

## **Work Ethic Camp Road Crews Reach Million-Dollar Milestone**

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Offender work crews from the Department's Work Ethic Camp in McCook marked an impressive milestone this week. It is estimated that if local governmental and nonprofit agencies had paid minimum wage for the hours the road crews provided at no cost up to this week, the agencies would have paid out \$ 1 million dollars.

Since the program began accepting offenders April 30th, 2001, offender crews have been providing labor for a wide range of projects that benefit surrounding communities. Offenders provide unpaid labor for government agencies such as the Game and Parks Commission, Department of Roads, city and county governments, and schools. They also assist with other community projects such as the annual "McCook Toybox" campaign for underprivileged children, Habitat for Humanity, and food pantry distribution.

Offenders learn new skills and experience the reward of helping others through their work experiences. In addition to unskilled jobs such as painting, picking up trash, pulling weeds, clearing snow and cleaning, offenders have also assembled bleachers, poured concrete, shingled picnic shelters, laid sod, hung and finished drywall, put up buildings, and assembled children's bicycles and tricycles.

Over the last few months, offenders have begun working individually with staff at agencies such as the Department of Roads, the McCook Humane Society, and the City of McCook in a "Trust Program." Offenders gain real-world work experience, and the agencies have the benefit of free labor.

All of these efforts are part of the 120 to 180 day Work Ethic Camp program, a cooperative effort of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services and the Nebraska Probation Administration. The Work Ethic Camp program is designed for first-time, nonviolent felony offenders who are sentenced to Intensive Supervision Probation.

While in the program, offenders participate in substance abuse treatment and education, and attend classes in GED, cognitive restructuring, victim awareness, parenting, lifeskills, and work attitudes. Upon completion of the program, offenders return to their own communities for up to 5 years of community supervision with an Intensive Supervision Probation Officer.

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