

Lives, cemetery restored

Inmates 'learning' while working

By Aaron Nathans

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They walked the rows of headstones, picking up branches and damaged decorations, and put back in place the occasional broken headstone.

They said it was good to get out of the the Hazel D. Plant Women's Treatment Facility in New Castle for a few hours. But there was also something poignant

about spending a summer morning fixing up Riverview Cemetery in Wilmington, said Kayla Mullins, of Harrington.

When fixing the headstones, "it's kind of like you're putting them back together," said Mullins, who said she has been incarcerated since 2008 for a series of armed robberies. She said it was doing something good for the deceased, "like

See SERVICE, Page B2



Casey Johnson (left), Kayla Mullins (center), and Shante Harris help clean up Riverview Cemetery. SUCHAT PEDERSON/THE NEWS JOURNAL

Service: Teaching responsibility, accountability

Continued from Page B1

we're respecting them at their final resting place."

The work at Riverview on Saturday was an example of a community service program offered by the state Department of Correction. During 2011, offenders from the state's seven community correc-

tions centers performed 219,000 hours of community service, said department spokesman John Painter.

The program is different from the day laborer program at the Sussex County Work Release Center that is the subject of an internal investigation by the Department of

Correction. That program, in which inmates work for and were paid by outside employers, was shut down after a News Journal investigation revealed a serious lack of documentation, including any information on the whereabouts of prisoners who went out as day laborers during the past 23 years or what they were paid.

Unlike that program, inmates in the community service program are not paid and are supervised directly by DOC staff, Painter said. Their projects include such jobs as cleaning litter and debris off the state's highways; cleaning up at Delaware Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Bear; and processing venison for donation to local charities and food banks, Painter said.

Projects also include landscaping and beautifi-

cation work for the Simon Circle Boys & Girls Club in Dover and helping stock fish in local ponds for trout season.

On Saturday, it was four inmates from the Plant center straightening up at Riverview Cemetery alongside members of Friends of Historic Riverview Cemetery, as Cpl. Shahida Santiago supervised.

"It seems like they're just picking up trash, but they're learning," Santiago said.

Painter said such programs teach the offenders responsibility and accountability and allow them to give something back to the community, sometimes the same communities they have victimized.

Crews from the various corrections centers have worked regularly to clean up Riverview Cem-



Emily St. Onge, of Newark, cleans up the cemetery. "This gives us something to do and gets us out into the community," she said. SUCHAT PEDERSON/THE NEWS JOURNAL

etry since 2004, and sporadically before then, Painter said.

Mullins said she was "pretty scared" to re-enter society, with all of its responsibilities, since it's been so long. Emily St. Onge, of Newark, working alongside of Mullins, noted that "she doesn't know what Facebook is, and Pandora."

St. Onge, who said she was incarcerated in June for reckless endangerment of her son, said, "This gives us something to do and gets us out into the community."

Staff reporter Esteban Parra contributed to this story.

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