

Jail program to offer classes to inmates

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—"Some people think we should stick a prisoner in jail, just throw him in a cage like an animal, and not let him out in our \$10 million edifice."

Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen, quoted above, is not one of these people.

Despite the short stay of most of the prisoners who pass through the Oakland County Jail, Spreen has supported a rehabilitation program for the other inmates, who stay several months.

Last week, the county board of commissioners agreed to give \$8,000 of county funds to the sheriff's newest project. The funds enable the sheriff's department to receive a federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) grant to fund four years of a rehabilitation program.

The county, as well as the state, is required to supply an annual five per cent funding match for only the first two years of the program. The federal government provides \$180,000 a year for four years.

The rehabilitation program, which will call for the hiring of nine new jail employees, will offer certain high

school and possibly college-level courses to inmates.

COUNTY FUNDING did not come without some opposition and five commissioners voting against it. Among critics, were Dr. Lowell Wieser, director of the county health department, and Commissioner Paul Kasper (R-23) of Bloomfield Hills, a frequent opponent of Sheriff Spreen's projects.

Opponents argued that \$180,000 a year was too little to accomplish anything meaningful in the way of rehabilitation and that the figure was misleading because the county would have to contribute additional funds and services to the program.

They also argued that the short stays of many prisoners and the nature of their offenses rendered a rehabilitation program unrealistic. According to jail estimates, half the county jail inmates each year stay less than 44 days. Some 4 per cent reportedly serve sentences for misdemeanor offenses.

"REHABILITATION in a county facility like ours is just whistling Dixie," Kasper said. "I'm for re-

habilitation, but this is just throwing dollars into the wind."

According to Dr. Wieser, the grant promises more than it can deliver. "The words sound good," he said. "But the worthy objective (a meaningful and cost-efficient rehabilitation program) is outside the scope of this grant."

Dr. Wieser estimated that the health department would have to spend a total \$200,000 to provide the medical and dental treatment for inmates, also suggested in the plan.

SHERIFF SPREEN agreed there is a high prisoner turnover rate in the county jail and many inmates who couldn't benefit from rehabilitation or other expanded inmate services.

"Of the 15,000 prisoners per year, 10,000 check in and out of here like a hotel," he said. "However, there are others who have longer visits."

Once you eliminate those who stay less than 10 days in county jail, Spreen said the average jail term is between five and six months.

"You can teach a college course to an inmate in a month," he said.

SPREEN SAID three-quarters of the inmates are crime repeaters. The county can save millions, he said, by trying to reach many of these before they continue moving in and out of institutions for repeated offenses.

"We have a lot we can turn around," Spreen said. "You have to

have the wisdom to know the difference between the person who can be helped and the person who cannot."

Spreen criticized opponents of his plan.

"Politicians like Kasper want to just put a man in jail and forget about him," Spreen charged.

The sheriff envisions offering high school courses in English, math and social skills. The possibility of college-level courses will be investigated, he added, as well as expansion of vocational training courses offered to inmates under close supervision outside the jail.

County approves waste plan

By ROBERT KIPPER

OAKLAND COUNTY—It was 14 years in the making and almost a year past state deadline, but the county board of commissioners last week finally approved a solid waste master plan to formally submit to Lansing.

The plan, required of all counties, describes how Oakland intends to take care of its garbage now and in the future. Oakland officials have proposed, revised and compromised its plan

analysis

countless times over the past decade. In the words of one disgruntled county commissioner, what has finally been approved, "has been watered down until it means almost nothing."

Another commissioner may have come closer to describing the situation: "Nobody really knows what we have here," said Commissioner Niles Olson (D-3), of Pontiac. "We are submitting this master plan for the sake of submitting it—to get the state off our back."

WHAT THE county has approved, in fact, is a very general plan that is probably specific enough to satisfy the state's rather general demands for solid-waste-disposal planning.

As George Shuttle, the assistant chief engineer for the county department of public works, said: "The plan is general, but it was always intended to be."

However, the county master plan was less general before.

The Oakland plan talks about recycling trash, converting trash to new energy forms, building a multi-million dollar volume reduction center and regulating the now unregulated way trash is collected, hauled and buried in most parts of the county.

The plan is overly general partially in order to accommodate more advanced ways of handling trash that will be devised or perfected in the future. It is also general with regard to known trash collecting methods because being general was probably the only way a master plan could be approved.

NOWHERE IN the just-approved plan are the terms "landfill" or "garbage dumps" mentioned. The less of offensive term "deposit facility" has been substituted.

Almost all county officials agree, however, that no matter how advanced garbage collecting and reduction becomes in the future, there will always be a need for dumpsites, regardless of what they are called.

Some communities in Oakland County will get some of those dumpsites even though the just-approved plan no longer specifically mentions where they will be located.

The plan merely whispers that there will be a need for some new "deposit facilities."



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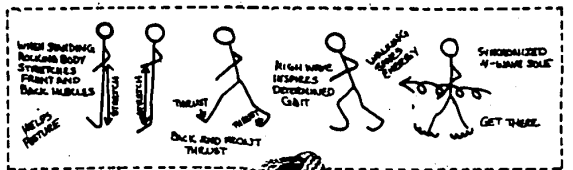
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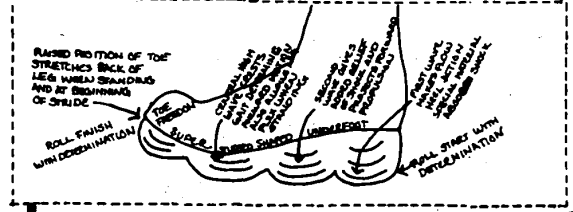
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