

Notes from Wyoming Medium Correctional Institution (WMCI) Prison Community Partnership Committee Meeting

August 12, 2009, Community Training Center, Eastern Wyoming College

6:00 p.m.

Notes taken by Melinda Brazzale

- Meeting called to order by Chairman Dr. Rick Patterson.
- Everyone introduced him/herself. The following were in attendance.
  - **PCPC Committee members:** Father Mike Carr, Sue Davis, Don Dungan, Tim Ellis, Bob Mayor, Don Murphy, Gary Olson, Rick Patterson, Jeff Robertson, Karen Smith, Steve Smith, Sam Wagner, Earl Warren, and ex-officio member WDOC Director Bob Lampert; (**PCPC members not present:** Doug Chamberlain, Steve Fullmer, Martin Gubbels (Jerry Smith attended in his place), Dee Ludwig, Paul Puebla; Rhonda Schulte, ex-officio members Leroy Schafer and Robert Ward)
  - **Community members:** Julene Asmus, Realtor; Janet Bass, U.W. Outreach; Rod Girmus; Sylvia Girmus; Rick Hoppal, Torrington Office Supply; Lisa Johnson, Goshen County Economic Development; Richard Keller, realtor; Earl Kissel; David Lamp, Food Services of America; Julie Murphy; Dave Porter, Food Services of America; Alex Rakisits, Layton Construction; Gilbert Servantez, Wyoming Department of Workforce Services; Jerry Smith (for Martin Gubbels); Dale C. Williams, RB; Cheryl Yeik, Realtor, Century 21
  - **WDOC staff members:** Melinda Brazzale, Public Information Officer; Officer Bonnie Canaday, WWC; C.E. “Carp” Carpenter, WDOC Business Manager; Captain Garry E. Halter, WWC Security Manager; Polly Helzer, Fiscal Specialist, WMCI; Dee Herdt, Administrative Specialist, WMCI; Steve Lindly, Deputy Director; Bernice Madvig, Human Resources Manager, WMCI; Warden Mike Murphy, WMCI; Jay Muse, Agent, Cheyenne Field Services; Deputy Warden Mike Pacheco, WMCI; Sabrina Pickett, WWC Food Service Supervisor; Brenda Reedy, WDOC Recruiting Manager; Barb Tuttle, Casework Manager, WMCI;
  - **Media:** Rachel Koon, *Torrington Telegram*; Sandra Hansen, *Scottsbluff Herald*
- Minutes from April 15, 2009 were passed unanimously by PCPC members.
- Dr. Rick Patterson discussed the first 5 weeks of his sabbatical from Eastern Wyoming College to the Wyoming Department of Corrections. The time period for his sabbatical is July 2009 to July 2010. He began with attending the training at the WDOC Training Academy in Rawlins for 5 weeks. He was impressed with the staff and instructors – they were professional. It was quasi-military: starts on time, ends on time, no nonsense; not oppressive but positive and professional. He was impressed with the trainees: largely male, vast majority were correctional officers but there were some non-uniforms; many vets, many college degrees, about 2/3 of the class were from Michigan. Though this class will not be heading to the WMCI, Rick was relieved by, and pleased with, the participants – “if this is the kind of people that are coming to Torrington, I am pleased.” On September 13 the first training class will be oriented at Camp Guernsey with classes starting on September 14. There will be 8 training academies running from September through January. Rick said that now he’ll be involved with training as an adjunct professor.

- Summary: It was very positive; the trainers and the curriculum were excellent.
  - They began by saying that “you are not training for a job, but you’re training for a profession”
  - Many training topics
  - Safety and security was the mantra of the 5 weeks.
- Update on construction: Alex Rakisits gave an update saying that two generators were placed today, each weighing 87,000 lbs! The water and power is on; punch lists are being worked on. The plan is that on either November 23, 2009, or November 24, 2009, the institution will be turned over to the Wyoming Department of Corrections.
  - Centralized purchasing, vendor list: C.E. “Carp” Carpenter suggested that anyone in the public who is interested in working with the WMCI on any purchases should either contact Sam Azad, Business Manager for the WMCI, or Jamie Spezzano, WDOC Purchasing Manager. He named types of items that could be purchased locally but suggested that it would be best to talk specifically about a specific situation. He had business cards from both Mr. Azad and Ms. Spezzano for interested attendees.
  - WDOC recruiting update for WMCI (Bernice Madvig and Brenda Reedy): Correctional Officer testing will again take place in Torrington on August 17 and takes 6 hours to complete (includes tests on judgment, integrity, writing, reading, counting, physical fitness and an interview). They’re getting calls every day from all around the country. Bernice said that just today she received calls from Arkansas, Georgia, Texas, Pennsylvania, Nebraska and Wyoming. They’re starting to recruit and interview for many positions including support staff, records, IT, and clerical. Brenda said that the response from the Torrington area to Correctional Officer testing has been mediocre. She asked for suggestions from the crowd on ways to get the word out – don’t wait! The hiring process for Correctional Officers can take 4-6 weeks (that includes testing and background investigation). Currently the WMCI has made approximately 150 conditional offers of employment. Half or more are from out-of-state. She again said, “don’t wait!” If one is considering working for the WMCI, test now, even if you’re interested in a non-security job. That may fall through and then you’ll still be able to start as a CO. Folks may miss out on employment opportunities as the jobs are getting filled now. Entry level pay for a Correctional Officer is \$30,888. Current employee turnover is about 25%; however, one cannot be sure about the WMCI. Graduation rate from the Academy is nearly 100%.
  - WMCI transition to Torrington (Warden Mike Murphy): The staff is looking forward to the move in early September 2009. About 15 staff members will be moving from Cheyenne into the completed WMCI maintenance shop temporarily. Another 5 staff members will be working in Guernsey as adjunct trainers. Another 11 staff members have been hired but have not arrived yet. And, there are currently 37 correctional officers slated for the September Training Academy. The warden was asked about treatment. Though we are experiencing a 10% budget cut for the upcoming biennium, the department has protected as much treatment as possible. There will be a delay in sex offender treatment; however, long and short term substance abuse treatment will be in place. The warden has already approached PCPC and other community members about potential volunteers for some programming. The department and the WMCI has lost no staffing with the budget cuts.

- WMCI sign, open house (Warden Mike Murphy): Warden Murphy passed around photos of the new painted sign for WMCI. It will be installed somewhere near the entrance. It was designed and constructed by an inmate at the Wyoming Honor Farm and incorporates items that reflect Goshen County such as pheasants, green fields and farm buildings. He said that there will be open houses for the public and for community leaders. There will also be an opportunity for folks to spend the night in the WMCI. These events will take place in late December or early January and will be well publicized.
- Training update (Deputy Warden Mike Pacheco): The first Training Academy at Camp Guernsey will orient on September 13 and start class on September 14. There will be 37 WMCI staff members in that first training. There will be 2 training academies beginning in each of September, October and November and 1 beginning in each of December and January for a total of 8 Training Academy groups at Camp Guernsey. Participants in the early academies will graduate and then work temporarily at one of the other WDOC institutions for continued training. Warden Pacheco was asked about inmates testing new staff and he responded that, “yes,” that will happen; however, experienced staff will work with new staff to help them. He also said that about 60 current WDOC staff members have indicated that they want to transfer into WMCI. Director Lampert added that in addition to the 60 existing WDOC staff members, there are also many staff coming from out-of-state well experienced in corrections. The first inmates will be coming from out-of-state. There are about 275 currently housed in Virginia.
- Torrington welcoming committee (Cheryl Yeik): Ms. Yeik explained that there is a group comprised of businesses, Chamber of Commerce, and others, who have named themselves “Hometown Neighbors.” Their purpose is to welcome new people to town and help them orient to the community. There are many ideas being discussed and a big one is that for each Training Academy class there will be an event on the day of orientation (8 total). Each will be sponsored by a local business and will be something centered around food. Ms. Yeik invited the individuals who will have volunteered to pair up with these newcomers to come to the gatherings. A concern seems to be rentals don’t allow pets and many people come with pets. They might be asking for individuals to board pets on a temporary basis. The Chamber of Commerce is filling bags with information supplied by local businesses and they hope for coupons and free items to add to these. Ms. Yeik was asked about rentals and mentioned that construction workers are currently occupying many of these and that they will be leaving, thereby freeing up some housing.
- Other business (Rick Patterson): Rick’s final comment was that Torrington is one town that has never experienced a boom and that the building of the WMCI is creating a kind of boom. He feels that the community will handle it well.
- Next meeting will be Wednesday, October 14 at Eastern Wyoming College, 3200 W. “C.” The room is Tebbet 131.
- Meeting adjourned at 7:20 p.m.