

Prison inmates help work 'on the yard'

by Tim Smith

Although most ECSU students don't pay a lot of attention to the men doing maintenance work "on the yard," many would be surprised to find that the man driving the tractor or cutting grass may not be an employee of ECSU.

He might be a prison inmate on work release.

Ten work release inmates from Gates County Correctional Facility are working on campus doing landscape and cleanup, according to Ms. Barbara Jo Knight, grounds supervisor for ECSU's Facilities Maintenance Department.

"They only get paid a dollar a day, and bring their own lunches with them," said Knight. This saves ECSU a lot of money, Knight pointed out.

"These men are primarily used in the landscaping of the campus, however, if one of them has a skill that can be utilized, we'll take advantage of it," Knight said. "We had one man who was a welder and he did a lot of repairs for us. Another young man was interested in landscaping design and now has his own business in the area. Another man was a mechanic. He worked for us two years and kept all of our equipment going. After he was released he worked here and then opened his own auto repair business."

Several ECSU students said they had no apprehensions about having prison

inmates on the yard.

Knight agreed with their lack of concern.

"There is no reason to fear any of these men," she said. "They are in a trustee status, near the end of their sentences. None of them has been convicted of any violent crimes; most were charged with possession of drugs, passing bad checks and not paying child support. I supervise these men every day and they treat me with the utmost respect. They're here to be rehabilitated into society. I haven't heard of any of them being sentenced again after they leave here."

Work release inmates are not allowed to have visitors on campus nor can they enter any buildings without supervision, said Knight. They are also not allowed to converse with students, she added.

Besides keeping the grounds clean and well-maintained, prison inmates also maintain and repair tractors, lawnmowers and other landscaping equipment

"The summer months are the busiest, they keep the tractors and mowers going all day," Knight said.

Many of the work release inmates return to ECSU after their release from prison to seek jobs, according to Joshua Dawson, assistant director of facilities maintenance.

Up a tree...



Photo by Carlos McCormick

ECSU sophomore Deon Moore has a bird's eye view of the yard from his perch in the top of a tree on campus. With final exam week approaching fast, many students may feel like climbing a tree to "get away from it all."

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