

EDUCATION



Working toward a new life



Photos by Stephen Lega

Top: David Nelson listens to the speaker during the March 18 GED graduation ceremony at the Marion County Detention Center. Above: The GED graduates gather for a group photo at the end of the graduation ceremony.

First group of inmates complete new GED program



By Stephen Lega

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The pomp may have been lower key, but the circumstance was just as important to the seven most recent graduates of the GED program at the Marion County Detention Center.

David Nelson, 36, was the first person at the jail to earn his GED after the implementation of a computer-only testing system.

"It's been 20 years since I dropped out of school. It was not easy," Nelson said.

For him, completing the GED, along with the substance abuse program at the jail, is a new step in his life.

Nelson dropped out of school when he was 16 years old and got caught up in the party scene, he said. After an injury, he was prescribed pain medication. When he was taken off the medication, he said he turned to heroin.

He admitted that his addiction came before everything else in his life, and it also led to his arrest for theft, something he was doing to pay for his habit.

He said it felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders when he learned that he'd passed the GED program.

"I got a lot of things to be grateful for. I thank God for giving me the courage. I thank God for giving me the ability to go pass the test. It's opened a lot of doors for me," Nelson said. "Now, I can go out there and better my life and I can better the life of my four little girls."

He added that he hopes to go to culinary school when he gets out, possibly as early as April 1.

"Now, the doors of opportunity's opened up for me," Nelson said.

During the graduation ceremony on March 18, the seven gradu-

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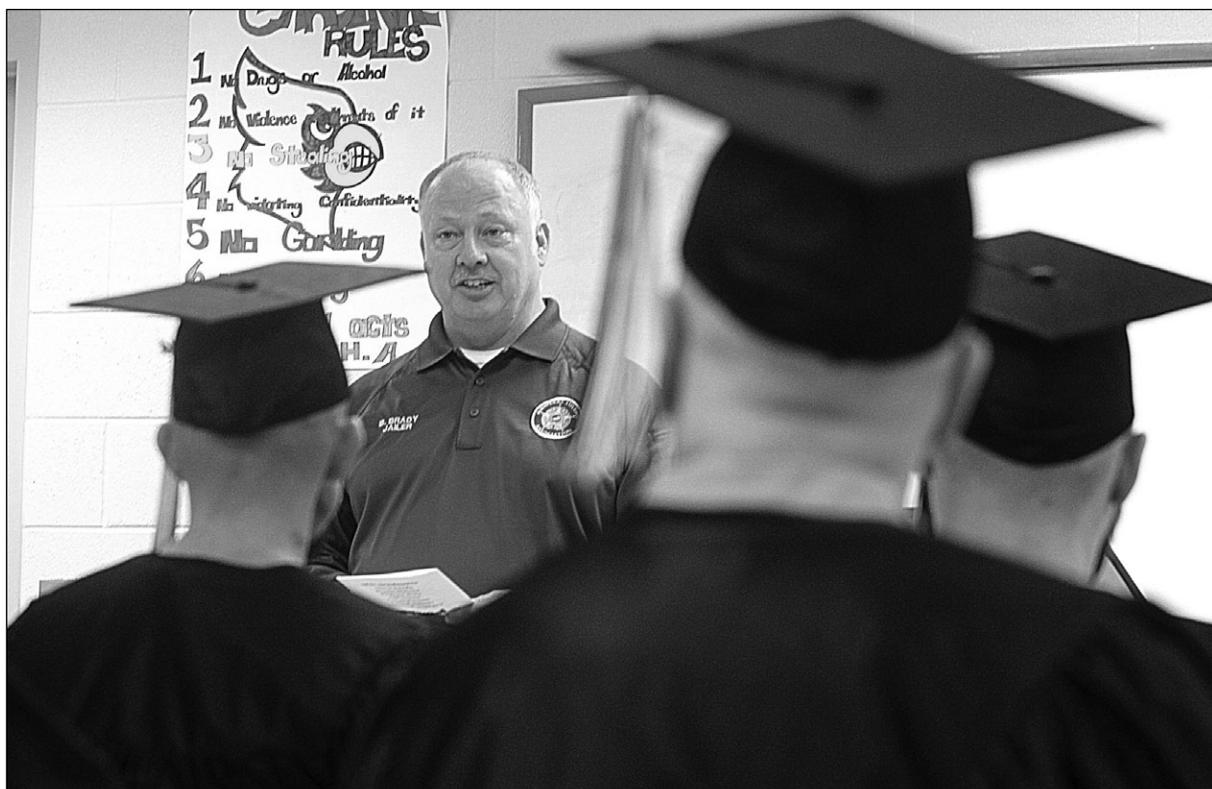


Photo by Stephen Lega

Marion County Jailer Barry Brady tells the most recent graduates of the GED program at the Marion County Detention Center that their accomplishment is something to be proud of.

■ LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MCDCC IS A MODEL FOR OTHER JAILS

Kay Carlew, Susan Classen, Elizabeth Croom, Maria Visse and I visited the Marion County Detention Center and were impressed with what we found. The entrance is attractive and landscaped. Inside we found a secure, clean, well-lighted facility with space for programs. Residents are treated with respect and are expected to treat everyone with respect. Mutual respect permeates the facility.

The jail, directed by Mr. Barry Brady, is a model for inmate rehabilitation. Unlike other jails, this facility has programs for residents to make good use of their time and leave with successful reentry skills. Substance abuse, GED and parenting programs are provided along with programs that increase self-awareness, strengthen decision-making processes and reinforce positive behaviors. These programs reduce the recidivism rate, future costs for repeat offenders, and are a good investment.

The detention center is a well-run facility and other Kentucky jail inmates apply for transfers there. If a Marion County jail resident is not willing to be involved in the programs, he or she

may be transferred out to make space for someone who is interested in the programs.

Marion County's Detention Center is a model for other Kentucky and U.S. jails. It provides services to residents while also working to reduce overhead costs. The new hot water system is one example of the new conservation and cost saving measures. These improvements come, in part, through the support of the Marion County magistrates and Fiscal Court. Kudos to them, Mr. Brady, and to his staff for working towards real rehabilitation of people rather than "warehousing" them.

*Kathy Wright
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