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For Immediate Release...

Corrections News

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Maryville Treatment Center joins Puppies for Parole program

For the next two months, three shelter dogs from Maryville will have a new place to call home. The dogs are the newest enrollees of the Department of Corrections' Puppies for Parole program and the first obedience school pupils to be brought to Maryville Treatment Center (MTC). MTC celebrated the kickoff of Puppies for Parole on April 24, making it the 17th DOC facility to join the program.

MTC's partner in the program, the New Nodaway Humane Society (NNHS), supplies the treatment center with dogs from its shelter in Maryville.

Sonny Collins, warden of MTC, said it is his hope that by training dogs at the center, it will increase the dogs' chances of adoption and be of therapeutic value to the offender handlers.

"It's a win-win situation for both the Maryville Treatment Center and the humane society," Collins said.

Puppies for Parole is the result of the DOC's partnerships with animal shelters and animal advocate groups all over Missouri. The program pairs rescued dogs with offenders at prisons throughout the state for an eight-week obedience training program. Puppies for Parole began on Feb. 1, 2010, at Jefferson City Correctional Center. The program recently celebrated its 800th dog adoption.

"Offenders work with the dogs, teaching basic obedience skills and socializing the shelter animals to make them more adoptable as loving and obedient future pets," said Cindy Nelson, NNHS shelter manager. "Once the dogs have successfully completed the program, they will return to our shelter to be placed for adoption."

During the dogs' training, they learn verbal commands and general obedience. The offenders and the dogs go through the rehabilitative process together. Typically, the training lasts eight to 12 weeks. At the end of the training, each dog is administered the Canine Good Citizenship Test, which they must pass in order to graduate from the program.

"The dogs have a remarkable impact on DOC offenders, improving offender behavior and giving offenders incentive to maintain excellent conduct," said DOC Director George Lombardi. "Offenders not directly involved in the program are showing responsibility and selflessness by donating to support our efforts. Staff morale is also enhanced by the presence of the dogs."

While MTC is starting with three dogs, Collins said more may eventually be brought into the program as it expands.

Puppies for Parole is funded by donations only and does not receive state funding. For Puppies for Parole adoption and donation information, visit: doc.mo.gov/division/dai/puppies.php.

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