

# THE Beacon-News

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## Kane inmates design T-shirts for a cause

Work helps those in recovery connect with others, raise funds for program

BY MEGAN JONES

T-shirts declaring “Don’t let your past make you” and other sayings would fit in with clothes at most stores, but unlike the rest, these were made by a group of inmates at the Kane County jail.

After inmates in the Lighthouse Recovery program at the jail started complaining of boredom, Kane County Sheriff Ron Hain said he wanted to give them the chance to run their own business, while also raising money to help fund the program.

“It’s something tangible that they can be proud of and that the public appreciates,” Hain said. “The designs are all from their own minds and show their life struggles. There are some pretty powerful images.”

For Johnathan Ortiz, the Lighthouse Recovery program where he and approximately 60 other men receive medically-assisted treatment for addiction is something special.

He has never been able to experience that kind of program before due to money issues.

“I’m seeing different ways of dealing with my addiction and I’ve never been able to go before,” Ortiz said. “It’s a good thing they have going and I can even attend when I get out.”

From designing the images to using a T-shirt press to proc-

essing orders, the men in the program are in charge. Hain said he is even working with staff to find safe shipping materials that comply with jail standards so they can complete the process from A to Z.

The program, which has been in effect for about a month, has sold hundreds of shirts so far, with the proceeds going back into the inmates’ canteen fund and to help with diversion programs in the jail, Hain said.

The T-shirts, which cost \$29.95, can be purchased online through Etsy by searching “KaneCoInmateDesigns.” People can also contact the Sheriff’s Office directly through Facebook or email to request a T-shirt design for their organization, a fundraiser or event.

For example, inmates were

pressing 300 T-shirts last week for an upcoming Thanksgiving dinner fundraiser.

Standing in a small room within the jail pod, the men were recently discussing how to use transfer paper to make the designs look as seamless on white shirts as they do on black shirts. They take their work very seriously, Kane County Sheriff’s Officer Eric Johnson said.

John Fowler, who also runs his own barber shop in the jail, said he hopes the extra funding provided by the T-shirt sales can bring more time for one-on-one counseling in the program, and to expand it so it can serve more inmates.

Marcos Hernandez’s T-shirt designs feature people who have contributed to society, he said, adding that he has chosen people

to feature from authors and architects from Chicago in the 1920s and ’30s to Aretha Franklin.

“It gives us something in common with other people,” Hernandez said of the T-shirt program. “It shows them we are not alone.”

Hernandez, who hopes to receive an associate’s degree and is using a tablet to take college courses in the jail, said he wants to be a counselor in the future. After living on the streets and growing up with drugs in a bad environment, he said it has taken him a long time to see the light.

“Maybe I could share my life with someone who is scared to speak and bring them out of that dark hole,” Hernandez said. “I want to help those going through similar problems.”

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DENISE CROSBY/BEACON-NEWS

Jesse Gaffney, Paramount Theatre’s properties manager, takes a spin on Maurice’s cart, one of the more challenging projects she took on for “Beauty and the Beast,” now playing at the Paramount in downtown Aurora.

## Props help produce magic at Paramount

Staging ‘tale as old as time’ takes plenty of preparation



DENISE CROSBY

For the past few years, I’ve fantasized about taking a tour of an old toy factory on Aurora’s East Side that still creates more magic than just about

any other place in the Fox Valley.

I’m talking about 515 Hill Ave.

That’s the address for the Paramount Theatre’s production warehouse, where not only are those magnificent stage sets designed and created, this 28,000-square-foot building is also where the thousands of props used in the eight seasons of Broadway Series productions are made

and stored.

In case you’ve not noticed, each year since 2011, as the theater’s subscription base and budgets have risen, those sets and props have gotten more elaborate. And for this holiday’s “Beauty and the Beast,” the Paramount has invited us to “be our guest, be our guest, put our service to the test” at its biggest and most expensive production yet.

This is, by the way, the first Paramount show where real magicians — from Vegas — were brought in to work with the actors, including the Beast, who somehow must transform into a human right before everyone’s eyes.

Those slight-of-hand maneuvers, in combination with wardrobe and trick props — think magnets and elastic —

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## Library will seek boost in tax levy

Board plans to make pitch to Aurora council for \$2.2M in upgrades

BY STEVE LORD

The Aurora Public Library is asking the City Council for about \$2.2 million more in its tax levy for 2020.

The money is needed to keep the library relevant to Aurorans and keep it providing services patrons say they want, said Michaela Haberkern, library executive director.

She said the money would go toward more materials and books, toward necessary improvements of the facilities and toward other resources. Her comments came during an information session library officials are holding to discuss the library’s future.

Part of the discussion revolves around whether or not the current city library would change its structure to become a library district. The information sessions included discussion by Haberkern about the possible switch.

But she said the monetary situation for the library is there regardless of whether it remains a city library, or becomes a library district.

“We’re going to ask for this whether or not we become a district,” she said. “It has nothing to do with being a district.”

The Library Board commissioned an analysis by Meristem Advisors LLC on what it would take financially for the library to become a district. Board members did it after Gov. J.B. Pritzker earlier this year signed into law legislation that allows voters the chance to choose an elected library board rather than an appointed one.

The referendum would be in the 2020 general election. The elected board would consist of 11 trustees serving staggered terms.

State Rep. Stephanie Kifowit, D-Oswego, introduced the legislation after some controversies with the current board involving cutbacks, then the possible relocation of the library’s West Branch next to Washington Middle School.

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