

PRIDE takes pride in reducing recidivism



Jack Edgemon

MY VIEW

April 24-30 is National Reentry Week, which provides a prime opportunity for communities across the Sunshine State to work together to reduce recidivism. At PRIDE Enterprises, we believe it is vital to recognize this week because it aligns with our statutory missions and our role in the community.

PRIDE, created by the Florida Legislature as a nonprofit corporation in 1981, works to make communities safer through a job-centered inmate training approach that lowers the number of repeat offenders and reduces criminal justice costs for all citizens, at no cost to the taxpayer. Our role within the criminal justice system further contributes to Florida's economy by creating jobs and stimulating the economy through the

purchase of goods and services from local vendors.

PRIDE operates 41 work programs, as well as e-learning opportunities, which are used to train inmates with skill sets that are both transferable and in-demand in the workforce. These programs combine on-the-job vocational training with real-world work environments inside correctional institutions, making it possible for inmates to receive training in diverse fields. These fields include manufacturing, graphics, sewn products, agriculture and processing services. Program participants were awarded 504 external certifications in 2015, which will help them stand out in their future job searches.

PRIDE's transition specialists work with inmates on an individual level to develop a plan for their release, which includes a portfolio of earned training certifications and a resume of job experiences. Upon the release of PRIDE program participants, staff strive to place them in full-time jobs and to assist them with basic life needs. Arguably, the most

crucial part of the entire process is maintaining contact with these ex-offenders for up to one year, to help them stay on track in their jobs and to adjust to normal, day-to-day life issues.

We believe in training and rehabilitating inmates. This approach prevents individuals from falling into the "revolving door" of crime, and provides opportunity for them to come out on the other side as contributing members of society. This method has proven to be effective, as almost 90 percent percent of PRIDE's transition program participants do not return to prison within two years, and an impressive 77 percent of Transition Program participants are placed in full-time jobs.

We understand the importance of seeing the whole person, as well as their potential, instead of just their criminal justice record. During this National Reentry Week, we encourage everyone to consider doing the same.

Jack Edgemon is president of PRIDE Enterprises.