

County Jail Work Crew Jobs Are Sought By Prisoners

By Norman Indahl

The county jail work crew has saved the county approximately \$6000 by helping to rehabilitate the county courthouse.

Prisoners on the work crew fixed the barbecue pits at De La-veaga park.

They do the gardening at the county hospital and take care of the vegetables at the hospital's truck farm.

At the present time workers are helping remodel Harvey West stadium for installation of a new lighting system.

Purchasing Agent Ed Christensen, who was in charge of the maintenance work at the courthouse until last Friday, would not have been able to accomplish all the repair work around the courthouse without help from prisoners. He firmly believes the work crew has saved the county approximately \$6000 by helping at the courthouse.

"They do everything as good as the regular maintenance men," Christensen claims. "They work alongside our regular men."

Harry Winterburn, director of the city park and recreation department, feels that the barbecue pits would not be ready now if the county jail work crew had not pitched in.

"The men are willing to do a good day's work when they get out there," Winterburn explained. "Only one guy we have had to complain about."

The prisoners also do other jobs. They work on the parks, hospitals and others places where attention needs to be given.

A prisoner does not have to join the work crew. He can serve his term in the county jail and do nothing—just sit around. Getting to work on the crew is considered a privilege, not a punishment.

Jailer Hal Esty explained that an inmate serving stint of 30 days or more in jail and without holds—criminal action pending by another county—is eligible.

The work crew comprises 13 men most of the time since the "tank" for the inmates of the work crew holds only that number of inmates. They work at the county jail, courthouse and city parks.

"More jobs are coming up so I am moving the work crew into a bigger tank—one that will hold 21 men," the jailer continued. "This will be done to meet the increased demand for workers."

There is only one hitch to the job. A man's "rap"—arrest-sheet is checked carefully by the jailer before he is put on the work crew. This is done to make sure there is no criminal action pending against him.

A prisoner usually has to wait five days after entering the jail until the "rap" sheet comes in on him.

"There are lots of prisoners that do not want to go to work,"

Jail Work Crew Members Keep Busy



A member of the county jail work crew at the county hospital have to be a jack-of-all trades. Two prisoners are shown trimming hedges. They do numerous other jobs such as gardening, repair work, and cleaning the vegetables for the hospital kitchen.

Esty related. "They just sit back in the 'tanks'."

There is a waiting list of 20 men to get on the work crews, but no place to put them, Esty said. For security reasons, the work crews are housed in one "tank".

Many benefits go with the work crew detail. They get a chance to get outside in the fresh air, away from the musty jail cells, and exercise their bodies.

Hot noon meals are provided the city and county work crews. They also get five additional days each month for "good" time. Esty explained that an inmate earns five days off his sentence for every month served without violating any of the jail rules and behaving.

Hours of work are from 8:30 a.m. until 4 p.m., five days a week. Inmates on the city work crew are brought a hot meal from a restaurant near the place where they are working. Prisoners on the county work crew eat meals at the county hospital.

Christensen uses one or two inmates a day and they eat at the county jail.

Naturally, the prisoners prefer to work on the city crew or on the county hospital detail since they receive better meals.

The deeply sun-tanned Winterburn is all smiles when the subject of the county jail work crew is mentioned. He usually has a detail of five or six prisoners per day. Due to the efforts of the inmates, the picnic grounds at the end of Pacheco avenue have been fixed up.

"They have done a tremendous job of cleaning up the brush in the park," Winterburn related. "We wouldn't have been able to get along without them."

Some expert craftsmen have served on the city work crews, Winterburn recalls. One carpenter, a "repeater" in the jail, played a major role in repairing the picnic tables.

Another inmate, known as "Red," was handy with bricks and was instrumental in revamping the barbecue pits.

The park department pays the bill for the meals, he said.

Only three prisoners have tried to escape from the detail that works at the county jail, Deputy Sheriff Jack Skelton, who handles this crew, reported. Two were captured in a short time and the third escapee was picked up some three months later in Fresno.

Most prisoners on the county jail work crews are serving sentences of 60, 90 or 180 days and they are usually in jail for drunk driving or disturbing the peace convictions.

"It is an advantage to have long termers on the work crews," Esty declared.

Since the work crews are on the job all day, the inmates have visiting hours on Saturdays from 10 a.m. until noon. Regular visiting hours for the other inmates in the jail are Thursday from 10 a.m. until noon and 2-4 p.m.

Herb Hunt, maintenance supervisor at the county hospital, is pleased with the work of the inmates. A truck farm with a small amount of vegetables is operated by the hospital, Hunt related.

"Without the help of the prisoners it would be impossible to carry on the farm on any type of an economical basis," he emphasized.

The prisoners are grateful for the opportunity to work on the farm. An agricultural worker serving a sentence made the following comment:

"Time goes an awful lot better on the work crew. The work crew is treated nice. As long as you do a half-way decent job, they don't bother you."

Prisoners on the county jail crew are under the supervision of a deputy sheriff, while the inmates on the city detail are under the supervision of Jack Taylor, city recreation department employee who has been deputized by the sheriff's office. Inmates working at the courthouse are supervised by Paul Fielding, a maintenance worker at the courthouse.

The purchasing agent was relieved of the duties of the maintenance work last Friday to devote full time to the purchasing department.

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