved it into the 21st century with the addition of e-commerce and electronic marketing, and he hired a new business development manager.

In 2015, OCE businesses brought in \$25.6 million in revenue, a revenue record for the second year in a row.

But the agency isn't rolling in dough. Many of the manufacturing programs are supported by profits from the call centers and laundries, but Jeske said he wants to keep them operating because they help inmates gain useful skills.

"We keep getting hit with PERS (Public

Employees Retirement System) and other things that keep raising our costs," he said, but today his agency has more inmates working in its programs than ever before while it manages to operate in the black.

Street Roots was denied access to Oregon Corrections Enterprises' most recent annual audit but was told it found "zero significant deficiencies."

In 2013, Portland State University completed a three-phase strategic assessment of Oregon Corrections Enterprises and made 13 recommendations its authors believed would allow the agency to expand its programs and double or triple its capacity by 2022.

The report pointed out that with an inmate workforce of 1,200 at the time of the analysis, only 10 percent of the work-eligible inmate population was assigned to Oregon Corrections Enterprises programs, and many were lower-risk inmates which led to lower turnover.

Part of this has to do with eligibility requirements. To work for Oregon Corrections Enterprises, an inmate must

have six months' clear conduct, and for some jobs, such as in the contact center, a GED is required.

The PSU report recommended Oregon Corrections Enterprises engage with more high-risk inmates, optimize its businesses and marketing, and expand its programs.

Jeske has outlined a strategic plan with many of these recommendations at the forefront, along with input from his staff, something he said wasn't happening before he took over.

"For the first time in a long time, they needed to feel like they were a valuable part of the organization and the administration cared about them," he said.

When asked if he thought doubling or tripling capacity in the next six years is attainable, he said, "I would like to tell you, yes, it's attainable, but we struggle with displacement in the community."

"At the end of the day, you still have to have a product or a service that is in need by the community."

But slowly, he's adding jobs. He's optimistic about a new transcription service at the state's only women's prison and a new website updating program that will bring state websites into American Disability Act compliance. This will add about 35 to 50 jobs.

Additionally, inmates will soon be building homeless shelters. Oregon Corrections Enterprises came up with a design that Jeske said "doesn't look like a tool shed; it has some character to it."

He's worked with mobile home manufacturers in Oregon to ensure skills inmates learn while building the shelters will qualify them to work at a home manufacturing plant.

He plans to survey inmates for input on new opportunities, and he's working on a program to build electric guitars under the Prison Blues label, the same label used for the prison's line of jeans.

When Street Roots spoke with Jeske, he'd just learned the Department of Corrections approved a contest where inmates could submit designs for the instrument they

would mass-produce.

"To me, if it comes

from the inmates, that's even better

because the ownership of that," he said. "I've

heard millions of stories – a lot of them don't have much to be

proud of because they harmed their families or other people. So

when they start having something that they are proud of, that they can show their families, it really makes an

impact."

While Oregon Corrections Enterprises is growing, most working

inmates are assigned to Department of Corrections jobs in work programs overseen by Angelozzi.

"Whether it's a janitor job or a kitchen job or a maintenance crew job, it gives the inmates skills that they need," she said.

Room for improvement

While many of Oregon's inmates work full

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— KEN JESKE
OREGON CORRECTIONS ENTERPRISES