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Inmates help the community as they count the days

- Sweet freedom is near for a group of minimum security inmates from the Illinois Department of Corrections Dixon Springs Impact Incarceration Program. Until their release dates, these men are doing public service work for the Harrisburg school district and other municipalities and school districts in Southern Illinois.



PHOTO/ TOM KANE PHOTO

A crew from the Illinois Department of Corrections, Dixon Springs Impact Incarceration Program, a paramilitary boot camp operation, clean the stands at Harrisburg High School's Taylor Field Tuesday afternoon.

Sweet freedom is near for a group of minimum security inmates from the Illinois Department of Corrections Dixon Springs Impact Incarceration Program. Until their release dates, these men are doing public service work for the Harrisburg school district and other municipalities and school districts in Southern Illinois.

Harrisburg School Superintendent Dennis Smith said, "We are really happy to have these guys here. They are going to do things for us that we otherwise wouldn't get done. These projects are the ones we don't have the finances for."

School grounds manager Tony Chrisman said, "Tuesday was their first day. They will be back Thursday and Friday to finish up the job by painting the stands."

"We can have them work for us again, but it is on an as needed basis. We have to make arrangements for each project."

Jason Hinton, superintendent of Dixon Springs Impact Incarceration Program said the boot camp is like the military.

"The camp lasts from 120 to 180 days depending on the individual. They are housed in barracks and wear a uniform that has to be worn in a military manner. Gig lines and seams must be straight. We are the only boot camp in the state that houses both male and female inmates," Hinton said.

"They are housed separately and do most activities separately but they are here together. The program is open only to non-violent offenders who are first time offenders or second time offenders. All candidates are screened carefully out of concern for public safety."

Inmates can exchange the boot camp time for four to eight years of court-imposed sentence, Hinton said.