



By Randy Parks, Burns Times-Herald
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More than 100 people paid a visit to the local Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) facility for its annual "Family Day" Saturday, July 27.

During the event, the youth's families and visitors had the opportunities to view the youth's projects on display, tour the facility, play outdoor games and enjoy a barbecue lunch.

The facility currently houses 50 youth, ages 14 to 24.

Superintendent Doug Smith stated that Family Day is one of the most important days of the year for the youth. "This, and Christmas, is when we get the most visitors," Smith said.

He explained that a lot of the families only make the trip to visit once or twice a year because of the distance they have to travel. OYA sends out notices of the event about 90 days in advance so families can make plans, and about 70 percent of the youth's families attend.

A number of local community members also attend the event to be there for the kids whose families couldn't attend.

Projects

Two of the youth, Tyler Krieg, 20, and Chris Kinnersly, 19, stood next to a Ford tractor 3000 diesel engine they worked on, and were more than happy to demonstrate their success. Krieg said over the past two or three months, they took the engine apart, gave it a new paint job, and replaced the fuel injector pump. With the flip of a switch, the engine was up and running.

Kinnersly added that he asked the shop teacher, Gordon Black, to bring them something that wasn't running, and, "We made it run."

The engine also featured airbrush artwork by Josh Cates, 23. Cates said he started with pencil and marker drawings, and then moved on to airbrushing techniques. Along with the artwork on the diesel engine, Cates displayed another engine he painted and worked on. "Just got it running this morning," he said with a smile.

A number of woodworking projects were also on display, as well as the results of their gardening efforts.

Three-legged stool

Smith likened the OYA program to a three-legged stool, with the three legs being treatment, education and work. He said the treatment and education portions are working well, but the staff would like to improve the work portion of the program.

“It’s important to teach them how to work. Up at 5:30 and ready to go by 6:30,” Smith said.

One idea they would like to incorporate is work crews in rural areas, such as picking up trash along roadways. “Parole and Probation does it. Why not here?” asked Smith.

Smith added that the one thing every one of the youth have in common is that they are getting out of the facility. “It’s up to us to get them ready for the day they go home,” Smith said. “We’re doing all we can to make sure these kids don’t end up back here.”

Tour

The facility has two sides to house the youth, with the sides being mirror images of each other.

The sleeping quarters are spacious with a bunk bed for each youth.

Treatment Manager Ron White pointed out several differences in the bunks, such as two mattresses or personal coverings, and explained they were results of the reward/punishment system employed by the facility. “If they meet all the requirements, they are rewarded,” White said. The facility also has several “private rooms” for the youth that have earned them.

There are also common areas for the youth, a gymnasium, classrooms and shop.

One area of the shop is set up to teach the youth how to build a house. They install duct work, plumbing, electrical systems and siding.

One of the more recent acquisitions is a driving simulator to teach the youth how to drive. “Some of these kids have never been behind the wheel,” White said. “We try to do as much as we can to get them ready for the outside world.”

The local OYA facility is one of 10 close-custody correctional facilities, working with about 750 youth in Oregon. It provides 54 family-wage jobs, making it one of the largest employers in the county. “Most of the employees here are local people. They care about the community, and they want to see these kids succeed,” Smith said.



Photos and captions by C. J. Drake

Chris DeLacruz (left) with son Zach. The two had not seen each other in 14 years until they were reunited at Family Day. DeLacruz, who lives in Sutherlin, Ore., decided to visit Zach after his mother died this year. DeLacruz said he felt like a “bottled tornado of emotion” during his visit with Zach, and vowed to return.



Superintendent Doug Smith (left) with Randy Parks, editor of the Burns Times-Herald, in the facility’s woodworking shop. Smith points to the simulated rooms, complete with doors and plumbing, that youth build to learn carpentry and construction skills.



During Family Day at Eastern Oregon YCF, Josh proudly shows off a tractor engine he refurbished. He's learning mechanical repair skills to help him find a job after OYA.

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