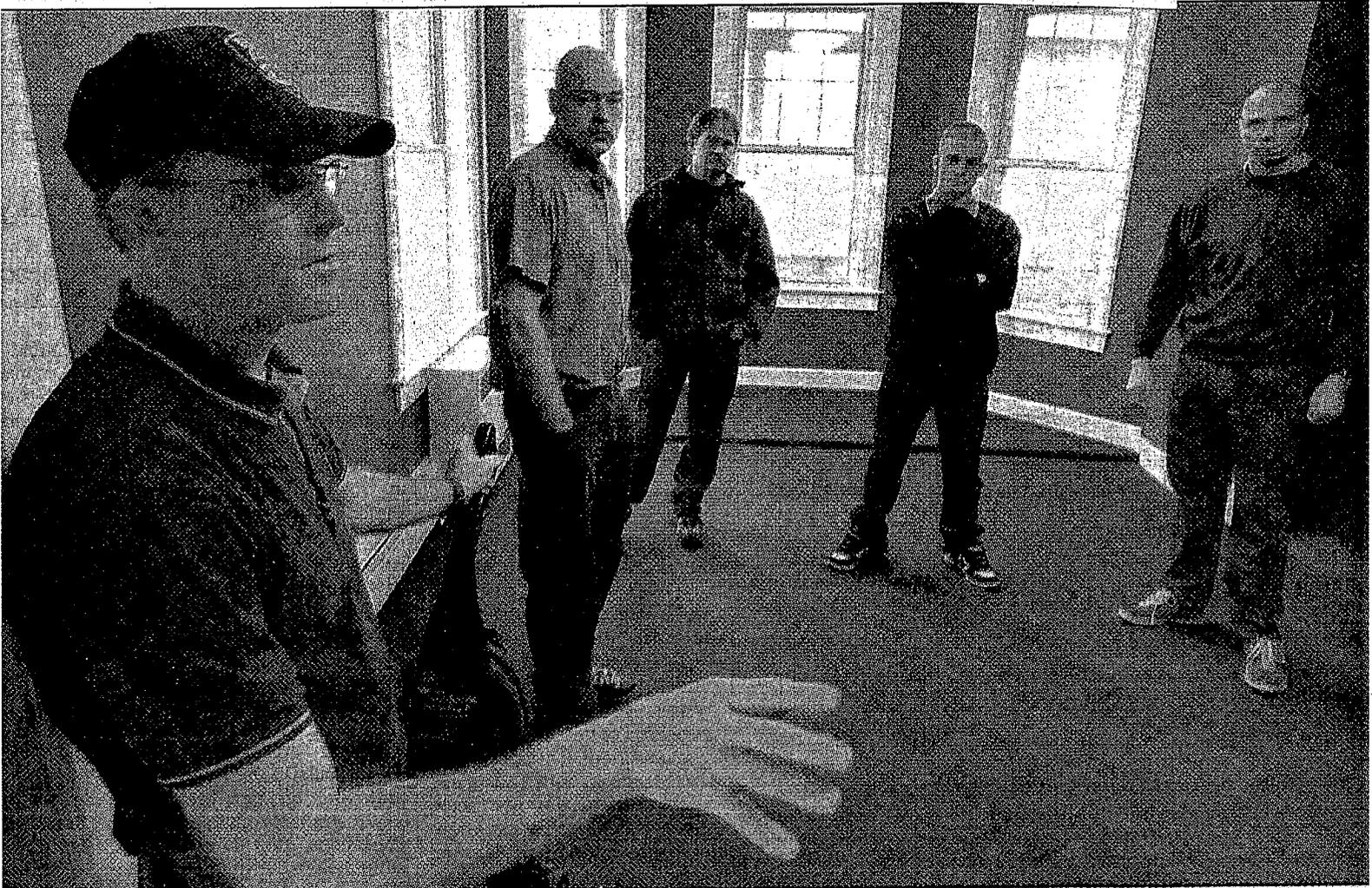
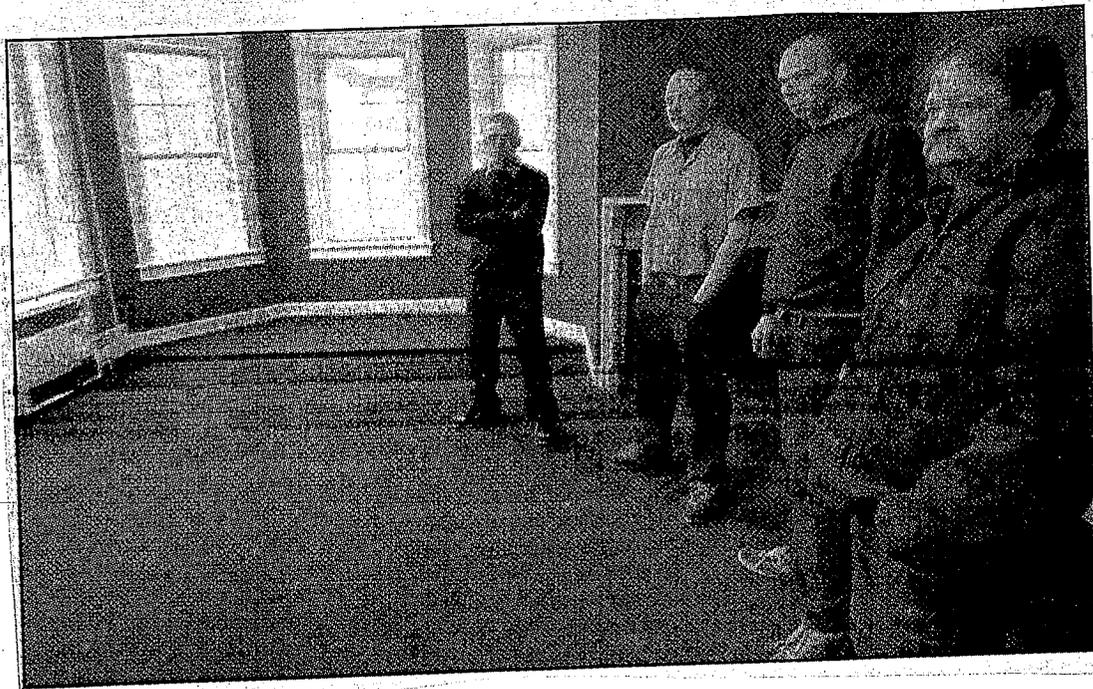


The benefits of reciprocity

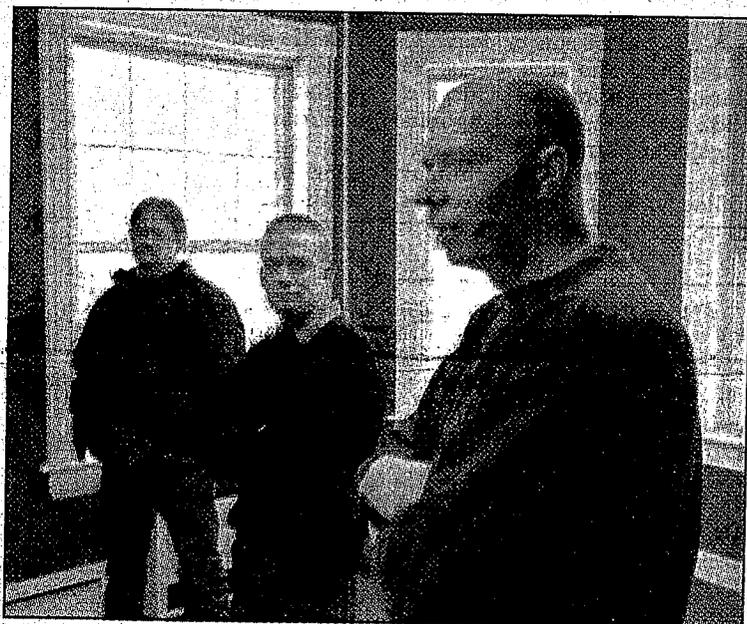
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CHRIS BERTELSEN PHOTOS

Community corrections officer Joseph Brookens addresses inmates who came to help refurbish four rooms in the Moody Building in Claremont. The inmates say they like the work and getting away from the jail while those benefitting from the free labor say it is a big help to them.



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With inmates helping out in the community

it is a win-win situation

By **ARCHIE MOUNTAIN**
Staff Writer

CLAREMONT — The four Sullivan County House of Corrections inmates came carrying hot coffee and a radio.

When they arrived at their job site they were introduced to their working tools, paint brushes and anything else they needed to refurbish four second-floor rooms in the Moody Building for office space.

They knew there would be no paycheck at the end of the week. They didn't expect one. Their reward was two-fold. "We're helping out kids that need a little help and we're getting out of jail for seven hours a day and that also helps," said Brad, a 29-year old Claremonter who asked that his last name not be used.

The kids, and adults, who will benefit utilize the programs at the Child Advocacy Center of Grafton and Sullivan Counties at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center in Newport.

That non-profit group will be moving to Claremont where the four refurbished rooms completed Feb. 20 will be their new home.

"We all did the same thing...sanding, mudding and painting," said Michael Robitille, 35, an inmate from Charlestown. He called the volunteer effort "an important contribution."

Jodi Thompson, who heads the Child Advocacy Center, called the HOC last fall to see if inmates could be used on a volunteer basis to get her new quarters in good repair. Her program provided all the material needed including paint and picked out the colors for each room.

"They see the benefit of a place like this," said Joseph Brookens, Community Corrections Officer who accompanied the inmates.

The Child Advocacy Center moved out of its Newport office to the Moody Building location last Tuesday. "The Claremont location is more centrally located," Thompson said. The office was operated out of Newport for the

past three years.

"Without the help from the Department of Corrections we wouldn't have been able to move in as quickly and smoothly as we did. That saved a lot of money and time," Thompson stated.

The renovation project was started in late January and a total of eight inmates were rotated in and out for about four weeks performing the work. "They put in a total of 288 man-hours," Brookens said.

"This is a cool thing. They see it as a worthwhile project for the community," Brookens stated.

"A couple of months ago you were reading our names in the court news, now this," said Chris, a 25-year old Newporter. All four were proud of their effort to make the four rooms presentable for occupancy by the Child Advocacy Center.

"This is a good reflection on them," Brookens said.

For Tom Lane, 48, of Claremont, the work in the Moody Building pro-

vided an opportunity to use skills he previously learned while doing trim work on the outside. "It's better than being there," Lane said of the opportunity to get out of his jail cell for a few days.

"It's a treat for these guys," Brookens said. "It's a big perk, we get to see people," said Chris in agreement.

"It gives them someone to speak to and feel normal," Brookens added.

From their second-floor tower, the four sometimes saw people they knew walking on the street below.

Upon leaving the Moody Building early in the afternoon on Feb. 20, they grabbed shovels from the HOC van and in pairs of two headed up Pleasant Street to move some snow around to help out the City of Claremont in its cleanup effort.

Brookens said there is sometimes chatter between the inmates and passersby who know them. He lets that go as long as the privilege is not abused.

There was a reward once the Moody Building project was completed. The four inmates were treated to pizza.

While serving their sentences, the four agreed the things they miss the most are their families and home cooking. They didn't miss being confined at the HOC, however, if only for seven hours at a time. "We'd either be working on the grounds or sleeping," Brad revealed.

In 2008, inmates from the Department of Corrections provided 1,714 hours of free community service throughout the county including emergency work crews for the December ice storm. DOC Superintendent Ross Cunningham said he hopes to see the number of volunteer hours doubled in 2009.

At the county complex, 15,886 hours of labor were logged for maintenance, kitchen and laundry work last year. Had that work been performed by paid help at the minimum wage of \$6.55 an hour, it would have cost the county \$104,053.