

>> Hello and welcome to The Valley today. I am your host Janet Michael. It is Laurel Ridge Community College Day and I've got a screen full of people on the Zoom with me today. Guy Curtis, of course, is in my top left corner. He is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge Community College. Returning to chat with us today is Sharon Hedland. Sharon is Director of Adult Education, she's done the show a couple of times, and then we have a room full of people at the Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center. We're going to talk to some of them about the programs, Sharon, that you are offering from adult education that are pretty wide in variety. It's not just a standard GED class that you offer at the jail these days.

>> That's true. I have to say that Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center is really committed to programming and doing as much as they can to help inmates come out with certifications and programming that's going to help them when they return to our community. We are very fortunate that besides GED, we have a full time instructor there, Kirk Jordan, and we wanted to do some things that would go beyond GED. As we were talking about certifications that were available, it became evident to us that there was a master gardener on staff who was a teacher there. They have a beautiful greenhouse, and they also had an officer there who is now retired but who was very involved with gardening. They grow fruits and vegetables, it's beautiful, and he saw the value of other things learned by gardening that were great skills and character builders for our students, and so it all came together. Our adult Ed teacher worked with the students on some of the academic parts of earning the certification, some of the math involved, some of the vocabulary, and then we had the master gardener who had them out in the field. They did a planting project, a landscaping design project, and then they took a certification that is an industry recognized certification in landscaping and horticulture.

>> This seems incredible to me that you are giving the inmates the ability to leave that facility in a much better state of mind and a much better place in their life because you offer these types of courses while they are incarcerated.

>> Yes, and that is only because the jail is such a wonderful partner and is so committed to doing this. The other one that we did was heavy equipment operator certification, and for that, everyone at Northwestern went above and beyond. Our instructor Kirk helped everybody get everything they needed to get financial aid. They transported the students to the campus, provided lunch and snacks. The inmates who are eligible to do that program are the folks who have been approved for work release. They've gone through all steps and Captain Kitral can tell you more about that to be able to do this. But these were folks who are working five days a week, going out, doing a job. They did the heavy equipment training for five and a half weekends here at the Middle town campus. They worked all week, they were transported for the classes, and then our instructor really reached his schedule so he could be there in the evenings after they had worked to help them get online and do all of the coursework

that was required outside of being on campus on the weekends, they came in their khakis and they were transported, and they were on time. It took a village to make it work, and I got to say that the people at Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center are just amazed.

>> Captain Kitral, tell me what that looked like on your side? Was this something that you had inmates sign up for? Did they go through some sort of vetting process? Did you have people that you thought would be successful in these programs?

>> Absolutely. Sergeant Tim Broke. He's in charge of the community mate workforce, and we chose that group of inmates to talk to first because they haven't entered the workforce as far as pay yet. They're going to community mate workforce. Our goal was to give them a certification, so when they were approved for work release, they could maybe get hired into that field. We vetted probably a group of about 25. We had I think, several interested, and we base it off of when they were getting out, their abilities, past work history and stuff like that. Then we picked five and sent them down there, and they were very eager, they worked hard, from what I understand is everybody did really good. Another way we chose them was anybody before they leave this facility is vetted go through three chains of command before they're allowed to actually step outside, and then once all parties agree, they can go outside with the exception of the DOC inmates. If we have a DOC inmate, then they have to be, of course, approved by the state to be allowed to go out. But once they're approved, they stay here with us during their incarceration, and they're allowed to participate in any programs that we authorize. The vetting process was actually pretty easy because most of them, obviously they want to work while they're here and everything. The more they can learn when they're here, the better off they're going to be outside. Because we don't want to be known for just warehouse and inmates. We want to try to make their life better and give them a stronger stand on the ground when they do great between Laurel Ridge and Kirk here all I did was set things in motion. Kirk, he did 95% of the work getting everything ready. He just made me look good, made the facility look good. But no, it went very well and we're talking about doing it again, trying to do it more frequently. The first one was a test, I hope to do it again real soon.

>> Kirk, what experiences did you have once this program kicked off and you were working so closely with these five different inmates on these different programs, how did that look?

>> They were all very happy to be taking these certifications and they all worked really hard to do it. Did the homework, did the studying, work well with each other to study and pass the certification tests at the end. For the heavy equipment operator class because they studied on as Captain Kitral said, they worked during the week their work release programs and then took this course for heavy equipment operations on the weekend in order for them to do the

homework that they needed to do on Saturday for Sunday, then I would come in and help get them scheduled online so they could work on the laptops in the evening and help with questions about the content and about the study resources that they were using for that. For the horticulture class, I wasn't as directly involved in that one. We have a wonderful master gardener here who taught most of that class, and I was more on the administrative side of things and therefore the classes, but not as the direct teacher of the class.

>> Sharon, was there a fee for them to participate in this? You mentioned financial aid. Did they pay a tuition and do all of the things that any other Laurel Ridge Community College student would do?

>> The wonderful thing about Laurel Ridge Community College and Workforce Solutions is that there is a lot of financial aid available. There's a program called Fast Forward and all of the students qualified for that, so they paid nothing for the class. There was one student who actually, his residence was West Virginia. The Fast Forward funding is only for Virginia residents, and so Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center paid that tuition. But Kirk worked very hard to help them get the documentation that they needed to get that financial aid. Having access to your driver's license and your birth certificate and things like that can be difficult once you've been incarcerated.

>> A lot of hard work was done in advance, but they were able to get this paid for them through funds available at the college. The certification for the horticulture was not that expensive, it was about \$25 per person, and Northwestern paid for that. Our goal with the programs at the college is to help people take advantage of all of the funding that is available for these workforce certifications.

>> Curtis, you and I have talked about that on previous shows as well. So many people don't even know all of the different programs and the financial aid opportunities that are available to them in any of these different programs. Being able to apply it specifically to this group of people that are at the Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center has a little bit more of a warm fuzzy attached to it.

>> It does. We know so many times when individuals can get that certification, that credential, it lifts them so much higher up to the poverty ranks in terms of where they are and where their positions. Financial award and backing by the state supporting those who are in Virginia for those high demand programs like heavy equipment operator, they want to incentivize folks to go after them. There's that program that fast forward supports but also G3 and even an additional layer behind the scenes, too many acronyms to remember that we offer so many different ways to support students. A lot of times you just say it's best to come to us directly to help you navigate those options and so we're very fortunate at a state level that we're getting a lot of support and recognition for those high demand programs and folks like these gentlemen

here today are finding opportunities afterwards. We're very excited about continuing those programs throughout the year and helping those high demand industries that we support in our local community.

>> Offering these types of programs. Is that unique to our facility here in Winchester, Frederick County, or is it done at other detention facilities across the state?

>> Adult Ed programs across the state. There are many places where with the interruptions caused by COVID, even regular GED instruction has not resumed. They did not make it a priority. Here it has definitely been a priority to get us back in there and to continue GED. I think you really are ahead of the curve on trying to do this for inmates and really looking at ways to make it work. Even the transportation issue of getting inmates to the college for the training. There are a lot of places when I talk to them, that's impossible because they're so short staffed. They don't have the people to make it happen. I think you are ahead of the curve and the fact that you have someone now who meets with people as they come in and you're working out, almost a learning plan for each inmate that comes in. These are the things that they need to come out as a better person. I think you are way ahead of the curve.

>> Yeah. Here at our facility, we're full board ahead of Mr. Corman. He wants to be known as a program jail. All our staff, from our officers all the way to our programs people, everybody pitches in and wants to see people succeed. It's an all thing here at NRADC. Everybody wants to see everybody achieve. That's our motto here. We do everything together to make everything success for Miss Hemelright, with the gardening and Mr. with the GO said, it ain't just one person it takes a family to get things done and that's what we have here. We want to see people get better we want to see people improve.

>> Let's take a break. When we come back, we have two students, two horticulture students on the screen with us as well. We're going to talk with Ricky Arbogast and Carl Funk in a few minutes after the break and we'll hear about their experiences and their goals for moving forward and what they're going to do with this certification. We're on the screen today for Laurel Ridge Community College Day. Guy Curtis is joining us. He is Director of Marketing for the College. Sharon Hedland is with us as well. She is Director of Adult Education. Captain Carl and Kirk Jordan are both with us at the Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center. We're going to come back and talk with everyone in just a couple of minutes.

>> Looking for ways to serve, but don't know where to begin to [serve.org](https://www.justserve.org). A free site to help those who want to serve find opportunities nearby. Just Serve has teamed up with organizations nationwide. Go to [Just Serve.org](https://www.justserve.org) and type in your city and you'll see a list of service opportunities. Sign up on Just Serve to receive emails letting you know about new projects. Just Serve is fast, free, and easy.

>> Welcome back to the Valley today I'm your host, Janet Michael. We are on the screen for Laurel Ridge Community College Day, and Curtis is with me. He is Director of Marketing for Laurel Ridge. Sharon Hedland is joining us as well. She is Director of Adult Education. We're talking about some of those adult education programs that are currently being offered at Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center. Captain Dan Ktrel is on the screen with us, along with the adult Ed instructor, Kirk Jordan and we've got two current students of this program, Ricky Arbogast and Carl Funk are both taking the Horder culture classes or have taken. Ricky I want to start with you. Tell me a little bit about this process for you. Was it something that you were all in from the word go or did it take a little bit of convincing that this was a program you wanted to be a part of?

>> It did. I was approached by Miss Hem right and Sergeant Tim Brooke. And at first I was a little reluctant, but after giving it some thought, I went ahead and participated and it is one of the best choices I've made in a long time. It's been really positive, the knowledge that I learned from it, and did agree that I can do so much, once I get out, I have options. It's a degree that's noticed by a lot of companies, so it gives me options and a future as far as employment, and just the experience has been unbelievable. It's very positive experience and I'm very glad that I participated in that, it was offered and I accepted.

>> Do you think that it is something that in a different situation you would have taken advantage of if not for where you are now at NRADC? Do you think if this had been presented to you in a different way or somewhere else that you would have said yes or do you think you might have passed on it?

>> I don't think that is something that I would have pursued on my own. But being that I was given the opportunity and I accepted it, it's something that I really am happy that I did, and that I've completed.

>> What is something that you've really enjoyed about going through the program? What's been your favorite thing so far?

>> I like to hands on gardening. I did my own gardening in the past with my grandma, and it brought back a lot of memories from my childhood and then, plus being out in the garden, you forget the situation that you're currently in. It's very self soothing. It helped me out a lot just being out there with plants. It was very self soothing for me.

>> What are you most looking forward to putting into practice once you're released?

>> I learned a lot of knowledge, just different types of vegetables and their starting periods when they produce the best and stuff like that. So I'm going to contribute that to my own NRADC and when I get out.

>> We could see you on a fruit stand somewhere telling people how to make

tartar sauce with any number of [inaudible 00:15:40]. Carl, let me bounce over to you. Tell me a little bit about what coming into this program was like for you in the beginning.

>> It was interesting at first when he was talking about landscaping, and I thought it was building retaining walls, that landscaping. Once I really got into it and realized it was a totally different level, I wasn't expecting, I got into it because it's something that I've done. I had my own business for about 14 years, doing landscaping. I planted shrubs, I took care of lawns. But this was just an elevated level of learning of different processes and how to grow your own food. That was something that was interesting to me.

>> When you found out about the program, were you hesitant at all to be part of it or did you jump in feet forward?

>> Well, I was pretty excited, feet forward because I thought it was something to do with building retaining walls and all that. Something that I've done for a long time. I was looking to get more experience and more knowledge on that aspect. I was a little surprised and interested after I realized that it was the horticultural aspect of landscaping.

>> Has there been one part of the program that has really stood out to you that you've really enjoyed more than the others?

>> One thing that stands out to me is a different group of guys with different backgrounds, some knowledge, no knowledge, some experience or whatnot, all coming together and from scratch, from a piece of paper, making this big garden work and seeing it come to fruit. Seeing everything from start to finish, getting to eat vegetables and stuff that we grew on our own was kind of unique.

>> They taste better when you grow them yourself, don't they?

>> Definitely.

>> Kurt, what career path will these guys have when they're released from NRADC? What jobs could they go out and apply for and be successful in?

>> Before I answer that, let me just say one thing. When these guys were talking about what they liked about the course and working Carl on, these guys were people that work together all the time. They just all ended up in this program together and the teamwork that they had that they developed over the course of the lessons. Was really fun to see how they work with each other and played off each other, made fun of each other's mistakes and things like that. It was interesting to see that. If you saw this garden, if you saw what they produced, it's just amazing. It's landscape beautifully and everything so green and healthy. The things they did in the greenhouse were planning, part of their projects were planning and germinating things in the greenhouse and then

transplanting those down into the garden. There are lots of moving parts to this, and it was really a nice project because this is one of those few things that you can actually see your work. You can literally see it grow and then, like they say, enjoy union at the end. There are a lot of good aspects to this program that weren't just about a curriculum, but also working as a team and working with each other. That's what it really takes when you get out, when you're working somewhere like, how do you get along with everyone? How do you make sure that those kinds of things, those soft skills you have, as well as the hard skills for whatever work you're doing. But as far as these guys, when they get out, but there's working greenhouses, and all said he had a landscaping business for many years, and this elevates that knowledge that he has to a slightly different aspect of it. Same with Ricky when he gets out, he can choose which part of that he likes and if he wants to pursue that and go forward from there.

>> Ricky, do you think, when you're done with this, that you'll continue your education in some form. That you'll get another certification and try and move even further up on your education journey?

>> That's something that I've definitely given thought into. It's definitely a possibility because just like I said, the experience was something phenomenal for me. It just enlightened me. Yes, I do believe that it's something that I'll pursue.

>> Sharon, this is one of those things where not to take anything at all away from someone, for example, getting their GED. But this type of program, and Kirk touched on this briefly too, you can actually see the fruits, in this case, literally, of your labor. It really has, I think, a bit more of a motivational aspect to it. When you can see that you're growing something and you're learning something and you're doing it together with a group of people that forget about their environment. They're all coming together to create a common good.

>> Yes, I think the lessons learned go far beyond what was in any textbook. The working together, the teamwork, the sticking to it. Like Kirk said, mistakes were made and we figure out how to remedy them. Adult Ed in the jail is much more than GED. Our GED classes, we also try to integrate the same workplace skills. But certainly these certification programs allow us to really expand on that. I hope that we can do more. I really hope that employers are listening and that they realize that these folks are wonderful employees. They've gone through a whole vetting process to even be able to be involved in these programs. When they are on work release, they're coming back to a facility. You know what they are doing. They are a better employee in terms of knowing what you can expect. The next morning they go back to a facility, they are randomly drug tested, they want to work, and they appreciate employers who give them that chance. There are also tax programs that are available to employers when they hire these inmates. Inmates can be bonded. You're

getting a wonderful employee and employers who have done this realize how grateful the employees are. While these folks are incarcerated and they have these certifications, they could do this work on work release. Please either reach out to the NRADC or in-call me here at Laurel Ridge because we have some great people that would add value to the company and certainly to the commute.

>> Then for someone who's listening that wants to learn more about your adult education programs. Guy Curtis and I talk about information sessions a lot. Do you have regular information sessions? Can they call you at the college? What's the best way to get more details?

>> They can call me at any time. My phone number here at the college is 540-869-0747. Our website is laurelridge.edu/adulted. The website tells you all of the programs that we have GED, ESL citizenship. We have registration for classes. We'll be starting our new semester, January 8th and 9th in most locations. But if you go to our website, you can get on a waiting list and we will contact you and try to get you into a class or you can call me and we'll try to get you into a class.

Guy Curtis, this is one of the coolest programs we have talked about in a while. This is great because it's not just teaching somebody how to do something and giving them an education. You are literally changing the trajectory of a lot of these guys lives.

>> Absolutely. Our college is so focused on the community itself and that's the core of what we do. This program is a great example of us reaching out and supporting folks, helping our neighbors uplift them, and supporting them in many ways than just offering programs to anyone who wants to get a new job. It is very gratifying and very rewarding to be a part of that behind the scenes. Thank you gentlemen and Sharon for putting together such a great program that we offer here at the college and through you. For those who are interested with being the new year and new opportunity and want to grow and continue to grow at the college. You do also have additional classes and programs starting the week of 16th January, and the week of 20th January as well. If you want to get into programs like heavy equipment operator, many of them are starting throughout January, February and March. We do have upcoming information sessions on January 18th in Fok here or February 24th in Middletown to learn more about those programs in person. But otherwise, reaching out directly to Sharon or those directly within our offices can help folks get started. This is your time to get a chance into becoming a better individual, but also look for a new career and look for new ways to better themselves and the community. We're very excited about the upcoming year and opportunities that we offer.

>> Ricky, Carl, I want to wish you both a lot of luck. I think that what you're doing is outstanding and I am sure that once you were released you are going

to go far. I'm really impressed with the work that you guys have put in. Captain Catrel and Kirk, thank you for the work that you're doing inside of the Northwestern Regional Adult Detention Center, because without you guys being there to do the work on the inside, these guys are not going to succeed like they need to on the outside. Thank you both for the time and the energy that you're putting into these programs.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you. I'd just like to say that I've been here for a little over a year and running a jail is like its own full time job. If you did no education or no programming at all, it's a challenge in itself. The fact that NRADC is so positive about doing programming and they don't ask why we can't do something, They ask how can we do something? That's really a nice attitude to have is like they really want this programming, will do whatever they can to try and bring it in. I really appreciate that about working here.

>> Chair that makes it a whole lot easier on your end to be able to offer these programs too, I imagine.

>> I just have to say the comments that were made today are exactly what you hope to hear that you are really making a difference. This is the best profession I could ever be in working with adults and helping them meet goals. Today it's just very rewarding to hear these two men speak. Yes, everyone at the jail, everyone at the college is really working together to try to make these really positive things happen.

>> Guy Curtis, thank you for pulling this all together.

>> Absolutely. I was so excited to have you back on and happy New Year to you, Janet.

>> Happy New Year as well. I will be back tomorrow. It is a brand new episode of the Valley today, a few minutes afternoon so meet me here then.