

SHERIFF ASHE REACHES ONE MILLION HOURS COMMUNITY SERVICE

The Hampden County Sheriff's Department Community Service Restitution Program has reached the milestone of one million hours of work performed by offenders since Sheriff Michael J. Ashe, Jr. took office in 1975.

The Sheriff's Department now performs 80,000 hours per year of community service by offenders from the Minimum Security/Pre-Release Center, the Correctional Alcohol Center and the Day Reporting Center. On a typical day, 65 offenders are out in the communities of Hampden County, cleaning litter, weeds, and bushes from streets and highways; assisting Departments of Public Works and Park Departments; working to maintain elderly housing complexes; getting children's summer camps ready in the spring; helping clean up illegal dumping eyesores; helping with food drives; and maintaining community gardens and cemeteries.

One project highlight of the past year took place at the Holyoke Soldiers Home, where 10 inmates labored for five weeks, cleaning, scraping, sanding and painting the main boiler room.

What may be the most dramatic restitution project in the program's history came when restitution inmates were credited with being instrumental in preventing the flooding of houses by building sand dikes on River Road in Agawam during a Connecticut River flood.

No citizen has been harmed by an offender in the 28 year history of the program.

"I have long stated my belief that a good, healthy sweat, worked up in service to others, is good for those who've come to jail for breaking the law. They come to jail as 'takers', but community service restitution challenges them to leave as 'givers'", said Ashe. "It's a "win-win situation, because our communities benefit greatly. If you were to assign the relatively reasonable wage of \$8 an hour to all this work, that would mean that this program has donated \$8 million dollars of free labor to the taxpayers. That's not a ham sandwich."

