



State of New Jersey

STATE PAROLE BOARD

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Media Release

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Parolee Volunteers Give Back to Community With Early Earth Day Celebration

NEWARK – About 50 parolees and former parolees held an early Earth Day celebration by planting 51 flowering and shade trees along Bleeker and nearby streets in Newark, from 9 am until about noon today.

The event was organized by the New Jersey State Parole Board, the New Jersey Tree Foundation and Rutgers University in Newark.

“This is a day for parolees to give back to the community, and to show they are ready to change their lives and become productive citizens,” State Parole Board Chairman Yolette C. Ross said.

“Today also allows us to highlight the success of employers like the New Jersey Tree Foundation, who have benefited from hiring parolees,” Ross continued. “Employers who hire ex-offenders have a partner in the parole officers who supervise those individuals and hold them accountable. Employers can also obtain federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit benefits, and free federal bond insurance, for each ex-offender they hire.”

Ross also pointed to scientific research that shows effective parole supervision, combined with community-based reentry programs, works to reduce the re-arrest rates of ex-offenders. The report of a four-year study by the Rutgers University School of Criminal Justice, announced December 10, 2008, found a 73 percent re-arrest rate for offenders who “maxed out,” or left prison without supervision, compared with a 51 percent re-arrest rate for parolees under general supervision and a 41 percent re-arrest rate for parolees subject to a specialized initiative of intensified supervision and reentry programs.

Most of the parolees present today participated as volunteers. Their volunteer work was supervised by five parolees currently employed as landscapers by the New Jersey Tree Foundation. The New Jersey Tree Foundation has created temporary, seasonal landscaping jobs for a total of 26 parolees, including the five currently employed, since 2007.

Of the previous 21 temporary landscapers, approximately 10 have gone on to permanent employment thanks to the experience they gained through the Tree Foundation.

The New Jersey Tree Foundation donated the 51 trees to Rutgers University, through the foundation’s Newark Renaissance Trees program. They included purple leaf plum trees, Japanese tree lilacs, ginkgos, London planetrees and Rutgers cultivar pink flowering dogwoods.

(more)

The parolee volunteers reported from community-based reentry providers including the Center for Urban Education (CUE) in Newark; Logan Hall, owned and operated by Community Education Centers (CEC), and Kintock-Newark. Many of the ex-parolee volunteers are members of the CEC Alumni Association.

Employers interested in learning more about the benefits of hiring parolees are encouraged to call the State Parole Board's Community Programs Division at 609-292-4257, extension 5.

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) is a Federal program designed to encourage employers to hire former offenders and others who face difficulty in securing employment. Employers are eligible for a Federal Tax Credit of up to \$2,400 for the first year of employment of each qualified employee.

Employers who hire former offenders are eligible for fidelity bond insurance coverage through a special Federal Bonding Program. The bond insurance issued ranges from \$5,000 to \$25,000 for a six month period with no deductible amount.

The New Jersey State Parole Board (SPB) is New Jersey's lead reentry agency, and works to ensure ex-prisoners return to society as law-abiding citizens. As required by law, appointed Parole Board Members and staff conduct more than 20,000 hearings per year, solicit input from victims and decide parole matters. SPB's sworn parole officers supervise more than 15,000 offenders statewide. In addition, SPB is New Jersey's primary law enforcement agency responsible for sex offender supervision. SPB officers are also active partners with multiple Federal, State and local law enforcement agencies and task forces. Finally, SPB's Community Programs Unit partners with government, non-profit and private agencies to connect ex-prisoners with vocational, mental health and related services, targeted to break the cycle of recidivism and reduce risk of crime.

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