

December 2010



8th Edition

The Merrimac Message

Middle Peninsula Juvenile Detention Commission

From the Corner Office...

"You can observe a lot by watching"

I thought I'd start with a quote from one of my favorite philosophers, Hall of Fame catcher for the NY Yankees, Yogi Berra. The above quote is really appropriate as it truly describes my first two months at Merrimac. Wow, have I ever been doing some observing, watching and **learning!** Amazing what you can actually learn when you keep your mouth shut and watch other highly trained, competent people demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities in the performance of their duties. I have been quite impressed, time and time again, at the quality of this program and the effort put out by talented folks who turn the "brick and mortar" into the Merrimac-Center. At every turn, every meeting, every level, I have been greeted with a sincere commitment to positively impact youth through a blended approach of accountability and treatment. I am so proud to be a part of this team and hope to make it even better as we continue on our quest for a "commitment to excellence"!

I must admit, I have experienced just about every thing one could expect as a new Director during these first months: DJJ audits, full staff meetings, Executive Board and full Commission meetings, budget deadlines, leadership meetings, visits from General Assembly members, training conferences, volunteer meetings, school assemblies, mock interviews, chickens / roosters, committee meetings with the CSU and DSS, breakfast meetings, and the list goes on. I only recount this to relate to our readers the extensive level of community and commission support for this Center. It is a team effort that has the full commitment of a dedicated group of public servants both inside and outside of these walls.

In closing, let's be clear, we have challenges ahead of us with the shrinking state dollars for juvenile justice, increased financial stress on our localities, budgetary constraints, training and retaining a competent work force, capital improvements, and program quality / fidelity, to name a few. I am confident we can meet these challenges, especially with the network of support that is in place to allow us to succeed. As I was recently reminded, (and properly corrected) by a Commission member, "Merrimac is not only the detention leader in the Commonwealth, but nationally recognized as well". It is my goal to keep us # 1!

Lastly, thank you all for the open-armed, warm welcome to what I hope for me is the last stop on my career in juvenile justice. I cannot think of a better place to hang my hat one final time.

Mike Sawyer



Special points of interest:

- New Executive Director
- Ten Year Service Awards
- New Sidewalk Installed
- Annual Holiday Lunch

NEW TEAM MEMBERS

Since our last newsletter, we have had the good fortune to welcome the following new team members to the Merrimac Center:

Wayne Smigielski

Hope Bryant

Joshua Frazier

Donald Hand

Robert Sopko

Michael Sawyer

WELCOME



Director's Challenge: Review the paragraph below and be the first staff to tell me what it is and you will win a prize. This month the prize is a \$10 gift card from WaWa.

"A balanced approach of accountability and comprehensive services geared toward the constructive use of time to support our residents' physical, emotional, and social development. All youth are worthy of our best efforts as we provide safe and secure confinement as we strive to modify their behavior through social skills training and cognitive behavioral interventions."

A Warm Welcome to Our New Director



This fall Mr. Michael Sawyer was selected by the MPJDC to fill the position of Executive Director of the Merrimac Center. Mike comes to us with over 25 years of experience in the Juvenile Justice arena. His resume begins with time as a Probation Officer. Along the way, Mike has held the positions of Assistant Director of the Tidewater Regional Group Home, Director of the Apartment Living Program, and most recently he served as the Deputy Director of the 2nd District Court Service Unit.

Mike is a native of Virginia Beach and a graduate of Randolph-Macon College. He began his service to us on October 4th. Arriving with his sleeves rolled up, a smile on his face, and enough team spirit to spur even the Detroit Lions on to a win, Mike has already made a positive difference here at Merrimac.

Employees Celebrating 10+ Years

The Merrimac Center gives thanks to those dedicated individuals who have served for 10+ years.



Lewis Stratton Mar 1999

Roy Kelly Sep 1999

Frank Medina Aug 2000

Sheila Horne Sep 2000

Retecka Bright Sep 2000

Fond Farewell

Since our last newsletter a new name has been added to the Merrimac Center retirement plaque hanging with pride in the administration area. On August 31, 2010 the Merrimac Family celebrated with both joy and sadness the retirement of Evon Lemon, Senior Cook.



Evon came to the Merrimac Center in October of 1997 as the first kitchen supervisor. During her years of faithful service she became friend, co-worker and Mom to many staff members, and always treated the residents as if they were her own children. She maintained an outstanding Food Service Inspection record, ensured the Center received the maximum quota of USDA discounted food items, supervised many charitable projects for the Center, and served as caterer for most facility functions, celebrations and meetings. Her kind ways and big heart made her a joy to work with and a fine role model for staff and residents, alike. She leaves behind wonderful staff who continue to provide the outstanding quality of Food Service the Merrimac Center so proudly offers.

NO MORE MUD!



The Merrimac Center would like to thank Chaplain Harold Dimmitt of Good News Jail Ministries for organizing the donation of a new sidewalk for our outdoor recreation area. Residents were sometimes unable to reach the basketball courts for days after a hard rain due to flooding of the area.

We would also like to thank the following patrons who donated supplies and labor:

- Branscome, Inc.
- Lowe's Home Improvement
- Coghlan Painting & Carpentry
- Quality Concrete Services





A ALIVE
F FEELINGS
R REALITY
O OTHERS
G GOALS

CBT Program Update

The Cognitive Behavioral Training (CBT) Program has been at Merrimac for 3 and a half years, now. It has proven to reduce room confinement significantly, keeping residents active in the program. The use of verbal de-escalation techniques has also reduced the number of physical restraints in 2010. We are constantly working toward implementing the program consistently and ensuring fidelity to the original CBT Program developed by David Roush, PhD.

As an additional tool for positive interactions with the youth, all day and evening staff have been trained in motivational interviewing. This approach provides extra help to residents so they can work on further developing a healthy thought process and, consequently, reach their individual goals. It takes a strong team of counselors to implement a program that not only deals with behaviors, but also supports the residents in improving their worldview. It is very rewarding to see staff work with residents in such a collaborative manner.

Happy Holidays! Merrimac staff will be honored with a holiday luncheon to be held on December 13th & 14th this year



From the Principal's Office

The 2010- 2011 school year has gotten off to a great start! The teachers have implemented a new vocabulary program that introduces new words to the students each week. The vocabulary words are directly tied to the students reading lesson for the week along with the addition of a character word. Our focus is to improve student vocabulary while they are here at Merrimac.

Additionally, we recently held a college week where students attended a presentation by a local community college representative, a study skills workshop hosted by William and Mary students, and a presentation by NASA. The students all seemed to enjoy the programs and were able to walk away with ideas about options for their future.

We are looking forward to our second nine weeks which will include SOL tests for some of our students, some virtual field trips, and the introduction of IPADS into our lessons.

Until next time,

John Whalen



POST-D UPDATE



In what has become an annual tradition for the Post-Dispositional Program, residents were able to participate in an etiquette luncheon held at the Richmond Tobacco Company on October 22, 2010. The residents put into practice many of the lessons they had spent weeks learning about in their Life Skills and Careers courses including appropriate business attire, table manners, and communication skills. Donning suits and ties, the residents put their best foot forward for a day of sightseeing along the James River canal walk in Richmond followed by fine dining and pleasant

conversation at the Tobacco Company. The etiquette luncheon is one of many hands-on experiences in which the Post-D residents have opportunity to participate

Throughout the year residents will also provide care for the facility chickens, grow and sell plants from the Lemon House, maintain the front flower beds of the facility, tour the worm farm, pick pumpkins, attend the State Fair, tour apartments, visit the Virginia Employment Commission, and obtain their food handlers license, just to name a few of the Post-Dispositional Program activities.



From the Kitchen: CAKE BALLS

Looking for something new to share with friends and family during the holiday season? Try making cake balls!

A departure from the more traditional peanut butter or rum balls, cake balls are easy to make and can be done in countless different varieties. Here are the simple steps:

1. Bake a cake and let it cool for 20 minutes
2. Crumble the cake into a bowl leaving no chunks
3. Add 3/4 to a full can of frosting and mix well
4. Chill mix in the freezer for 15 minutes
5. Roll out 1 inch balls, placing them in freezable containers (you can stack with waxed paper)
6. Freeze for at least 6 hours, then dip in the candy coating of your choice and decorate



CHRISTMAS POEM - Written by a Post-D Resident

Little Noel was a reticent girl, silently begging for her parents attention
But when she walked into a room, she barely made an indentation
Noel's always wishing for Christmas; the only time the family gets together

Hoping that the holidays could somehow last forever

She looks out the window at the falling snow

Staring through the mysterious woods until out comes a doe

She rushes out to get a closer look

The deer gives her a cunning stare, as if from a story book

It nudges her repeatedly, begging her to climb on

In a moment they're flying, soaring across the frozen pond

It's bitter cold in the evening snow, but she's too amazed to feel it

Soon they come to a tiny opening, so small, she doesn't know if they'll fit

She has no idea where they are, or how it came to be

But her biggest question of all: Why is this happening to me?

The deer makes a landing; Noel can't believe her eyes

Everything is Christmas and magical, and all so small in size

Little people are running everywhere, gifts and candy galore

Instead of standing dumbstruck, she goes to the biggest door

What she finds is amazing, all different kinds of toys

People would go crazy, parents, girls and boys

Winding all around the room is a sparkling red path

As she follows, she's overcome with cheerfulness, and can't help but laugh

She's come to the end, but has to pause

Sitting above her is none other than Santa Claus!

She stares up at him, lost in thought

Until he asks (already knowing), have you been naughty or not?

Of course not Santa, I've been good all year

But can you tell me how I got here on a deer?

"All it takes is faith", said Santa; something you've got a lot of

If anyone tries to change you... learn to rise above