Non-violent offenders do their time landscaping, cleaning up county

BY AT MURPHY
STAT MURPHY
STATE AND AND UNIFORMS.
No gun-toting guards.
But they are technically juil inmates. And, they are workling off their debt to society—although, there's no heavy lifting," as doe explained.
Joe (who asked that his last name not be used) is part of WAM, a new community corrections program that — with a stretch of the imagination—limight be described as a modifically kicked off last weekend when a handful of nonviolent offenders did some landscaping and general cleanup at Addison Oaks, a county park in the northeast cerner of Oakland County.

northeast corner of Unklana County.
Joe is a 21-year-old Macomb County resident caught drink-ing and driving in Troy.
When he violated probation, District Judge Dennis C. Drury gave him a choice: 15 days in jall or six weekends on WAM.
WAM has been in the plan-

"Many of these defendants don't have any money. Sending them to jail because they can't pay a fine com-pounds the problem."

Judge Terrence Brennan 44th District Court

ning stage for some time, but Saturday and Sunday were the first times nonviolent offenders were actually on the job.
"I had other things I'd rather be doing," Joe said. "But on balance, it wasn't a bad experience. In fact, I was surprised by the positive attitude."
Not a bad experience? Positive attitude? See what a stretch it is to compare WAM to a chain gang?
"These aren't really prisoners," said George J. Miller, manager of community corrections. "These are your neighbors who goofed up."

Joe and eight other people who "goofed up" were allowed

executive's office that oversees community corrections. Shoriff John F. Nichols explained the overcrowding situation to judges and police chiefs earlier this year and urged local communities not to send people convicted of nonviolent misdemennors to the county jail.

It was at the sheriff's suggestion that WAM came into existence.

tion that WAN came

The program has a less obvious side benefit, accrding to Judge Terrence H. Brennan of the 44th District Court in Royal Oak.

"Many of these nonviolent defendants don't have any money. Sending them to jail because they can't pay a fine

to work off their time because it saves the county money. It costs \$12 to \$15 a day for the county to have somebody in WAM, according to Miller, compared to \$68 to house them in the Oakland County joil.

"It also helps oase overcrowding at the jail," said Michael W. Zehnder, director of Public Services within the executive's office that oversees community corrections.

"Most are embarrassed to be there," he said, "so they're anx-ious to get it over with." Nobody came close to strain-

"These aren't really prisoners. These are your neighbors who goofed up.'

d up."
George Miller
Manager of Community
Corrections

ing themselves or passing out from exertion, Joe acknowl-edged. "But we worked contin-uously."

Equally important, said Joe, the weekend scheduled enabled him to keep the job Jue has been working for about 8ix months. He had previously managed a pizza store, but his current job is a step up. The first WAM work crows were all male defendants. But that won't always be the case, according to Miller.

"Women defendants will have the same option,' he said, "just as soon as we get some."





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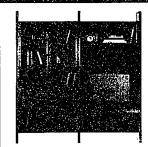
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