

# Guard advocates tough action

By Mitch Hottis  
Special writer

When Gerry Fryt was fired from his job as a Jackson State Prison guard, he said, it was like going on a summer vacation.

Fryt, president of the Michigan Corrections Officers Association, was one of the two guards fired following the prison uprisings in May. At a Kiwanis Club luncheon on Tuesday, he relayed stories of life within a state penitentiary. He talked about overcrowded conditions, weapons and an uncontrollable atmosphere.

"WHEN NORMAL PEOPLE go off to work, you might be worried about someone talking bad about you, but listen, you never have to worry if someone's going to stick you in the back with one of these," Fryt said as he held up an 11-inch homemade dagger. "Don't

forget, these guys have 24 hours a day to sit around and think of ways to beat you up," he added.

Fryt said he was fired because of gross insubordination and conduct unbecoming of a state officer. The charges were leveled following the prison uprising.

"We've seen the prisoner go from inmate to convict to resident. We are told by the psychologist running the prison not to hurt their dignity," Fryt said. "But if just once we had shot a few shots in the air we would have gained more respect. Let's stop worrying about the prisoner's due process."

After working for 12 years at the largest enclosed prison in the world, Fryt said the ratio of prisoners to guards far exceeds the normal standard. Jackson holds 5,600 convicts while employing some 760 correctional officers — only 130 are on duty at one time — for a ratio of 35 prisoners to every one guard, he said.

Fryt also said the prisoners' lack of respect for the guards and lack of discipline contributes to the problems.

"You've got to get rid of these young liberals," Fryt said. "Today you have a younger, more radical inmate in the system causing problems. You need control of these people."

PRISON LIFE may not be a vacation paradise but an estimated 80 percent of the prison population owns televisions, radios, cassette tapes, books or magazines. The only magazines prohibited from prisoners' subscription lists are those dealing with explosives and guns, yet these find a way into the system.

The prison also furnishes cards, swimming pools, basketball courts, tennis courts, handball courts and a softball field among other facilities.

When the guards did search the facilities, after word had been out for over a week that a shakedown would occur, prison officials found only a handful of weapons, Fryt said. During surprise searches, one officer found at least 45 weapons.

Since his termination at Jackson, Fryt has heard several rumors about the inside happenings.

"I heard they are going to put a big fence down the middle to cut the population in half," he said. "It's a joke. And all of the prisoners have been locked up for some time now. I'd be scared to death to be there when they turn them loose."



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