

Spring 2011 Media Day Showcases New Women's

A dozen area journalists came to the Spring 2011 **Media Day**, which featured a tour of the new women's facility, soon to be officially named the Gloria McDonald Women's Awaiting Trial and Medium Security Facility. The guests were then transported over to Maximum Security where Captain Jeff Aceto led them on a brief tour of the state's oldest prison facility. At least two articles about the event were published shortly thereafter, one in the online publication *Cranston.Patch.com* and another in the *Beacon newspapers*.



Director Wall (center) and media guests listen to Warden Carole Dwyer describe the unique needs of female offenders.



Capt. Jeffrey Aceto and Deputy Warden Michele Auger, along with members of the press, listen as Director Wall talks about Maximum Security.

❁❁ Garden Therapy at Max ❁❁



When work began on the garden in the spring, there was still snow on the ground.

It began back in February with classroom instruction and a variety of seeds planted in soil and stored on a plant stand in the Education wing of Maximum. Terry Meyer, a cartographer and volunteer Pilates instructor at the Women's facilities, Kate Lacouture, a landscape architect, and Vera Brown, past president of the Rhode Island Federation of Garden Clubs, made the commitment to travel to the facility twice a week to instruct and assist the inmate gardeners. The idea began when Assistant Director of Rehabilitative Services Roberta Richman and Warden James Weeden first started discussing what type of programming could be beneficial for the small number (about 30) of inmates within the Department who are serving Life without Parole, the state's stiffest sentence. When they considered how to bring hope and meaning into the otherwise bleak existence of these men, the idea of a community garden was born.

Catholic Chaplain Martha Paone, who had been leading a support group for Lifers, was a natural to serve as facility coordinator for the project. Warden James Weeden's enthusiasm and support have also been critical to the project's initial success. Since Ms. Paone had been working with the men and had a strong sense of their suitability for this type of experience, she recommended about 10 men to the Warden, and he approved their participation.

It's not the sort of place one would expect to find a beautiful, expansive garden full of flowers and vegetable plants. On a beautiful summer afternoon recently, the new garden at Maximum Security and the inmates and volunteers who have created it received a special blessing from Bishop Thomas Tobin. The Bishop was also on hand to ceremonially hand over the lock to a new shed located in the back of the fenced in area housing the garden, purchased by Catholic Chaplain Martha Paone with grant money from the Diocese.



Plants were started and watched over inside of the Education Unit in Maximum Security.



Volunteers Kate Lacouture (back) and Terry Meyer (foreground) pick lettuce and strawberries from the Max garden.

To enable them to claim it as their own, the men were asked to design the garden themselves. Terry, the map maker, made a map, which was a joining of the ten designs. The final product includes

- continued on next page -

Garden Therapy at Max

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This butterfly garden by the fence enclosing the Max garden was part of the inmates' design.

and a rototiller was rented in April to prepare the ground and begin carrying out the design. Botany classes were offered to the men and guest speakers were brought in to teach. According to Ms. Meyer and Ms. Lacouture, each guest speaker fell in love with the project and asked to return and continue their involvement.

Two soil tests were taken and then sent to UMass./Amherst. The first harvest took place in late spring and yielded 9 bags of lettuce, spinach, and peas used in the salad for that evening's meal.

"A lot of people seemed to have the same idea at the same time," notes Terry Meyer. "It was like kismet the way it all came together."

One of the challenges the organizers faced was the issue of tools being introduced into a Maximum Security prison. Everything was counted and logged in and out to ensure the safety of everyone involved. The trellis was made with yarn instead of wire.

What has the garden meant for the men involved in its design and entrusted with its daily upkeep? "For many of them," Chaplain Paone says, "The garden recalls fond memories. Fragrance is big to them. Their senses are waking up in a way they haven't in a very long time. It also benefits nature and the other inmates in the facility who pass by it every day as they move through the yard.

"We have had other inmates thank us," notes Terry.

During the brief blessing ceremony with Bishop Tobin, attended by Director Wall, Assistant Director Richman, and several others, one of the Lifers read a reflection he'd written thanking the volunteers for their gifts of time and talent and noting how much the garden has come to mean in his life. The group had created a thank you card for the Bishop, which was given to him. "This is a group of men who had no hope or possibility of redemption," noted Director A.T. Wall. "The garden symbolizes that for them."



Bishop Tobin made funds available through the Archdiocese to purchase the shed, which he blessed recently. Beside him are Martha Paone and Kate Lacouture.

a butterfly garden of flowering perennials along the fence enclosure and organic vegetable gardens capable of producing enough to feed all 400 inmates in the building. Tomatoes, lettuce, herbs (including chives, oregano, tarragon, sage, lavender, saffron, dill and cilantro), arugula, strawberries, blueberries, and radishes are among the harvest.

The seeds started producing sometime in March,



ACI Chaplain Martha Paone, who has coordinated the Max garden project, stands with volunteer Terry Meyer, holding freshly picked arugula.



Focus on Fathers

Federal Funding Allows for Enhanced Programming

Recent statistics show that 1.5 million children in the United States have a parent serving a sentence in a state or federal prison on any given day. Not only does a parent's incarceration at least temporarily sever the relationship between parent and child, it also results in young people struggling with economic, social and emotional burdens. The RIDOC has long recognized that family support is critical to successful reentry and in recent years has focused on engaging the family as soon as possible, offering support and referrals that will keep family ties strong during a father's imprisonment. Recently, the Department was awarded a \$287,574 Second Chance Act grant for its Family-Focused Initiative and a \$391K Family Reunification grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) which together will allow for an even greater emphasis in this important area of prisoner reentry work.

It is not at all uncommon for several generations of one family to be locked up at the same time. In some cases, there are members of the same family in numerous facilities.



An inmate father who participated in the parent visitation program plays with his sons.

The overall desired outcome of the Family-Focused Initiative is to create a system that promotes responsible fatherhood and encourages fathers to be engaged in the lives of their children the results of which will contribute to sustaining healthy relationships, lead to crime-free lives, end family inter-generational incarcerations and create safer communities. The three phases of the initiative are listed below:

Phase I: Institutional Inmate Intervention:

Upon sentencing, the RIDOC will identify eligible inmates and their families through the use of the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) assessment tool. "Since the introduction of the LSIR, we are able to identify those offenders who are high risk, so we can focus our efforts on them, not the more compliant low risk individuals who have tended to be the ones to seek out services and who have a lower risk to recidivate," notes Professional Services Coordinator Ken Findlay. "This high risk group is more difficult to engage, but the stakes are higher." Priority will also be given to those fathers who owe child support payments with the intent of keeping them engaged in their

- continued on page 19 -