

'Yes, sir!'

County boot camp expands as state's falters

By PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County is expanding its boot camp even as the state's program is coming under fire as expensive and ineffective.

After two years of operating a seasonal boot camp, the Oakland County sheriff's department opened its first winter session — with nonviolent male offenders braving subfreezing temperatures in tents.

"The boss (Sheriff John F. Nichols) went through the winter in tents during World War II," said Carl G. Matheny, a major in the sheriff's department. "We figure inmates can survive too."

Thirty-seven defendants started the county's first winter session boot camp in the week of Jan. 10. As of Friday, 28 were still enrolled.

One inmate tried to escape. Eight others simply gave up, choosing instead to serve their regular prison sentences rather than continuing in the quasi-military setting.

Oakland experimented with a boot camp in the fall of 1990 before offering it on a permanent ba-

sis in each of the next two years. Until now it was a seasonal program, generally from April into the fall.

Turns offenders around
Nichols, for whom the camp is named and possibly its staunchest supporter, insists the boot camp turns young offenders around by offering a highly disciplined lifestyle in a quasi-military setting. It's also cheaper than housing defendants in the already crowded jail.

Preliminary figures seem to support that theory.

Of 259 inmates to go through boot camp, 21 have been accused of additional crimes, according to figures released last week by Ann Russell, a civilian corrections staff assistant.

Russell didn't have precise figures on the per day costs of keeping an inmate in boot camp. "But it costs \$60 a day to keep an inmate in the regular jail. If we can keep an inmate in boot camp for less, the program is very cost effective."

In sharp contrast, the state's boot camp program is running in

the red with no indication it helps deter criminal activity, according to a report released earlier this month by the Senate Fiscal Agency.

The report said the 90-day boot camp costs nearly \$10,600 per participant — more than double the amount needed to imprison other nonviolent offenders — with no sign its graduates are less likely to commit other crimes.

Michigan has operated its boot camp program for five years during which time it processed about 4,000 inmates.

"I think there are big differences between the state's program and ours," said Matheny. "I think we are more selective . . . and more successful."

Schooling included

Matheny, who has studied the state's program, said Oakland gets young offenders before they have committed to a life of crime. "We work them hard and give them some schooling."

County commissioner Marilyn E. Goulik, R-Bloomfield Hills, said she has voted for the boot camp because of its apparent suc-

cess. "It's a rough and tumble program," she said. "Inmates learn what it's like to say 'Yes, sir.'" However, operating the camp is becoming more and more expensive, she said, something that prompts her to take a closer look at the program. "But it's hard to put a price tag on turning somebody's life around."

Circuit Judge Edward Sosnick said he is a strong supporter of the boot camp. "Some of these young people (usually in their 20s) have never had discipline in their lives. The boot camp helps instill discipline, self esteem and self reliance. It's a better use of their time than having them sit around a jail cell."

To qualify for boot camp, an inmate must be in good shape and pass a physical exam. By choosing boot camp — and successfully completing the program — inmates can take months off their regular sentence, he said.

Matheny said he considers the program to be so successful, he can envision something comparable for women offenders.



Bootcamp booster: Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols (left) is a sought-after graduation speaker for the boot camp named in his honor.

Contest celebrates Women's History Month

Secondary school students can enter an essay contest to celebrate Women's History Month in March.

It's sponsored by the Michigan Women's Commission and the American Association of University Women.

Students in Michigan public and private middle school, junior high, and high schools will have the opportunity to write an essay

about a woman, contemporary or historical, who has served as a role model in their lives.

Application forms for the essay contest are available from the Women's Commission Office. Deadline for submitting an essay is Feb. 1, 1993. Call (517)973-2884.

The theme for the essay contest is "Dream Dreams: Reach for the Sky! Women in History have

Achieved their Dreams . . . Who has Inspired You To Achieve Yours?"

Prizes include the following: the top five winners in each grade category (6-8, 9-10, 11-12) will be honored at the Governor's residency.

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