

# Prisoners to clean up Rouge, area freeways

By Teri Banas  
staff writer

Prisoners soon will be clearing out the Rouge River in western Wayne County and picking up trash along metropolitan freeways.

The Wayne County Sheriff's Department expects to launch a jail work program Feb. 24 for non-dangerous prisoners.

The 12-month pilot program was prompted by jail overcrowding. It will fund with a new \$90,000 state grant. Westside headquarters will be located at the abandoned Wilcox Yard in Plymouth Township.

"It's a sentencing alternative," said Sheriff spokesman Dale Jurcisin. Twenty 20 prisoners are being selected from the jail this week to take part.

TARGET GROUP is offenders who are serving 45 days on misdemeanor charges such as drunk driving or writing bad checks, he said.

The program will screen out those convicted on assault charges or those considered a safety risk, Jurcisin said.

Although overcrowding and tight jail space have prompted the program, Jurcisin said there is hope for real rehabilitation.

"There are certain work ethics instilled in a person who is involved in a cleanup program," Jurcisin said. "You can see progress being made. We're hoping it could change a mind set that crime doesn't pay."

There are no projections yet on how much impact the program will make. But Jurcisin said it's expected to draw from the misdemeanor offenders, who make up about 20 percent of the jail population.

THE WAYNE COUNTY Jail, with 1,750 beds, is chronically at capacity or overcapacity, even with the ability to double-bunk some prisoners.

This program was recommended at a seminar he and other county officials attended last year at Brandeis University in Boston. It was sponsored by the National Institute of Sentencing Alternatives.

When the Sheriff's Department received a \$90,000 grant from the National Institute for Justice to combat jail overcrowding recently, plans went into motion here.

Jurcisin admits that it wouldn't work, however, without the support of the sentencing judges.

WAYNE COUNTY Circuit Court Judge Patrick Duggan, for one, says the alternative goes beyond freeing up jail space. It's an option to choose when

"you don't know if jail is the answer, but you want them (convicted offenders) to do more than report to probation officer."

Duggan said he frequently uses a similar program run under the Community Reintegration Program of the Wayne County Adult Probation Department. Through this program, offenders are assigned to community service work instead of to jail.

But unlike the sheriff department's plan, this program is only available for individuals who are indigent and can't afford to pay their court costs, said project director Anne DuCongo.

DuCongo's program, now in its 10th year, operates in Detroit's Recorder's Court as well as at the county Circuit Court and has wide acceptance by judges. Last year, 88 judges referred offenders to some 50 participating community agencies, including the Boy Scouts of America, the Capuchin Soup Kitchen and Bon Secour Hospital, for example. It also is funded by a justice grant.

ACCORDING TO DuCongo, she and one other staff person field a 2,000-person caseload by relying on supervision from the participating agencies. Supervision, she advised the sheriff's department, is the key to running a successful program.

"Most of them (offenders) are drop-outs, 17-27, who come from families with one parent. There's no motivation and no job."

"And there's a lot of problems in just getting them out on time. It's best to have the judge, an authority figure, mandate (their appearance on the job)," she said.

IN THE SHERIFF'S plans, Jurcisin said, supervisors from the county roads department will oversee the workers while sheriff's deputies will be asked to "cruise" the work sites.

In putting together the project, county officials needed to secure agreements from county labor groups to ensure that union jobs wouldn't be affected. He said those agreements were reached with the stipulation that the work involve manual labor. The unions drew the line on work that would require "power tools," he said.

Besides saving jail space, Jurcisin said there would be an additional cost savings. Currently, it costs \$68 a day to house a prisoner in the county jail system. This program would cost the county \$40 a day to handle an offender, he said.

In western Wayne County communities, both Livonia and Westland district courts operate similar work programs out of their respective probation departments.

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## Don't park in their places

A handicapped parking place is not a special privilege for a disabled person, says the national commander of Disabled American Veterans. "It is not even a convenience," he adds. "It is a necessity."

Edward Gallan points out that DAV is not asking for sympathy. It is asking for understanding about things like handicapped parking zones marked with the international handicapped access symbol. Others should not park there.

He explains that spots close to stores are what handicapped people need. "It may be a pain in the neck for an able-bodied person to walk a much longer distance with a loaded shopping bag in each hand," he notes.

"But think of someone carrying a heavy load over that same distance on artificial legs. It can cause serious pain, perhaps even bleeding. And the

person wearing prosthetic legs is more susceptible to falling than an able-bodied person."

The disabled also need ramped curbs near their parking place, and space between their car and other cars. It's hard to pull a wheelchair out of the car and set up before leaving your car. You need room, he explains.

Gallan notes that handicapped persons rely heavily on their cars because otherwise they would be prisoners in their homes. They can't walk very far.

"Further, nearly all bus and subway systems, regardless of the law, are not set up to accommodate people who can't walk up steps."

He stresses the fact that "handicapped parking places are for handicapped people."

"Please, don't put yourself in their place," he says.

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