

VALLEY & STATE

Diversion program gives felony offenders second chance

BY SARA STACY
LOGAN DAILY NEWS REPORTER

LOGAN — Felony convictions carry harsh consequences, and follow convicted individuals for the rest of their lives.

However, a program run through the Hocking County Prosecutor's Office can give first-time, nonviolent offenders an opportunity to avoid severe punishment.

The Hocking County Diversion Program was first rolled out in June 2017 as a way to give felony offenders a second chance after committing a crime that may have just been a result of one bad choice said Brenda Riddlebarger, who oversees the felony diversion program for Hocking County.

"It's for nonviolent offenders but also people who haven't had a past, a criminal past," Riddlebarger said. "Okay,

you made a bad decision, you screwed up, this is a chance to make it right."

The diversion program puts the sentencing on hold for the crime while the offender completes programs such as drug counseling or anger management programs.

Additionally, the offender must pay fees and any restitutions. If individuals finish all components of the program, the case goes away.

Riddlebarger keeps track of everyone in the program, ensuring they've completed their counseling and have paid back any fees. So far, there have been 12 people to go into the diversion program.

"It's not an abundant amount of people because it's targeting certain situations," Riddlebarger said.

Offenders have two years to complete the program, and

must pay a \$250 fine each year they are in it.

"I really encourage them to try to do everything they can to try to get it done in a year because they'll have to pay another year's fee if they don't complete it the first year," Riddlebarger said.

Even though individuals in the program have not been sentenced to a crime, they have pled guilty, and are subject to drug tests and check-ins from the prosecutor's office.

If someone is unable to complete the program, they must go back to court for sentencing.

Riddlebarger said everyone who has entered into the program so far has been completing all steps necessary to complete it, and two people have finished it.

However, paying back restitutions can be a major obstacle for some people in the

program, and it can take some time for even those with steady incomes to meet their payments, Riddlebarger explained.

"Some particular restitutions can be up into \$3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000, it takes them a while to make those payments," she remarked.

Many other counties in the state have similar programs, and judges are also able to have their own diversion programs.

Riddlebarger said Hocking County Prosecutor Benjamin Fickel wanted Hocking County to have a program that would give some offenders a chance to avoid a felony record.

"I think that Mr. Fickel viewed this as an opportunity to kind of help some people out that made bad choices, that they can have a chance to learn from their mistake and move forward," Riddlebarger said.

BHRC report shows how it benefits Hocking County

BY BETH LANNING
LOGAN DAILY NEWS REPORTER

LOGAN — The 2017 Buckeye Hills Regional Council (BHRC) report showing how it benefited the Hocking County community has been released.

According to BHRC, it "provides public infrastructure financing, planning, data analysis, research and other technical assistance to local governments."

Fredrick D. Hindman, assistant executive director of Buckeye Hills Regional Council, communicated that in 2017, Hocking County members paid \$2,938 in dues and for every dollar in dues — BHRC members gained \$1,424 in grants, loans and services.

According to the report, the total population in Hocking County in 2017 was 29,380 — of those about 6,486 of them were 60 years old or older and 1,770 of them were 70 years old or older.

Hindman shared that 551 seniors were served by BHRC and 180 seniors were served by the Senior Farmer's Market.

Additionally, the assistant executive director explained that BHRC has provided 109,012 of direct service hours to Hocking County.

"That's everything — that's meals, that's transportation, that's Passport Services, that's legal assistance and stuff like that," he communicated.

The reports specifically shared the financial aspect noting: \$2,323,834 total service dollars; \$1,353,701 of federal dollars, \$906,748 of state dollars; and \$61,385 of local dollars (local levy, local cash, local in-kind and local donations).

The breakdown of Hocking County statistics for

2017 included: 76,116 meals served (this is both congregate and home delivery meals); 7,332 miles (Adult Day Service transportation miles); 10,102 transportation trips (this means in and out of the county as well as medical and non-medical trips. It doesn't include Adult Day transportation); 581 units of medical equipment and emergency response units; eight pest control jobs; and 16 homes given accessibility modification.

The breakdown of Hocking County statistics for 2018 from January to March: 8,935 meals served (this is both congregate and home delivery meals); 1,456 miles (Adult Day Service transportation miles); 195 transportation trips (This means in and out of the county as well as medical and non-medical trips. It doesn't include Adult Day transportation); and 192 units of medical equipment and Emergency Response Units.

The report also stated that: "Hocking County received an ARC project grant for a \$250,000 for the City of Logan Sanitary Sewer Project that serves 2,891 residential, 227 commercial and 32 industrial customers. The project also received \$475,000 from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program being administered by Buckeye Hills."

BHRC serves approximately 260,000 residents across Athens, Hocking, Meigs, Monroe, Morgan, Noble, Perry and Washington counties, according to the report.

Hindman discussed the report at Tuesday's Hocking County Commissioners meeting.

The next Hocking County Commissioners meeting is set for this morning at 9:30 a.m.

Hocking College Trustees discuss budget, enrollment

BY HEATHER WILLARD
FOR THE LOGAN DAILY NEWS

NELSONVILLE — Enrollment may be down at Hocking College, but administrators say there are other positive trends in student numbers to focus upon.

Enrollment figures and budgetary concerns dominated Monday night's meeting of the Hocking College Board of Trustees.

Betty Young, the college's president, noted the number of graduates each year has been trending upward even as total enrollment declines. Young cited statistics of 567 graduates in the 2015-16 school year; 722 graduates in the 2016-17 school year; and a projected 828 graduates who will have received degrees for the 2017-18 school year.

"Keep in mind that those graduation rates are up every year, while enrollment is down every year," Young said. "So we're retaining more students and graduating more students, which is really what we're supposed to do."

The Messenger reported earlier this year the Spring 2018 semester enrollment was 2,690 students, down from 2,903 a year before. Enrollment peaked during the Fall 2010 semester at a reported count of 6,599 students.

Young noted the average cost to attend an Ohio community college has risen around 6 percent over the past decade. She said during that same time period, the national average for community college costs have risen around 32 percent.

Young said the college is implementing several strategies to deal with these student enrollment figures.

One of those is Quickstart, a program that allows incoming students to do everything they need to do to become enrolled in one day. The college is also encouraging more on-campus involvement to boost retention, as well as encouraging students to take a full course load so they can graduate in just two years.

Hocking College has also expanded the College Credit Plus



FILE PHOTO BY HANNAH TAULBEE, THE LOGAN DAILY NEWS

Hocking College President Betty Young is pictured during a speech earlier this year. Young has noted the school's graduation figures have increased even as enrollment has declined.

hours of career and professional development requirement and the institution's focus on internships.

"They come to college, then they go home for the summer, and they go back to that place of former employment for the summer. They are not advancing in their career when they do that," Young said. "If we can put them in an internship with an employer that may employ them at the end so they still earn some money over the summer but they begin a career path, then they are not getting started down that path of being underemployed or not employed."

Trustees also spent time considering a new technology fee to be used to assist with distance learning, classroom technology and student printing.

The printer network at the college is currently being overhauled. Administrators are considering changing printing to a more centralized network, which would have several large printers accessible on campus to students.

Currently, the plan is to have a certain amount of money loaded onto student IDs to allow limited printing, but with the option for students to add more money to that amount.

The board voted to approve a new \$25 technology fee for students to pay each semester to finance these tech improvements.

Denise O'Donnell, vice president of financial services and the chief financial officer of Hocking College, also presented the 2018-2019 budget to the board.

program, which allows high school students to take college classes. Administrators hope the students stay to complete their degrees.

There is also a requirement for students to have 24 hours of career and professional development per semester, which administrators hope prompts students to find internships and jobs in their career paths directly out of college or during summer breaks.

Board Chairman Tom Johnson said he would like to see students moving away from minimum wage and service industry jobs, instead placing them in jobs within their career path. He referenced a study which showed that students who are underemployed after college tend to "get stuck in a rut."

"Their longer-term success is dependent on them finding employment that meets the level they've been training to," he explained. "With 14 new programs and strong relationships with employers that are in the community, I think it's a really good opportunity for us to double down on the need for those students to see success in their first jobs out of college."

Young responded to that, saying that the college has been taking steps, noting the 24

"If you just look at the bottom number, it's down," she said. "Every year that's our goal, is to keep enrollment up and keep revenue pushing forward while we trend down expenses and make sure we're spending correctly, so not a lot to really report."

O'Donnell noted that budget items are going through a reclassification process, and that there would be large changes in some areas. She also stated \$1 million was placed in reserves, to be saved and later used to reinvest in the college.

O'Donnell went in-depth on the auxiliary portion of the budget: she said new dorms at Hocking Heights should bring in revenue; the meal plan structure was changed and prices increased, which should add more revenue; the college's new water park at Lake Snowden opened recently and the college is considering adding a few new campsites; and the college's distillery in Perry County has opened and will bring in revenue as well.

"We continue to manage within the enrollment," said Young. "The really important thing is are we doing the right thing for the students that are here? And are we managing the budget for the number of students that we have? And the answer to all those questions is yes, and we're continuing to put a million dollars each year into the reserves so that we're able to do this reinvestment into the institution."

The budget was approved unanimously.

Heather Willard is a Messenger staff journalist

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