

Jailer leaves with good reports, no regrets

By Kathy Parrieh
staff writer

Politics almost kept Stephen Saunders from becoming Oakland County's jailer. And just months later, it finally lost him the job.

But the director of corrective services leaves Oakland this month with "no regrets."

Saunders is considering a corrections job with another county and also negotiating with the National Academy of Corrections in Boulder, Colo. Meanwhile, he is staying on through January to help new Sheriff John Nichols, a Republican.

"None of this has been personal," said Saunders, who admits he is not thrilled to see his job disappear with a change in sheriffs.

"The new sheriff has no problem with Stephen Saunders. He said he understands and believes I've done some good things. He just has a problem with the position of director of corrective services."

IN MARCH, the 39-year-old Florida resident arrived in Michigan prepared to stay a while. But it quickly became clear his tenure would be brief.

Sheriff Johannes Spreen, a Democrat, brought Saunders here to be director of corrective services. He was to oversee the 700-inmate Oakland County Jail with its work-release center, work camp and detention facility.

The job was created to help the county comply with a 1982 federal court order resulting from a lawsuit brought by prisoners because of overcrowding and lack of services. While positive changes have been made, the jail still exceeds its court-ordered capacity of 450.

But the Republican-controlled Board of Commissioners — which rarely agreed with the Democratic sheriff — refused to rubber stamp the hire. In-

stead of waiting rules to put Saunders on the payroll immediately, they hired him as a consultant March 30 and waited until April 12 to confirm him.

When Democrats wanted to push through his hiring, Saunders objected. His refusal to start off on the wrong foot impressed politicians of both parties.

WORKING OUT OF a small office in the jail, Saunders quietly prepared a Plan for Action for the county's Corrective Services Bureau.

This master plan recommends pre-trial release and diversion programs to reduce the jail population. His alternatives would cut the number of people who would be jailed while awaiting trial or sentencing — in Oakland County, 75 percent of the inmates.

While saying the report is "flexible," its author cautions that ignoring alternative programs will be costly to taxpayers.

Saunders believes the plan, if adopted fully, will defer major jail construction for several years. Partial acceptance would require additional housing for 300 prisoners in 1988. Ignoring the plan, he contends, would mean construction of a 500-inmate facility immediately.

"I'm not married to the plan. If the county says 'no,' that's fine. But we are going to have to build more beds. We can't do it both ways," said Saunders, who believes alternative programs are constitutional and would save taxpayer money.

IN HIS FEW months on the job, Saunders also reorganized the corrections division.

"It really didn't have a well-defined structure," explained the director, who also "clarified and reaffirmed policies and procedures."

While impressed with the overall jail operation, he made a real effort to ad-

dress the federal consent judgment. He leaves confident the jail is in "total compliance" with the order, which addressed a wide range of issues such as staffing, sanitation, cell lighting, inmate treatment, racial integration and access to radio and TV.

"We don't have funds for jail expansion; that's up to the county," said Saunders, who has been working steadily with a county committee on jail improvement.

"But it's been a very positive relationship. I see nothing but good in the future. The major issue left is overcrowding. Once we can devise a way to deal with it, everything will be taken care of."

RECOUNTING his contributions, Saunders is quick to credit the jail staff for its part in the improvements. "A good jail is a team operation. We did these things," he says firmly.

Involved in corrections for 11 years, he thinks Oakland County is fortunate in the quality of personnel working in the jail.

"We're critically overcrowded, but there's no tension in the jail. Our inmates are not treated unconstitutionally," explained Saunders, who places Oakland County Jail in the top 25 or 30 jails in the U.S. in terms of population.

"It's a crisis situation, but well managed. Especially under the gun as we are, I know of few — if any — programs which are better across the board."

Nevertheless, Saunders would like to see the jail operation improved. A big part of his job has been to inform the public about what goes on in Oakland County Jail.

While doing that, he stresses the value of alternative programs to help offenders get out of jail and contribute to society.

Saunders also advocates educational programs which can help people turn themselves around. "I can't effect any change in a person, but community programs allow individuals who want to change to do so," he explained.

"If someone does want to change, we need to be supportive."

BARELY ON THE job, Saunders be-

came aware his position would not last into the new administration. Spreen was vacating the sheriff's post to run for county executive, assuring a new sheriff would take over in 1985.

It was so clear that the new director never moved his wife and three children here from Florida.

"I'm not scrambling. I've been making plans for awhile," said Saunders, who is committed to staying in corrections work.

"I plan on leaving Oakland County with no regrets. I've been able to accomplish some things here, enjoyed working with these people and gotten a lot of support."

But he is concerned about the sheriff doing away with his position, which he feels is vital to wrapping up the court order.

"With all the objectivity I can muster, I think this is a necessary position. And I'm concerned about what posture the court is going to take on this."

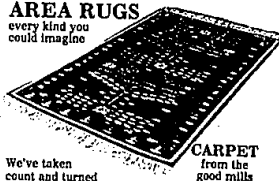


staff photo

Stephen Saunders leaves as corrections director convinced the Oakland Jail meets constitutional tests.

After Inventory

AREA RUGS
every kind you
could imagine



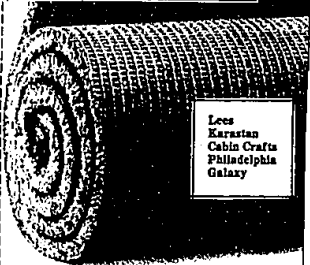
CARPET
from the
good mills

We've taken
count and turned
up hundreds of fine
quality area rugs and
carpets that must go.
Come in and save!

Best

Woodward - South of 12 Mile - 543-5300

SALE!



Lees
Karrastan
Cabin Crafts
Philadelphia
Galaxy

'We're critically overcrowded, but there's no tension in the jail.'

— Stephen Saunders,
outgoing Oakland jailer

Computerized accounting
class scheduled by OU

Hands-on instruction in computerized accounting will be offered beginning Tuesday, Jan. 22, by Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education. Offered in the Accounting Assistant Diploma Program, the noncredit course will be conducted from 6:30-9:30 p.m. Tuesdays through March 26. Tuition is \$135.

For enrollment information, call 370-3120.

HONDA GENERATORS

Honda's EM-500 portable generator gives you 600 watts of power whenever you need it. It's compact, lightweight, easy to start and economical. And it's perfect for battery charging, camping, boating or emergency use.

For larger recreational needs, there's a Honda's EB-2200. It's hard working and dependable with plenty of power for lighting up the campsite, running small appliances. Even cooking your dinner.

GENERATORS FROM: 600-6500 WATTS AVAILABLE

IT'S A HONDA

Cougar HONDA Power Equipment

"Where Quality Counts"

25100 Novi Rd. 1 m. S. of I-96 348-8864

JANUARY SPECIAL

"Think Spring" Basket

'12.95 '15.95 '19.95 '24.95

Harry Miller FLOWERS

DEARBORN 14900 Michigan Ave 281-7374

FARMINGTON HILLS 27699 Orchard Lake Rd 973-6644

Only Delivery Throughout Metropolitan Detroit Monday-Saturday 8:30 AM to 6:00 PM

"Now that Sue's here at Harper, we all feel better."



"Sue's doctor came to Harper when he had cancer. I think that says a lot!"

Some say there are no choices when it comes to cancer, fate deals all the cards. But that's not entirely true. Patients make choices every step of the way from prevention through recovery. Regular check-ups and frequent self-examinations are choices of prevention. Selection of a personal physician and electing timely treatment after diagnosis are recovery choices. And the correct choice regarding hospitalization may be a matter of life or death.

As a participating organization in America's program of twenty Comprehensive Cancer Centers, Harper Hospital provides scientific and clinical leadership in the organized fight against cancer. Cancer patients who choose to be treated at Harper are assured of receiving one of the most complete and scientifically aggressive cancer treatment programs available anywhere in the world. Knowing about Harper Hospital and its cancer program may be the most important thing in your life.

For immediate information about Harper Hospital and its cancer program ask your doctor or call 494-9564. Harper Hospital is affiliated with the School of Medicine, Wayne State University, and the Medical Center in delivering world-class quality health care.

Harper Hospital
AT THE MEDICAL CENTER
SCIENCE / RESEARCH / HOPE AND HEALING

For more information about Harper Hospital's Cancer Program, telephone 494-9564. Physicians, please call 494-8130 for information regarding cancer patient referrals.

© 1984