



Lighthouse celebrates 30 years of partnership

Sara Nealeigh, Reporter 6:31 p.m. EDT September 21, 2016



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(Photo: Jess Grimm/Gazette)



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BAINBRIDGE - The two agencies have worked together longer than the current residents have been alive.

To celebrate its 30 years of partnership with the Ohio Department of Youth Services, Lighthouse Youth Center at Paint Creek invited people from Lighthouse

Youth Services and DYS, as well as several juvenile court officials from across the state, to join them for an afternoon.

In front of the crowd of about 100 people gathered for the event, Director Renee Hagan thanked past and present staff, board members and the young men in the program for all the work they have put into Lighthouse Youth Center over the last three decades. Hagan said the program has assisted more than 1,000 children in that time.

"We get to see the best of them," Hagan said. "These kids with the juvenile delinquency label are smart. ... They deserve the same dignity and respect as anyone else deserves dignity and respect."

Lighthouse Youth Center at Paint Creek officials wanted to host the event to allow the residents in the program to feel more connected to the community where, traditionally, they would be turned away, Hagan said.

"We're trying to create a positive environment for them," Hagan said, adding they know if they weren't at Lighthouse, they would be in a maximum security facility.

The young men who reside at the facility have committed first- or second-degree felony offenses and have been deemed to have a moderate to high risk of reoffending.

"We're pretty proud that we've been able to provide this service to the community all these years," Hagan said.

Wednesday's event included a tour of the facilities, with a look at the greenhouse where produce and mums are grown for sale; some of the items are used in the kitchen. The tour also stopped in the dormitories; the classrooms; the dining hall, where residents can work to learn food service skills; and the semi-independent living apartments. The facility houses about 50 young men.

During the tour, a small group of residents talked about their daily routines, programs they are involved in, and how incentives and jobs work in the facility. Some have jobs that allow them to earn money, which they are taught to budget. But what many in the group said they benefited most from were the many counseling sessions provided at the facility.

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One young man said an anger management program was the most beneficial and showed him he kept things "bottled up" inside, while another noted going through trauma counseling during his three-year stay at the facility has not cured the issue, but has taught him coping skills.

Most importantly, one resident said, he was given another chance at life.

Bob Mecum, CEO of Lighthouse Youth Services, also named Paul Haffner his successor in the position Wednesday as he prepares for retirement after 40 years with the organization. His retirement takes effect Dec. 30, according to the [Lighthouse Youth Services website](#).



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