

Inmates lend a hand: Partnership forms to fight local floodwaters



Inmates at the Du Quoin boot camp filled about 12,000 sandbags Thursday to help make the bags available in advance of spring flooding. These bags will be stored at the Du Quoin Fairgrounds.

By Becky Malkovich
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DU QUOIN — A collaboration between state and private entities put 12,000 sandbags in reach of those affected by flooding — at no cost to taxpayers.

Inmates at the Illinois Department of Corrections Inmate Impact Incarceration Program in Du Quoin shoveled about 126 tons of sand into bags Thursday as part of a joint effort by IDOC, the Du Quoin State Fair and Nikki's Place, a video gaming business with 13 Southern Illinois locations.

The business donated the sand and about 12,000 bags and the boot camp and inmates donated the labor.

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The fair is providing covered storage for the bags.

The collaboration was the idea of the donor and Thomas Spiller, warden at Pinckneyville Correctional Center. The Du Quoin camp is a satellite of the Pinckneyville facility.

“Everybody benefits,” Du Quoin IIP superintendent Clem Campanella said. “We’re being proactive and doing this in advance so if there is flooding we aren’t all of a sudden trying to coordinate the effort. These are ready today for anybody in an emergency situation.”

Inmates convicted of non-violent offenses are sentenced to the camp that offers educational, work, community service and physical activity opportunities.

“We want them to learn discipline and a work ethic,” Campanella said. “Hopefully they’ll take the abilities they learn here and use them in their own communities.”

Nikki’s Place made the donation as a way of giving back, general manager Ranessa Cunningham said.

“We want to help our communities,” she said. “We’re thrilled to be a part of it.”

The fair will provide covered storage, which will help keep the bags in good shape.

Fair manager Shannon Woodworth said the effort was worthwhile because spring flooding affects many parts of the region and some of those affected may not have the ability to put sandbags together or have access to them in an emergency situation.

“In this game with Mother Nature, we’re 12,000 sandbags ahead,” he said.

The sandbags are available to anyone who needs them and can be accessed by contacting local emergency services or emergency management agencies, Campanella said.