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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ewing, N.J. Dec. 15: Garden State Youth Correctional Facility (GSCF) hosted its first-ever Winter Concert, where young men from the facility's music program and members of staff performed a repertoire of funk, soul and seasonal jams.

Under the direction of music teacher Dante Coluccio and others, the young men have spent months learning their instruments, studying music theory and preparing the music program. They've learned about stage performance, gear maintenance, sound production and gained technical skills that could lead to good-paying jobs later in life.

"Not only are they learning, but I'm learning," Coluccio said. "I watch these guys, and the life skills they are pulling out of here are amazing."

The 11-member group performed a program with songs by Stevie Wonder, Bruno Mars, Van Morrison, Bob Marley and others, with a holiday flair. Fellow incarcerated young men, family members, Department of Corrections (DOC) officials and staff gathered in the GSCF auditorium.

"The administration just said go for it, so they let us build what you saw today," Coluccio said. Musicians learned their instruments through individual lessons. "We have a recording studio, we have a piano lab, we have music theory 1, music theory 2, composition, and whatever the guys want to learn."

Dr. Darcella Sessomes, Chief of the Division of Programs and Reintegration Services, praised the young men in the band for their talent and commitment to channeling their energy into something positive.

“The success of this music program is illustrative of the power of educational initiatives that engage the mind, body and spirit,” Sessomes said. “With music the centerpiece of this program, these young men not only learned to play instruments but how to work together toward a shared goal. They gained technical skills that can lead to careers once they leave GSCF. This program is a glittering jewel with real value in the lives of the young men it touches, and has a profound effect on the development of prosocial skills, which leads to improved behavior.”

Next up, the band is recording a jazz album.

Garden State Youth Correctional Facility, opened in 1968, consists of a main institution and a minimum security complex. Men ages 18-31 participate in a full-day program of work, vocational training or academic education ranging from basic skills to a high school degree. Vocational programs include auto body and service, barbering, food service and paralegal training.

Video by Chris Carden, NJDOC