

W-S Urban League celebrates seniors from 18 counties

Organization celebrates Older Americans Month

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

May marked the 50th anniversary of Older Americans Month. To celebrate the event, the Winston-Salem Urban League held a ceremony on Friday, May 29, to honor the participants of the Senior Community Service Employment Program.

The program operates in 18 counties across Northwest North Carolina and provides low-income residents over the age of 55 with job training. After training is complete, the program helps the seniors find jobs related to their training.

SCSEP Director Patricia Sadler has been with the Winston-Salem Urban League for over 10



CSEP Director Patricia Sadler welcomes the 200 seniors who are participants in the program designed to provide job training for citizens over the age of 55.

years and believes the program is a great way for seniors to get training, and is grateful for the employers who have worked with the program.

"Without our employers, we wouldn't be nearly as successful," Sadler said. "SMO Supreme and D&K Fresh Start hires a lot of our seniors, and we are very grateful for everything they

do for us." During the celebration, human resource managers from D&K Fresh Start and SMO Supreme received the Premier Employer Award for their dedication to giving seniors an opportunity to gain employment.

Laura Garduno of SMO Supreme (WHAT KIND OF COMPANY IS THIS?) said she wouldn't know

what to do without her seniors. She said they are a joy to work with and looks forward to working with the program in the future.

"Our senior employees are amazing," Garduno said. "I don't know what we would do without them. We are grateful for everything this program does to help us."

Through a partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College, seniors can also take computer lessons to improve their chances of obtaining jobs.

The SCSEP also honored a number of college graduates during the ceremony. Carolyn Higgs and Robert William (WILLIAMS?) of Forsyth County are participants in the program, and both recently received their associate's degrees.

Higgs graduated from Forsyth Tech with a degree

in Human Services Gerontology, while WILLIAMS? attended ITT Tech, where he majored in Network Systems Administration.

WILLIAMS?, an Army veteran, said next year he plans to move to California, where he will continue to study to become a computer engineer. Although he just graduated, Robert has been offered a number of positions in his field.

"I've had a number of job offers since I graduated, but I'm just waiting for the right one," WILLIAMS? said. "I've

been all around the country but I like California the most. That's why I want to move there."

A number of other employers from Forsyth County were recognized during the celebration including, Winston-Lake Family YMCA, Mast General Store, Pepsico and RGA Behavioral Health.

Sadler believes the celebration should continue for the entire year.

"We should be celebrating the entire year," Sadler said. "We truly have some amazing people within this program that should be proud of all they do."



Built in 1962, Forsyth's Youth Center is one of 14 juvenile detention centers in the state.

Center

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youth, ages 11-15, and serves Forsyth, Davie, Davidson, Surry, Stokes and Rowan Counties. Deputy County Manager Damon Sanders-Pratt said that the facility, which was estimated to cost the county \$517,000 this fiscal year, was not holding enough



local youth to justify the cost and it was cheaper to pay for them to be held in other facilities. He said the facility averaged 12 youth at a time, and in February only five of them were from Forsyth.

"The numbers of Forsyth County youth being held in the county facility has been below the level the policy makers were comfortable subsidizing," he said.

County Commissioner Walter Marshall said he'd fought for a long time to keep the facility open but eventually lost the battle. He was concerned for both the youth and the center's employees, which the County is trying to place in new jobs. He said the commissioners heard precious little from the community in support of the facility, which he said has a disproportionate minority population.

"People need to become aware and become advocates for our kids," he said.

Judge Denise Hartsfield was also disappointed in the decision. She was one of four judges who serve in juvenile court who sent a letter to the commissioners expressing concerns about the court psychologist having access to them in another

county and the hardship it places on parents to visit their children.

Hartsfield said youth being transported from other counties are frequently late to court. She said that it also places a burden on parents who have to drop off and pick up their child when the court orders them to be detained for the weekend. She said there should be more local services for youth in the Forsyth juvenile system, not less.

Built in 1962, Forsyth's Youth Center is one of 14 juvenile detention centers in the state. Ten are operated by the state's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and only four are county operated: Forsyth, Guilford, Mecklenburg and Durham. The Forsyth facility detains 250 youth a year, 80 percent of whom are male and the most frequent age served is 14 to 15 years old. The average length of stay there is 17 days.

Youth spend most of their day in classes taught by a certified teacher so they don't fall behind in their studies. The facility also provides individual and group counseling, substance abuse assessment and evaluation, substance abuse education, psychological testing, health screenings and health education. The center's director, Sharon Singletary, said the goal is to put the kids back on the right path.

"There's a small percentage of children that go on and end up in the criminal justice system forever, but most of these children, given the right dosages of intervention, they can recover from this and they can still go on to be healthy, productive citizens," she said.

Singletary said the amount of youth detained at the center has been down in recent years. She said a change in state law kept many minor offenses like

truancy and shoplifting from resulting in detention. Now it's more serious offenses like assault that bring youth there. She also said diversionary programs and alternatives like electronic tracking bracelets have also kept youth from being detained. However, since March the facility seen an unusual increase and has been at or around capacity since then.

Since the population there is constantly changing and it's unknown how soon it will happen, parents have yet to be informed of the closure. She said the facility allows for half-hour visitation by parents during a two-hour window on Thursdays and Sundays. She said Forsyth County youth tend to be visited by parents, while out-of-county youth often aren't.



She said some local families will have to get creative in visiting their children in other counties. She said she's seen parents take the bus and even walk to the center to see their children at the center.

She's instructed the center's 21 employees to look for other jobs. She said she had faith Forsyth youth will continue to receive good care at the detention center in Guilford County.

"It's the end of an era," she said. "We've helped a lot of kids. Thousands and thousands of children have come through these doors, and I feel like we've provided Forsyth County and the other counties, the neighboring counties, with an excellent service. We have been very impactful into the lives of the children we've served."

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