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Employers head to jail for job forum**

**By David Kuxhaus**

IT might be the last place many companies would turn to for workers, but not if you're Marty Donkervoort.

This week, Donkervoort and about half a dozen other Manitoba employers are headed to jail. They're going to take the long drive down Highway 7 to Rockwood Institution.

"I think everybody deserves a second chance," Donkervoort explains.

Whether they will find any prospective employees remains to be seen but at least companies will be guaranteed a captive audience.

The minimum-security facility, which stands in the shadow of Stony Mountain Institution, houses about 90 low-risk prisoners in cottage-like buildings.

The job forum is being organized by Correctional Services Canada and a group of agencies, including the North End Community Renewal Corporation.

"We wanted to be sure (inmates) were aware of employers that would be willing to hire them, even though they are ex-offenders," said Betty Juselius, the corporation's employment development director. "We know how they struggle and that if we're not able to assist them, there's a high rate of returning back to places like Rockwood or Stony."

Donkervoort is general manager of Inner City Renovation Inc. -- a construction company that does residential and commercial work and has about 30 employees.

He said he has hired workers with criminal records in the past.

"We've never had any problems," Donkervoort said. "It's worked out fine."

The company is owned by three non-profit community economic development groups. Part of its mandate is to provide jobs to low-income, inner-city residents.

While he won't be offering up any jobs to inmates next week, Donkervoort said he wants to let them know that there are opportunities with his company and that they should stop by for an interview when they get out.

The qualifications are fairly simple.

"The main thing is attitude," Donkervoort said. "As long as they're committed to learning and showing up for work on time five days a week, we'll consider them."

He said if they work hard, former inmates can pick up a trade like carpentry.

Juselius said unfortunately there aren't that many companies willing to have an employee with a criminal record on the payroll.

A similar job forum was held at Rockwood several years ago, but only a handful of companies were involved.

"Getting employers on board has been a little hard," she admits. "But sometimes all people need is a break."

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