

Unbridled enthusiasm for service: Glen Innes pastor saddles up

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They may not seem to have much in common, but for Corrective Services NSW prison chaplain Mark Dawson, saddlery and chaplaincy share many important similarities.

“In both, you have to have an attention to detail, creativity, an ability to listen carefully, and value people,” Mr Dawson said of both his jobs in the Northern Tablelands town of Glen Innes.

Mr Dawson’s association with Corrective Services NSW goes back over two decades, when he started teaching TAFE courses in leatherwork to inmates at Glen Innes Correctional Centre.

“I taught them how to make belts, handbags, wallets and other small items,” Mr Dawson said. “Unfortunately, leather has become far too expensive now for inmates to be able to afford.”

After ministering at Tamworth and Grafton correctional centres and the Balund-a rehabilitation program at Tabulam, Mr Dawson became a full time chaplain at Glen Innes Correctional Centre in 2012.

Having had an adolescent interest in leatherwork, Mr Dawson was apprenticed at 14 to local saddlery legend Steve Pollard and completed a rigorous four year apprenticeship before establishing his own saddlery in 1982, specialising in handmade Australian stock saddles.

“I was one of only two apprentices trained at the time,” Mr Dawson said. In addition to making saddles, he also turns out harnesses, bridles, belts, saddles and other leather items.

Things have changed in the past 40-odd years that Mr Dawson has been at the leatherwork bench.

“Materials have changed,” he said. “Where we once used brass for features, we now use stainless steel; where we made the tree – or main part of the saddle – from coachwood, we now use carbon fibre and foam, which is much lighter.”

A typical saddle can take between 38 to 150 hours to design and make, costing anywhere between \$3,800 and \$10,500, with eager clients in the United States and around Australia waiting for up to 12 months for one of Mr Dawson’s prized saddles.

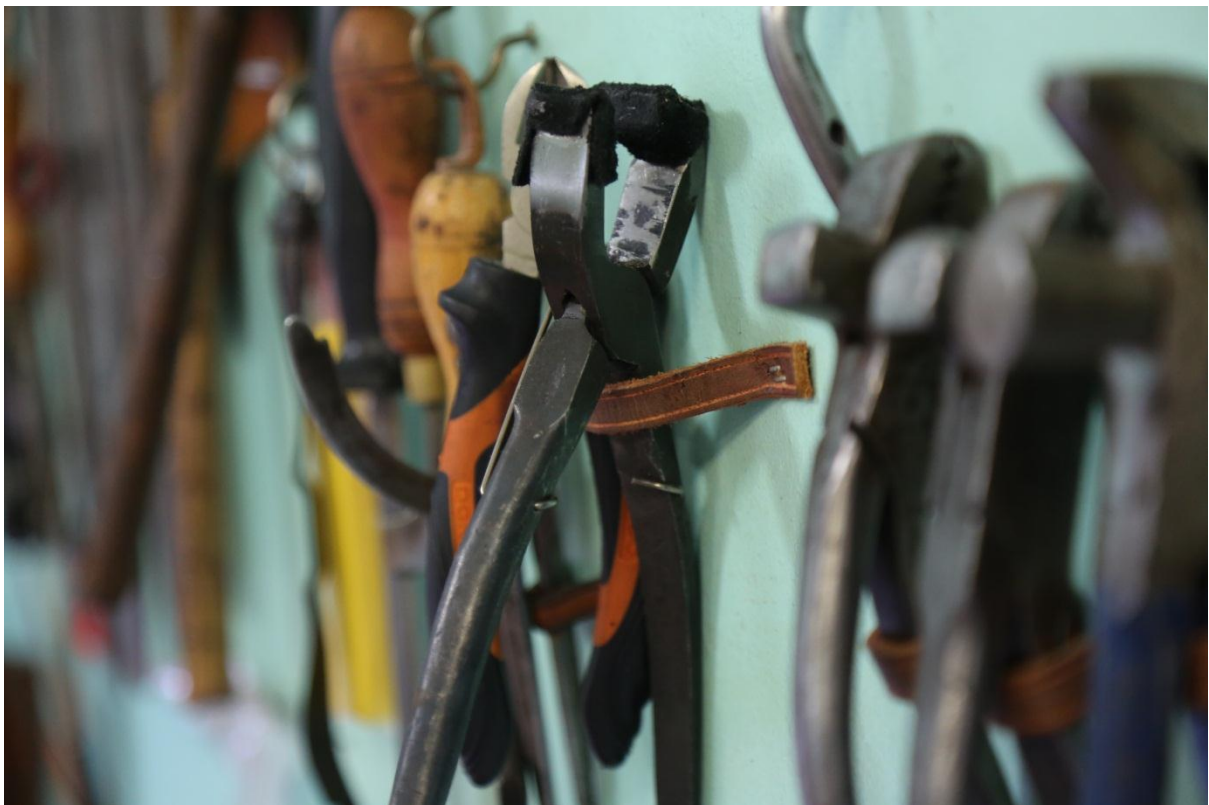
While one of his proudest achievements as a saddler was being commissioned to make an authentic stock saddle for the Australian Stock Saddle Museum in Romsey, outside Melbourne, Mr Dawson believes his real work is with inmates.

“I love being there for people, just being a sympathetic ear to inmates and helping them find the courage to change their lives in positive ways,” Mr Dawson said.

Media inquiries: 0419 258 290 | All pictures courtesy CSNSW



Saddle up! An authentic Australian stock saddle in chaplain Mark Dawson's Glen Innes saddlery. Photo courtesy CSNSW.



Tools of the trade: In Mr Dawson's workshop, one of the last making traditional Australian stock saddles. Photo courtesy CSNSW.



Justice
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Unbridled enthusiasm: Saddler and chaplain Mark Dawson at work. Photo courtesy CSNSW.