



# Summit offers hope to parolees

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MT. VERNON — For Mt. Vernon resident Brian Shirrell the Summit of Hope expo held Tuesday at the Rolland W. Lewis Community Building provided him with the needed tools to help younger men and women who are at risk to commit crimes.

The Summit of Hope brings together local and state service providers to create a "one stop" environment in which invited parolees and probationers obtain necessary assistance to move past barriers that may prevent individuals from leading a successful life. The expo in Mt. Vernon is one of 24 such events sponsored by the Illinois Department of Corrections around the state.

"The Summit of Hope is to fight recidivism and give ex-offenders, parolees or probationers an opportunity to get back on their feet and become productive citizens," said Marcus King, community outreach administrator for the DOC. "One of the main things people are looking for when they come out of prison is employment. We have the Secretary of State here to give people free ID's. If you've been gone for 10 years you're not going to have a state ID."

Other agencies participating in the expo included: Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services, Health Care and Family Services, Public Health, Illinois Department of Employment Security and Housing and Development.

King said the object of each event is to give hope to those who may have lost it, noting the local expo is one of about seven each year in the southern part of the state.

Shirrell was recently released from Graham Correctional Center after being convicted of aggravated driving under the influence. Shirrell, unlike many of those attending the expo, was lucky enough to return to Ryan's Steakhouse within two weeks of his release.

"I did 14 months at Graham and got into the drug and alcohol program," Shirrell said. "I learned a lot from the counselors and other inmates, and through that, I gained a lot of knowledge and wisdom. It was an experience that I would've liked to have not done but it was good and probably put me on the right track in my life not to go back and do those things again."

Travis Deloch, also of Mt. Vernon, is looking for work after serving eight months in DOC on a charge of unlawful use of weapons. Deloch was paroled on Christmas Eve a year ago.

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"I'm trying to get my license back and better myself pretty much," Deloch said. "Hopefully, I can get a resume today and take it with me to find a job."

Shirrell's goal is to be a role model for young people.

"I hope to get some knowledge and see how far I can go with my education," Shirrell said. "I hope to go out and help some younger people not to go down that (criminal) path. It's not something I would wish on anybody. I saw so many young people while I was in prison that looked like babies to me that shouldn't be there, so my whole thing, is that I want to do something different in helping others."