

Governor praises Bozeman halfway house

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Gov. Brian Schweitzer challenged state officials Friday to find new ways to rehabilitate criminals and keep them out of prison.

"We've got to stop warehousing souls," he told about 100 people at a celebration honoring the Bozeman halfway house. "That's not working in Montana, that's not working in this country."

Schweitzer, Montana Department of Corrections Director Bill Slaughter and local criminal justice officials attended a ceremony in honor of the new 32-bed halfway house located on South 16th Avenue near the Law and Justice Center.

Schweitzer told the crowd Montana must lead the country in starting new programs like the halfway house to improve the justice system and curtail repeat offenders.

Part of the solution is to create good jobs, provide students with a good education and gain community support for new programs, he said.

The halfway house, which is run by the Butte nonprofit Community Corrections and Counseling Services, opened Dec. 12.

The goal of the program is to integrate offenders back into society with the support and supervision of the staff and programs offered at the home.

The program rehabilitates people from the Montana State Prison and Gallatin County jail.

"Prison isn't working," Slaughter told the crowd. "This re-entry program is what we're all about."

District Judge Mike Salvagni didn't want a halfway house more than 10 years ago when he was the county attorney, he said. His reasons included public safety issues and a lack of jobs for inmates.

"Gallatin County is a different place now than it was back then," he said of the need for a halfway house in Bozeman.

Offenders must stay in the home for about six months before they're released into the community with money, a job and a place to live on their own.

Everyone in the home must hold a job or attend school full time. Employers have been hiring men from the halfway house, paying them \$15 to \$22 an hour in a construction job.

They pay about \$300 a month to live in the 6,600-square-foot prefabricated home. No violent or sexual offenders are allowed.

Professionals provide drug and alcohol treatment, anger-management counseling, parenting and other classes for the residents.

A five-person screening committee, including a resident who lives near the halfway house, decides who can live in the home.