

SHERIFF'S INMATE LABOR PROGRAM ASSISTS WITH LINCROFT VILLAGE GREEN PARK CLEANUP

By Susan Murphy

Monmouth County Sheriff Joseph W. Oxley met with reporters, township officials, and members of the Lincroft Village Green Association at the Lincroft Village Green Park on Tuesday, September 7 at 1:30 p.m. to discuss a project his Inmate Labor Program has undertaken at the park.



Inmates cleanup a wooded section of the Lincroft Village Green Park to make walkways visible. They are part of the Inmate Labor Program of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office.

Four male inmates worked to open walking trails at Lincroft Village Green Park located on Old Phalanx Road in Lincroft. The work began on Tuesday, September 7 and was expected to continue until Friday, September 10th. Corrections Officer, Ann Marie Souza from the Monmouth County Correctional Institute in Freehold, who supervises the men during their work hours, said the inmates were chosen for this project. She noted that they are short term, non-violent inmates who are sentenced to jail due to non-payment of fines or motor vehicle violations. She has seen a difference in those who become part of the Inmate Labor Program. "This work is helpful to the men. You can see a change in their demeanor. They actually look forward to going to work. They want to help the community, and they feel good when they do it." Corrections Officer Souza said the men will work about four to five hours a day on this particular project.

Mitch Gotesky, Co-Chair of the Middletown Community Affairs Council, to which the request for the cleanup project was originally made, said that four hours earlier you could not walk through the wooded area. Within four hours, the inmates had made a clean walking path. Corrections Officer Souza noted that the Inmate Labor Program works 365 days a year. "If there is a light rainfall, I have rain gear for the inmates, but if there is a heavy downpour we don't come out." She currently takes only four inmates out to do these projects due to lack of space in the van, "I am in the process of getting a larger van which will accommodate six to ten inmates."

Sheriff Oxley explained that when he was first sworn in as Sheriff in January 1996, he realized that the Inmate Labor Program could be used as an opportunity to help municipalities get through projects that they needed extra help with, so every year he sends a letter to the Mayor and Township Administrator of the 53 municipalities in Monmouth County reminding them of this labor program. "The Inmate Labor Program helps municipalities offset tax increases by undertaking projects that might not be undertaken due to budget constraints in the municipality," said the Sheriff. He recalled one project done not too long ago in which an old cemetery in the Belford section of Middletown was cleared. Similar programs undertaken by the Inmate Labor



Two key people in this event are Corrections Office Ann Marie Souza of the Inmate Labor Program and Mitch Gotesky, Co-Chair of the Middletown Township Community Affairs Council, shown in the section of the area cleared by the inmates.

Program include painting of the interior of Keyport Senior Center, painting parking lines at Manasquan Public Schools, general clean-up of Camp Happiness (Association of the Blind) in Lincroft, as well as field preparation and clean-up for Freehold Borough Little League. He noted that in Sea Bright, the Inmate Labor Program planted 50,000 plants of dune grass and cleared 5 1/2 miles of snow fence from Sandy Hook to Monmouth Beach.

"The only limitations we ask is that municipalities pick a project that has a clear beginning and an end so that when we come in we know we will make a substantial difference in the time we have, whether it is a week or two weeks. We will not accept a project that displaces municipal employees." Sheriff Oxley was pleased with Lincroft Village Green Park site. "This park is a phenomenal opportunity for the neighborhood, certainly a win/win proposition for the Mayor and Township Committee in Middletown and Brookdale Community College, and certainly a wonderful partnership between the Inmate Program and what Middletown Township was looking to do with this piece of property."

The Lincroft Village Green Park is a 6-acre, Middletown Township park that was acquired as a land swap in 2000 with Brookdale Community College.

Committeeman Thomas Hall, who had walked through the cleared area commented, "Being a Lincroft resident, I am glad to do what I can to help the project along. And I am delighted to hear from Abe Littenberg of the Village Green Association that his fundraising efforts generated over \$50,000, which, for a grassroots campaign effort is really nice." The Middletown Township Parks and Recreation supplied the tools and equipment necessary for this project during the time the work was done.

Corrections Officer Souza has worked with the Inmate Labor Program for four years, and has been with the Monmouth County Correctional Institute for nineteen years.

Manhattan Bagel in Lincroft donated bagels and coffee, and the Lincroft Inn made and donated sandwiches.

Thanks to the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office, the Middletown Township Community Affairs Council, the Lincroft Village Green Association, the Middletown Township Committee, and the Middletown Township Department of Parks and Recreation for their combined efforts in pursuing this project. Special thanks to Mitch Gotesky, Co-Chairperson of the Middletown Township Community Affairs Council, and to Affairs Council member Colleen Galatola who took on the assignment of liaison between the Sheriff's office and Director Gregg Silva of the Middletown Department of Parks and Recreation. Through working together with Abe Littenberg of the Lincroft Village Green Association, Officer Medora Morris of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office, and Deputy Director Mike McCoy of Middletown Parks and Recreation, Colleen and Mitch were able to collectively arrange today's starting work date for this project.



Through a collaborative effort of the Monmouth County Sheriff's Office, Middletown Township and the Lincroft Village Green Association, pathways through the woodlands of the Village Green were created just after Labor Day. Those individuals who facilitated this project are pictured here (left to right): Monmouth County Sheriff Joseph Oxley; Under Sheriff, Ted Freeman; Middletown Township Committeeman Thomas Hall; Lincroft Village Green Association Co-President Abe Littenberg; Middletown Community Affairs Council Co-Chair, Mitch Gotesky; Monmouth County Corrections Office Ann Marie Souza.