

FIGHTING for a BETTER LIFE

Culver boxing club also teaches teamwork, discipline

By Lauren Dake / *The Bulletin*

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CULVER —

Marco Olivera, 17, looked straight ahead as he jabbed at an invisible competitor — left, left, right.

A buzzer pierced the air and Olivera moved faster — left, left, right.

Practice at the Central Oregon Boxing Club in Culver — nearly two hours of shadowboxing, hitting the speed bags, jumping rope — was winding down.

Olivera was sweating, but he looked energized, which is good because once practice ended, he headed to the Madras Safeway store, where he works from 6:30 p.m. until midnight.

The Madras High School senior admits he doesn't have time for much else aside from school, work and boxing.

Founded in 1999, the Central Oregon Boxing Club uses amateur boxing to teach young people teamwork and self-discipline. It keeps them busy and out of trouble. It targets those who need support, a mentor, a little direction.

But most of all, said **Mark Evans**, coach and founder of the club, it gives them an outlet to become better people.

"It's about helping young men and women to become better community members," Evans said. "Boxing is just the tool we use to get there."

In the coming year, the boxing club will host the two-day Oregon State Golden Gloves Tournament. Amateur boxers will come from across the state March 13-14 to compete in the event, which will be held at the Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center in Redmond.

It's an honor to be the host of the Golden Gloves Tournament, Evans said.



Joseph Barrera, 14, left, throws a medicine ball to Marco Olivera, 17, while Lionel Velasquez waits his turn during a training session Wednesday at the Central Oregon Boxing Club.



Jovanny Medina, 19, hits a heavy bag filled with water during training at the Central Oregon Boxing Club in Culver on Wednesday.

And it's a fundraiser, which will help the club upgrade from its current location — Evans' backyard shop, which holds tools and boxing gloves — to a larger room where more people can participate.

For the community

The boxing club was started in Bend under the nonprofit Opportunities Unlimited. When Evans and his wife, Sonya Littledeer-Evans, who works as a supervisor in the Jefferson County Juvenile Justice Department, moved to Culver — so did the club. It became apparent the need was greater in Jefferson County, Evans said. The club, a member of the U.S. Amateur Boxing Association, has been in Culver since 2002.

Finding funding has never been easy. But the Central Oregon Boxing Club, which still has nonprofit status, hosts several local boxing shows, holds raffles and puts on car washes to raise money.

And now that they've been awarded the distinction of hosting the Golden Gloves Tournament, Evans hopes fundraising will be slightly easier. Money will come from ticket sales.

The club has also received the community's support.

Local physicians often volunteer to work ringside at many of the local boxing events. A local business owner said he will rent a warehouse to the club for a low price, once they raise the money. And Evans said he's talking with the Jefferson County Commission on Children and Families, which has expressed interest in helping with funding.

Right now, there are only a handful of members in the anti-drug, stay-in-school, respect-yourself-and-others boxing club.

But Evans said he fields calls from parents wondering when the club will be moving into a bigger building.

The club primarily attracts young people from Jefferson County, but any Central Oregonians ages 8-20 can join, and the club makes exceptions for older people. At times, the year-round club has had more than 20 training. But the varying size of membership relates to the space available.



Photos by Pete Erickson / The Bulletin

Lionel Velasquez, 17, trains Wednesday with Mark Evans, 49, coach and founder of the Central Oregon Boxing Club in Culver.



Photos by Pete Erickson / The Bulletin

Marco Olivera, 17, left, and Justin Evans, 20, work on their timing while punching the double-end bags at the Central Oregon Boxing Club in Culver on Wednesday.



Justin Evans, 20, and Jovanny Medina, 19, take a break during their interval training session at the club

The boxers know Evans' rules — stay in school, attend classes, don't mess up or you're out.

Wednesday.

The boxers

Antonio Villanueva, 19, started boxing in the club when he was 13. When his father left for Mexico, it left his mother with three young boys. All the boys were in Evans' boxing club.

"It got to the point where the principal would call him if I messed up," Villanueva said, pointing to Evans.

And it would be Evans, 49, currently a counselor at the Deer Ridge Correctional Institution in Madras, who would pick him up for school if necessary or chat about what went wrong.

Villanueva graduated and now works at Mid-Columbia Lumber in Madras.

"I took on a fatherly role," said Evans, who has a son, Justin, in the club. His wife also volunteers.

Jovanny Medina has also been part of the club since he was 13. Now, 19, he's graduated high school, a feat that Evans said he's not sure would have happened without the club. Medina agreed.

"It really taught me discipline," he said. "I think I would have been in trouble a lot without it."

Medina continues to practice, although he works for Central Oregon Seeds Inc. cleaning seeds, starting at 5:30 a.m.

He's decided to train to become a professional fighter. Although Evans, who was once the Central Oregon heavyweight champion, said he doesn't encourage the club members to become professionals, he won't discourage them either. Most professional boxers continue to work full-time jobs, Evans said, and boxing supplements their income.

Medina punched at the black bag. He kept his head low and crouched.

"Hands up when you're throwing," Evans told him.

The timer punctuated the practice once again, meaning Medina could take a quick breather. Sweat dripped down his face.

"I just want to be something more important," he said.

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South Fork crew on the Camas Knob Fire, 2008.

Photo by Joe Hessel, ODF

Oregon's inmate crews: *A valuable firefighting resource*

Angie Johnson,
ODF Northeast Oregon District

Prisons throughout Oregon often form partnerships with others to make tangible contributions to Oregon communities while providing inmates valuable work experience.

Those assigned to the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) often find themselves on the fireline, the result of a long-standing partnership with the state Department of Corrections (DOC) to train and deploy inmates as firefighters.

The wildland fire crews that DOC provides are a valuable, cost-effective firefighting resource, and several correctional facilities around the state participate in the firefighting work crew program.

This year, ODF's Northeast Oregon District tapped the Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) and South Fork Forest Camp (a satellite of the Columbia River Correctional Facility) to provide support during the Eagle Creek and Camas Knob fires.

To qualify for the firefighting program, the inmates had to complete the same nationally certified training course that agency and private firefighters go through. In addition to fire assignments, correctional facilities also provide specialized crews to help with camp and kitchen facilities during large wildfires.

Inmate labor an Oregon tradition

Inmates in Oregon have always been provided with work opportunities. Inmate labor has been used in a variety of capacities, from making bricks for the first permanent penitentiary in 1866, to milling jute for flax processing, to mining lime for fertilizer. Back then, the primary goals were similar to today's: reduce idleness, lower costs and teach skills. Firefighting and general natural disaster response - most recently, the floods in December 2007 - are other



◀ **This mobile kitchen served the needs of firefighters on the 125-acre Camas Knob Fire.**

Photo by Janell Lacey, USFS

capacities in which inmate crews have traditionally worked.

“South Fork Forest Camp Inmate crews have been fighting forest fires in Oregon for decades,” sums up Gordon Dana, ODF Camp Manager at South Fork, located in the Tillamook State Forest.

The Camp was established in 1951 as an additional source of labor for Tillamook Burn rehabilitation. It provided meaningful work for honor inmates from the Oregon State Penitentiary. Today, 200 inmates and more than 60 staff support fire suppression operations as well as State Forests’ projects for ODF. South Fork crews typically respond to an average of 30 fires per year, he said, with the majority of crew time spent on fires outside of northwestern Oregon.

1994 measure puts inmates to work

Believing that inmates should work at least as hard as the law-abiding citizens who pay taxes for their support, in 1994 Oregonians voted to require inmates to be at work or in on-the-job training programs 40 hours each week. The mandates of that constitutional amendment, commonly referred to as Measure 17, became the primary focus of all inmate work and workforce development activities. The measure required the DOC’s inmate work programs to operate in a “businesslike fashion” and generate revenues for the private sector, or reduce the costs of government. In essence, the department was told to build a viable workforce of inmate workers.

Working the fire, food lines

Throughout the year, inmates working with the Oregon Department of Forestry are trained in wildland firefighting. State correctional facilities that participate in the wildland firefighting work program include Shutter Creek Correctional Institution (SCCI), Warner Creek Correctional Facility (WCCF), Snake River Correctional Institution (SRCI) and South Fork Forest Camp (SFFC).

Inmate crews have been fighting forest fires in Oregon for decades.

During the 2008 fire season, SRCI and South Fork provided nine wildland firefighting 10-person crews, a kitchen and two 10-person kitchen crews to ODF’s Northeast Oregon District. These crews were mobilized on two significant wildfires – the 370-acre Eagle Creek Fire and the 125-acre Camas Knob Fire. The firefighting crews dug fire line in active, hot situations, conducted holding operations while a hotshot crew burned out a fire line, and mopped up for several days on both fires. While the Wildcat Fire was burning near Lakeview, some 40 to 50 fire crews from the Warner Creek Correctional Facility worked that blaze.

As the Eagle Creek Fire was winding down, the Camas Knob Fire was spooling up. All crews, the camp and the kitchen located at Athena for Eagle Creek were then mobilized to a new camp location in Ukiah to serve at Camas Knob.

According to Lynette Rothwell, ODF food unit leader, “They didn’t miss a beat. SRCI quickly brought in another kitchen crew to assist the one we had and started right into providing meals. They worked hard on short notice.”

Mobile food service

SRCI, in partnership with ODF since 2001, now provides a mobile kitchen and services inherited from the Powder River Correctional Facility in Baker City. (In 2007, Powder River decided to discontinue participation in the wildland firefighter work program.)

The kitchen adds another tool to SRCI’s firefighting toolbox. The 2008 Eagle Creek and Camas Knob Fires were the first incidents to which the kitchen was mobilized since SRCI took it over. Tim Burgess, Snake River’s food coordinator for the fires, helped ensure that the kitchen was a success on its first time

out. The mobile facility alone can serve 300-500 firefighters. Adding a food preparation trailer to the set-up doubles its capacity.

The work of the kitchen crews supporting the firefighting operations was just as important as the fire crews themselves. Rothwell attributes the success to the availability of a coordinator who traveled with the kitchen, and to the teamwork of the crew. “It was a pleasure working with all of them,” she said. “They really got into sync with each other and put out good food that made the

firefighters smile.”

As for all of the hard work of the firefighting crews from both correctional facilities, Northeast Oregon District Forester John Buckman described their performance as critical to the success of fire suppression in Oregon.

“It’s obvious the crews wanted to be here, working hard and giving back,” he said. “They gave 100 percent, from the crew coordinators and overhead within the DOC organization down to the firefighter. We greatly appreciate their efforts.” 🍷

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Christmas in the clink

By [Jessica Musicar](#), Staff Writer

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HAUSER — On the 12 days of Christmas their Secret Santas gave to them pairs of shining boots, pages of encouraging notes, cells with freshly made beds — and dozens of friendly hugs.

Within the walls of Shutter Creek Correctional Institution, even the prisoners are keeping Christmas in their hearts.

Since Dec. 13, inmates in Shutter's SUMMIT Program have given one another thoughtful gifts on the sly in the form of help and encouragement. One of the primary rules, though, is no gifts of property are allowed.

"It's doing nice things for each other. It's more of a leave 'em a nice note or pass on a message to them," explained Julie Martin, a spokeswoman for the minimum-security state prison.

Participating inmates have been asked to log each gift they've given, as well as those they've received. On Christmas Day they will come together to unmask their Santas.

SUMMIT, which stands for Success Using Motivation, Morale, Intensity and Treatment, is an alternative incarceration program that focuses on cognitive issues to confront and overcome criminal beliefs and thinking patterns, Martin said. Those who graduate can shorten their sentences up to 30 months. There are 160 men involved in the program in three separate communities denoted by the color of the hats they wear — green, red and gold.

Inside Shutter's Freedom Hall, a handful of "gold hat" SUMMIT inmates stood in front of a tree decorated with colorful paper chains, cut-outs and other decorations hewn together with paper, popsicle sticks and glitter. The gold hats are in their last phase of the program. Come Dec. 30 they'll graduate.

The three men — Shane Schuyler, 24; Charles Wimer, 29; and Thomas Pyatt, 45 — said it isn't their first Christmas in prison, but it has been the most merry and hopefully their last in the clink.

"I've spent seven Christmases incarcerated. This is the first Christmas that I've actually celebrated and didn't treat it like it was any other day," Wimer said. "Through SUMMIT, I've been able to become close to people around me. I'm able to spend the holiday with the people I care about."

Martin said the focus of the Secret Santa exercise is to get inmates to do something selfless, to lift each others' spirits and to give without really expecting anything in return.

"If we give them something positive to do, they aren't dwelling on things that might be negative and nonproductive," she said.

Since Secret Santa began, the men said they've received some unexpected gifts from shined boots to cards on their beds. And the inmates have gotten pretty creative, giving gifts to a number of peers in hope of



World Photo by Madeline Steege

Shane Schuyler, 24, (left) Charles Wimer, 29, both of Eugene, and Thomas Pyatt, 45, of Bend stand at attention at the Shutter Creek Correctional Institution on Friday. The men are involved in a Secret Santa program at the prison. On Christmas Day they will reveal the identities of all involved.

tricking their recipients. Others have had friends deliver messages in their place, while others have gotten up early in the morning to complete their Christmas chores.

While many of the men have done their best to surprise and delight their recipients, not everyone was so keen on becoming a Secret Santa. At first, Pyatt thought it was silly. But after he getting his first gifts, he realized by opting out he was preventing someone else from feeling special.

"It really did make me feel good. I wanted that person to feel what I did, too," Pyatt said.

The men said in other penitentiaries, which they described as a training camp for criminals, this sense of festivity wouldn't be possible.

"This place is the exact opposite," Schuyler said. "All these people up here they treat us like people. Everybody cares. ... They want us to make it out there."

A father of a young daughter, Schuyler said he does not want to waste his life behind bars and believes SUMMIT is his ticket to a normal life. He grew up in a rough household where drug use and crime were a normal part of life. Now that he's in SUMMIT, he said he no longer thinks that way. He believes that if he continues to stay in prison, he'll not only waste his life, statistics show it's also more likely that his child could do time.

"That's what scared me straight. I did not want to see myself sitting in prison at 55 years old and have nothing to show for it," Schuyler said. "My family is my daughter and she needs somebody out there. I know what I gotta do."

Christmas Day also will mean better food for inmates — with a lunch of turkey, mashed potatoes, gravy and stuffing — as well as marathon game playing for the general population, Christmas movies and a Catholic Mass.

Correctional Officer Doug Mansfield said the holidays are a difficult time for prisoners, so he cuts them a little slack.

"We have to be extra sensitive because we know what they are missing," he said.

This year's Secret Santa project seems to be bringing the men closer while teaching them positive behaviors for their lives after Shutter.

"It's all about doing something to help their peers out. Something to make their days brighter," Mansfield said. "They just feel good when they get and do good things for people."

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News

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Inmates light the port

By Steve McCasland
Staff Writer

Sparkling sea life, snow-flakes, winter scenes. It's all there every year, adorning the Port of Bandon's boardwalk, boat launch parking lot and former Coast Guard building.

And the colorful holiday lighting display helps bring the spirit of the season alive not only for local townspeople and visitors, but also for those responsible for creating the display.

The port has used inmate labor on innumerable projects over the past two decades, including its annual Christmas display that stretches from the boardwalk to Weber's Pier to the port-owned historic U.S. Coast Guard building.

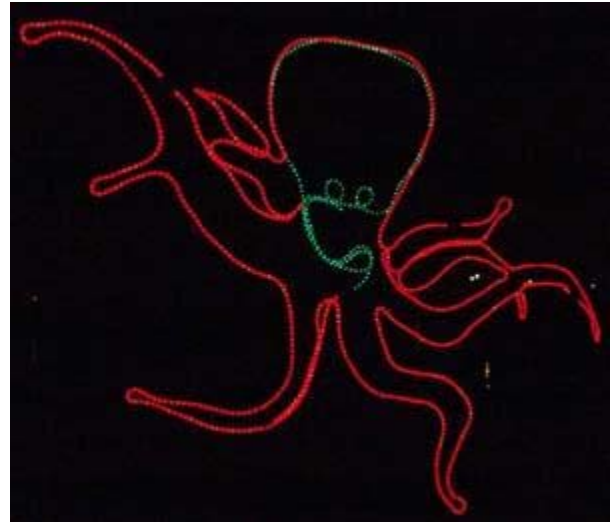


Photo by Steve McCasland

According to Gina Dearth, the port's general manager, the agency has the longest-running inmate labor contract in the state. Most of the inmates who've worked here in the past 20 years were provided by the Shutter Creek Correctional Institution just north of Hauser.

Dearth explained that each winter, the inmates get the light strings and fixtures out of storage and do any needed maintenance before putting up the display.

"We started the second week of November this year and the inmates are after it every day," she said. "In this environment, repairs are needed constantly, so they work on them every weekday morning."

The inmates created all the popular and colorful sea creatures displayed on the boardwalk and Weber's Pier using rebar for the general outline and regular Christmas lights or rope lights for color.

"We try to do a couple of new ones each year," Dearth said. "This year we added a jellyfish and two dolphins."

The crews' efforts have yielded awards in most of the community's annual holiday lighting contests over the years.

"But we just do it for the community and the visitors," Dearth said, adding that the displays will continue in coming years, but the port plans to stop entering the lighting contests. "This is our gift to the community. We'll probably step aside after this year and leave the awards to the other contestants."

"The port and the community have benefited from the efforts of easily more than a thousand inmates over the years. And probably at least a couple hundred have worked on our holiday lighting."

Roger Schliecher, inmate work crew program coordinator for Shutter Creek, said the work program is mutually beneficial for the prison and the port.

"The program is good for the port, good for us and good for the community," he said. "The crews get a chance to be away from the institution and to get real-life work experience. They learn skills that will help them segue back into society. In my opinion, they do contribute to the community of Bandon and they are giving back (to society)."

Inmate Kenneth Mullins, 30, said he enjoys getting away from the prison environment and back into the community. He was recently tasked with hanging paper snowflakes created by local children on the glass walls of the boardwalk picnic shelter.

"I feel lucky to get a chance to get out here," he said. "It's so cold sometimes that you can't feel your hands, but it's worth it. It's a joy to see the kids enjoy it."

Inmate Jason Dimicelli, 36, has spent the last month working on the holiday lights.

"It's nice that the port and city allow us to come out and do something for the holiday for the children and visitors," Dimicelli said.

He said that his family lives out of the area, so he doesn't get to see family members very often.

"It's nice to see the kids smiling and enjoying the lights," he added.

Dearth estimated that the port spends \$200-\$300 a year on its holiday lights, and considers that a bargain.

"If we didn't have this inmate crew, the waterfront wouldn't look like it does," she said. "We only have three full-time staff. You couldn't afford to pay regular employees to take care of this day after day. It wouldn't be good business."

Anne Sobbota of SAGE Gallery paid for the materials needed by inmates Michael Krussow and Mark Nelson to create the new jellyfish this year, Dearth said.

"We're open to other interested citizens or businesses contributing to the creation of more holiday sea creatures, and even, possibly, to displaying them at other locations around town," she said. "We hope this effort contributes to the holiday spirit in Bandon. Maybe it'll eventually get to a point where it'll bring people and a little economic boost to town."

Like everyone, Dearth added, the inmates have made mistakes in their lives.

"But that doesn't mean they shouldn't be able to feel the joy of doing this," she said. "I think it's interesting that some of the guys on our crews have been brought up in Christmasless households, so they've never done lights or trees with their own families. They get that experience here, and it makes for better people."
