



Juvenile offenders pay tribute to crime victims

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The tiny blue and yellow ribbons waved messages of sorrow and remorse.

On two of the four wooden walls of the Survivor Memorial at Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility in Massillon, juvenile offenders paid tribute to the victims of their crimes with clusters of ribbons on which notes like, “You weren’t the only one and it’s not your fault,” and “You were too young to go” were written.

“It’s for people who sometimes feel left out because they are victims,” said Dale, a 19-year-old inmate at the correctional facility who helped construct the memorial. “To pay tribute to them, we built these walls. We didn’t just build it for the looks. We built it because someone out there deserves it.

“It’s a small token to show that we’re here and we care,” he said.

The Independent does not typically identify crime victims or juvenile offenders.

More than 150 Department of Youth Services employees, local criminal justice officials, and Indian River inmates Wednesday saluted crime victims and vowed to work collaboratively to protect their rights.

The ceremony, which took place under sunny skies in the parking lot of the correctional facility, was part of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, first recognized by President Ronald Reagan in 1981.

The day, “Brings awareness to the citizens of our country and state that crime does happen and it can happen to you,” said Bruce Adams, administrator of the office of victims services for the department.

Stark County Prosecutor John Ferrero, speaking on the week’s theme of “Strength in Unity,” said crime affects everyone in the community from the offenders and their victims, to law enforcement and criminal justice officials.

“It’s very important that we remember the victims of crime and remember to protect their rights,” Ferrero said. “The community as a whole has to be involved and has to help out.”



PHOTO BY GLENN B. DETTMAN/THE INDEPENDENT

A juvenile offender at the Indian River Juvenile Correctional Facility looks at the banners displayed on the grounds during the National Crime Victims’ Rights Week.

Ferrero said crime victims need to be informed and educated of their rights.

“They have a voice in the hurt and harm to which they have been subjected,” he said.

Adams said victims of juvenile crimes have only had rights in Ohio since 1999. Victims’ rights include the right to be updated on a criminal investigation, the right to receive and provide information about an offender’s incarceration or parole status and the right to participate in a court hearing.

“Prior to that law in 1999, they were often told ‘leave my courtroom,’” Adams said.

The ceremony included remarks by Judge Paulette J. Lilly, president of the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges, and Thomas Stickrath, director of the Department of Youth Services. Stickrath read a resolution from Ohio Gov. Bob Taft and four members of the Shiloh Baptist Church men’s choir sang “Jesus is All.”

Fourteen crime victims serving as victim panelists for the department were honored. The panelists told their stories to juvenile offenders in the department’s victim awareness classes.

“It’s important as a parent and as a citizen to be a teacher of the values and the morals that everyone needs to have,” said Kim, a 2002 crime victim who began working as a panelist last year. “I want our youth offenders to know that even though we have been victimized, we aren’t just angry and out for revenge. We do care about what happens to them.”

Dale, the 19-year-old inmate, said the classes have made him feel sorry for things as minor as teasing his sister.

“A whole new door opened in my life,” he said. “I’ve seen things in that class I don’t want to see again.”

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This page was created April 28, 2006

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