

Community shows support for WATCH East

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Residents of the Georgetown/Hillcrest community and other areas of Glendive have shown overwhelming support for the proposal to expand the WATCH East felony DUI program from 40 to 50 beds.

According to Rick Deady, Treatment Contract Program manager for the Adult Communities Correctional Division at the Montana Department of Corrections, 95 percent of responses to the surveys which were mailed to 215 residents of the Georgetown/Hillcrest subdivision and an equal number of general Glendive residents have been positive.

Last week Deady told the Glendive City Council he was pleased with the community's response to the survey, pointing out that the 46 percent return rate was well above what is considered successful by statistics experts. The survey form also left room for comments, which will be compiled in a final report for city officials.

Mayor Jerry Jimison relayed several concerns he had heard from area residents about the survey, questioning why it was not conducted by a neutral third party and why some Georgetown/Hillcrest residents did not receive it. Deady said the survey had been conducted according to the Administrative Rules of Montana, which do not require a third party for surveys in this situation. In situations which do require surveys to be administered by a third party, the cost is very high, he added. Those who were missed by the mailing were simply overlooked, he explained, saying, "It was, I believe, just an honest mistake of going through a long list." Five residents who had contacted the DOC were mailed surveys last week. Any residents of the subdivision who did not receive the survey, should contact the DOC at 444-3930, said Deady.

Community members will also have the opportunity to make comments and ask questions about the expansion at a public hearing to be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 1 at the Dawson County Courthouse. Deady urged people to attend, saying, "(WATCH East) is a partnership with the city of Glendive and the community of Glendive."

WATCH East Program Coordinator Deb Dion was pleased with the results. "I think it validates what I've been saying, that this is a good program," she said.

The facility will host an open house preceding the public hearing on May 1 from 3-5 p.m. Staff and program participants will be on hand to answer questions and give tours of the facility. Coffee, cookies and punch will be served. "I want people to have a chance to see the program... I just think the more that people can get educated about treatment... they can better understand why it is beneficial. It does benefit public safety to treat people rather than just incarcerate them," Dion added.