

Corrections plays large role in Butte economy

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The Montana Department of Corrections has far-reaching economic impacts in Butte-Silver Bow and adjacent counties.

Mike Ferriter, a Butte native, recently took the helm of the sprawling agency, replacing Bill Slaughter, who resigned. Ferriter, 51, has been working in corrections since 1977.

Butte's adjacency to the state prison in Deer Lodge has left the impression that Butte is a dumping ground for the majority of the paroled inmates. And there's concerns of locating the pre-release center in Uptown Butte has affected other economic development.

Not so, according to Ferriter and his agency spokesman, Bob Anez.

Here's a few facts as of the end of June 2006:

- There are 799 offenders in community corrections programs in Butte. That includes 517 on probation or parole and the 39 people in the Connections Corrections chemical dependency program here. That compares with 900 in Helena and 588 in Bozeman. There are 12,000 offenders under DOC supervision statewide. More than 9,000 or 77 percent of those are in pre-release centers offering alternatives to prison.
- In the Standard's readership area, there are 1,388 offenders in various community corrections programs. This includes those on probation and parole in Dillon and Anaconda, along with 49 offenders in the Connections program at Warm Springs, 149 in the WATCH (DUI) program at Warm Springs, 50 in the boot camp at Deer Lodge and 80 in the START program at Warm Springs, (which assesses parole violators to see if they should be returned to the community or prison). The prison at Deer Lodge is housing about 1,460 inmates.

Economic, Social impacts

- The prison and Montana Correctional Enterprises (the industries and ranch program) employ 629 people. (232 live in the Deer Lodge area, 221 in Anaconda, 151 in Butte and 25 in other areas). The combined annual payroll is about \$22.7 million.
- The Riverside Youth Correctional Center for female juveniles in Boulder has 27 employees with an annual payroll of \$1.05 million.
- The boot camp has 16 employees and a payroll of \$525,700. In addition, the Butte-Anaconda-Dillon areas have 16 probation and parole officers with a total annual payroll of \$593,516.
- That combined employment is 688 and the economic impact from salaries alone is \$24.8 million. That doesn't count the so-called ripple effect of the money as it turns over in the community.

The prison is at or near capacity, said Ferriter, and about 180 men and women are waiting in county jails to be transferred to the prison.

Nearly all of the crimes committed are tied to drugs, he said.

"It's always drugs. Alcohol is the gateway drug for juveniles. Meth is the drug of choice for adults," he said. "And a higher percentage of women are caught up in meth." It points to the need for more early intervention. Butte's chemical dependency program is a good start but has a long waiting list. Lewistown will soon see a program dedicated to meth via the Community, Counseling and Correctional Services, based in Butte.

Also, Ferriter says controls are in place to keep the most dangerous and the sex offenders out of Butte. The pre-release center does not take such offenders.

"The thing about pre-release centers is that you have an instant workforce for jobs no one else can be called on to do, at all hours of the day," Ferriter said.

CCCS operates several programs in the area. The Butte Pre-release Center employs 68 people with an annual payroll of \$2.3 million. This program has spent \$2.8 million on buying and improving property in Uptown Butte since 1983. It spent \$750,477 on local goods and services last fiscal year.

Women's Transitional Center employs 36 full-time employees with a payroll of \$950,774.

Connections Corrections has spent \$460,426 on property purchase and improvement and spent \$633,21 on goods and services last year. It has 28 employees with a payroll of \$939,200.

WATCH program spent \$633,200 on goods and services last year, and has 63 employees with a payroll of \$2.4 million annually.

RYO juvenile correctional facility (at Galen, for federal offenders) has spent \$7.8 million on property purchases and improvements since 2002. It spends almost \$649,000 annually to buy goods and services, employs 78 people and has an annual payroll of \$2.7 million.

START at Warm Springs has spent \$303,500 on goods and services since Dec. 1. It employs 34 staff with an annualized payroll of \$1.5 million.

In total, the corporation has 407 employees with total payroll of \$11 million.