Written by Ivan Phifer
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The Camper Cabin Production in Red Wing, MN is now on the Summit Academy campus.

Hennepin County Sentencing to Service (STS) Homes and Summit Academy celebrated the first jointly built camper cabin for state parks. An ice cream social was held at Summit Academy OIC, 935 Olson Memorial Highway, to celebrate completion of the first Department of Natural Resources (DNR) camper cabin built through a new partnership between the Hennepin County STS Homes Program and Summit Academy OIC.

A one year on-the-job carpenter training program for men and women, the STS program has seven crews, one of which is the camper cabins crew. The cabins built will be shipped to a few of the 68 DNR parks in southern Minnesota. The completion for the cabins took 10 weeks.

“We are very excited. This is a great partnership with Summit Academy OIC,” said Joe Witt, Senior Administrative Manager of the STS program. “The goal is to learn carpentry skills building cabinets for the DNR, and help graduates receive employment,”

“The students literally put their lives in our hands, and trusted us to provide them with the skill-set to allow them to take care of their families,” said Louis King head of Summit Academy. “For all those who debate welfare, we say no thank you. We prefer to take care of ourselves, and not have people hand out our checks and make money off of us. That is not the pursuit of happiness,” King said.

Phil Eckhert, Hennepin County Director of Housing Community Works and Transit who handles county development activities said the STS homes program was transferred to Hennepin County three years ago.

“We provide skills in carpentry and building trades; basically on the job training,” Eckhert said. “There are several North Minneapolis homes that were either foreclosed or had tornado damage. Many of the individuals working on these properties live in the community, so they give back and receive training all at once.”

“You would not expect the DNR to have a partnership in North Minneapolis,” King said.

According to a Hennepin County News press release, the STS Home Program has had remarkable success, with a nationally recognized low recidivism rate. Hennepin County reports STS is recognized as a leader in re-entry initiative by a number of leading construction companies in the Twin Cities area.

“I talked to a lot of people about how many people made agreements outside of procedures to make this happen,” said Mike Opat Hennepin County Commissioner. “Some people had to suspend their disbelief and I want to thank the folks who did that.”

Summit graduate Todd Munoz is one of the six students selected for the building of the first DNR camper cabin.

“It’s overwhelming to see everyone come out to see a completed project,” said Munoz. “I spent 20 weeks of my life here and met a lot of great people.”

Munoz said he first heard about the program at the Minnesota Work Force Center in St Paul six months ago.

“I was in a transitional time in my life, out of work and looking for a fresh start,” said Munoz. “As

a teenager, I enjoyed working with my hands, fixing and remodeling homes with my stepdad. Summit Academy provided me with the opportunity by awarding me a scholarship for the 20-week program."

For more information, visit www.saoic.org or www.hennepin.us/stshomes