

David Closser, 137666
Parole eligible since 1986

Having paid dearly for foolish choices made many years ago, Closser is now a skilled draftsman and master gardener, quietly doing his time.

David Closser says he had a favorable home life and good parents but that his “restlessness” would get the better of him. According to a psychological report, as an adolescent he spent his energies “defying authority and compulsively seeking independence.” At age 14, he was sent to Boys’ Republic for running away from home. At 15, he was arrested for carrying a concealed weapon and was sent to Boys’ Training School in Lansing. When he was 17, he was convicted of breaking and entering and unlawful use of an auto and sent to prison for 2-5 years, where he was housed at the Ionia Reformatory.



David Closser at HOGs’ garden in Kinross

On May 31, 1976, Closser was transferred to the minimum security dormitory, but hated the crowded conditions there. The next day he walked away.

After walking for hours, Closser decided he needed a vehicle. He knocked on the door of the Ernest Allen residence. When no one answered, he broke a window to enter. His intent was to look for keys to the car he saw parked in the driveway.

Unfortunately, Mr. Allen was home. Closser knocked him down and demanded the car keys. When told the car was not working, but that Mrs.

Allen would be home soon with another car, he tied Allen up and waited. Searching the house, he found rifles and ammunition. Two children arrived home from school; then Mrs. Allen returned with five more. At gunpoint, Closser had them tie each other up.

When a young neighbor peered in the door and saw the family tied up, she called 911. Police surrounded the house before Closser could leave. He then took the 17-year-old daughter hostage, threatening to kill her if the police tried to stop them. They left in the family’s car with the daughter driving.

A high-speed chase and two vehicle exchanges followed. The Allen car skidded off the road on a curve and became stuck in a freshly plowed field. The police disabled the next car by shooting out its tires. Closser, who had traded his hostage for a third car, was arrested when he lost control of it, ending up on the highway median and injuring his back.

Closser was placed in segregation for 12 months while awaiting trial and sentencing. He received two life sentences — for armed robbery and kidnapping. He said later:

I realized then I was going to have to change my lifestyle or I was going to spend the rest of my life in one of these cells.

Despite his long history of incarceration, a psychologist judged that Closser had had “minimal treatment” for assaultive/impulse control issues. On his own, he began to develop strategies to keep himself out of trouble. Over the next 16 years, he had only two misconducts, neither assaultive.

Closser also began using the “superior intelligence and great potential” that the pre-sentence investigator noted in 1977. He became a certified mechanical draftsman and grew skilled in construction drafting. He applied his skills working for prison industries, where he also trained other pris-

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oners. He studied electronics and was a cable-TV repairman for his facility. He was clerk to the education director at State Prison of Southern Michigan, worked at the facility's radio station and completed coursework and on-the-job training for an FCC license.

In 1989, an interviewing psychologist found Closser to be patient, thoughtful and able to anticipate realistic consequences for his behavior. Closser told him:

I try to distance myself from the negative aspects of the prison environment. This is not the lifestyle I want.

In 1993 he was finally placed in a six-month program of group therapy for impulse control which he continued voluntarily for another six months. At the end of a year, the therapist judged that he Closser had achieved "maximum benefit" from the program.

In 2000, Closser entered the horticulture program at Kinross Correctional Facility. He is now a Michigan Certified Nurseryman and has completed the Advanced Master Gardener program through MSU. He currently spends his time tutoring in the horticulture program and chairing the Horticulture Organic Gardeners (H.O.G.s), a prisoner organization that provides flowers and produce to charitable organizations in the community.

By 1988 the parole board expressed interest in paroling Closser. The interviewing member wrote:

A different person than originally arrived in the system. I would be willing to start the process under the lifer law.

Closser was still waiting for his public hearing to be scheduled when the board was reconstituted in 1992.

After interviewing him, the new board reversed the prior decision and continued Closser for five more years. A 1998 interview had the same result. In 2003, the board only reviewed his file before sending another five-year continuance. His next review is scheduled for 2008, when he will be 52 and will have served 32 years.