

Inmate labor benefits Town of Williamsport with 'zero problems' | [View Clip](#)
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WILLIAMSPORT — Maryland Correctional Training Center inmate Shawn Miller said the time he spends in a work-release program is helping him cope with life behind bars.

Miller and several other inmates from the correctional facility south of Hagerstown work full time for the Town of Williamsport. Their duties include painting, carpentry and landscaping.

"We're just working together and having a good time doing it," Miller said. "I'm not stuck at the compound all day. I actually like to get up early and get out of that place."

Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services Secretary Gary Maynard and several other dignitaries from the state prison system visited Williamsport on Friday to publicize Public Safety Works, a program that began in 2008 to supply free prison labor to Maryland's towns and cities.

Williamsport is the only municipality in the state that uses prison labor full time. The inmates in the program are near the end of their sentences and close to being released.

Maynard praised Williamsport officials for reducing the town's labor costs by taking advantage of the program.

"I really believe other towns are missing out on an opportunity," Maynard said.

Williamsport Mayor James G. McCleaf II said the inmates have contributed about 3,300 work hours to the town and saved roughly \$30,000 in labor costs since May 2008.

In addition to painting Town Hall, the inmates helped install restrooms in Byron Memorial Park and will begin repairing tombstones at Riverview Cemetery next month. They also mow grass and shovel snow for the elderly.

"Sometimes, in a small town like this, public works can't keep up," McCleaf said. "We can't afford to hire more help."

McCleaf said he has given some of the inmates job references after they've been released from prison.

"We've had zero problems," McCleaf said of the inmates' behavior.

Charles Brown, a carpenter who works for the town of Williamsport, said he typically oversees three to eight inmates, and the ones who loaf aren't asked to return. He said the inmates provided much of the labor that was required to restore the Springfield Farm Barn in Byron Memorial Park.

"They were a great help to the community," Brown said. "A lot of the labor we've done up here has been done with inmate labor ... I can really utilize their help bringing this town back."

Freddy Taylor said he wants the budding program to flourish so other inmates will have an opportunity to give back to the community.

"It does a lot for the next guys who are coming through this system," Taylor said. "It paves the way for them."

Taylor said he hopes to use the painting skills that he developed while helping to renovate Town Hall on projects around his home one day. But he wants to return to trading stocks and bonds

upon his release.

"I haven't done manual labor in 27 years," he said. "I'll be home around October."

Mark Vernarelli, a spokesman for the state prison system, said at least one officer escorts the inmates, who typically work Monday through Friday from about 7 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.