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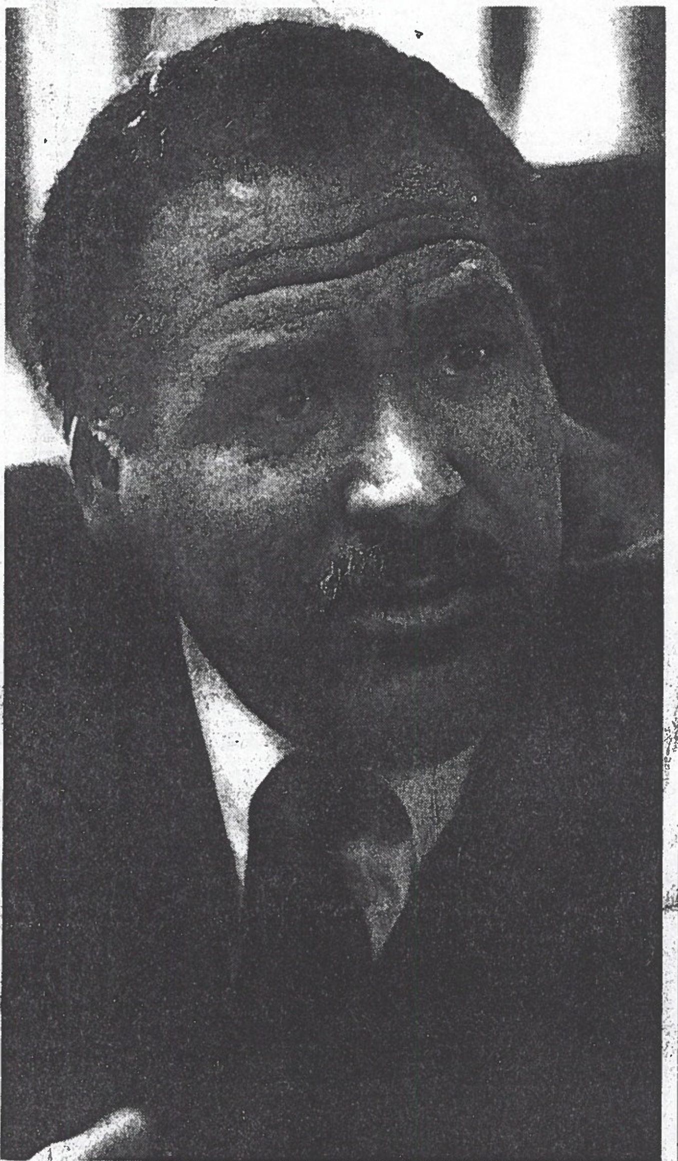


'I run Danbury. If an inmate gets the idea that he should run it, I get rid of him.'
— Robert Gunnell, warden at FCI

News-Times photo by Joseph Cannata Jr.

Prison's main role to protect society, says FCI's warden

11/21/82

By Mary Connolly
Assistant Sunday editor

DANBURY — Robert A. Gunnell wishes Americans would forget all those Edward G. Robinson-Humphrey Bogart film images of prison life — images of inmates running the prisons, images of inmates ready at all times to jump over the walls and hold innocent people hostage.

He says they're uninformed, unrealistic, even romanticized.

"A prison is as safe in a community as a nuclear plant," says Gunnell, warden of the Federal Correctional Institution for the past 18 months. "A prison is as safe in a community as a truck carrying nuclear waste or a factory that handles explosives. One canister of bottled gas has a greater destruction potential."

While he acknowledges opponents of nuclear energy might not appreciate the comparison, Gunnell thinks it gets his point across. He thinks people worry too much about what *could* happen at a prison.

"There's a common charge. 'Someone will jump the fence and rape my wife.' Fact is they (escapees) want to get away as fast as possible... During my tenure (in the federal prison system) I can't think of anywhere any harm has been done to local people."

Gunnell — who at 51 has 18 years of experience working for the Bureau of Prisons — has had more than his share of explaining to do about escapes during his 18 months in Danbury. The most celebrated, the one that got politicians and residents equally alarmed, was that by John Patrick O'Shea.

A convicted murderer temporarily housed at the FCI, O'Shea escaped from Danbury Hospital in November 1981 after being taken there when he complained of chest pains. Private guards were hired to watch O'Shea at the hospital and O'Shea got away from them.

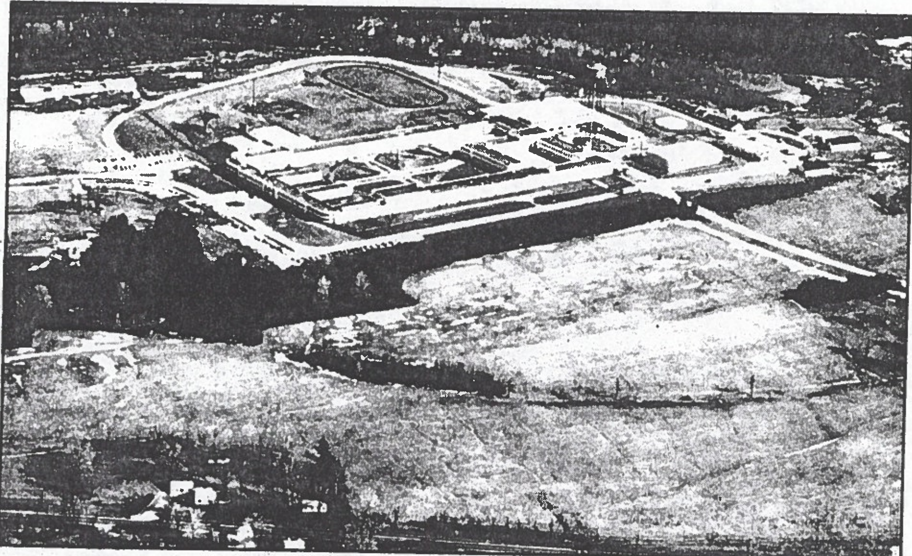
Gunnell doesn't like to count O'Shea as one of the inmates who escaped while he's been at the FCI, a medium-security facility. He says O'Shea escaped from the hospital and the private guards were responsible. Gunnell only wants to count those who escape from the prison. And he keeps a separate count for those who walk away from the minimum-security prison camp that is nearing completion on the FCI grounds.

All together — counting O'Shea, one inmate who jumped a fence, two inmates who got out by methods still unknown, and two inmates who "walked away" from the fenceless camp — there have been six escapes in the past 18 months. All except one of the walk-aways have been recaptured.

"Escape is part of a prison," says Gunnell. "There is no such thing as an escape-proof prison. Inmates have the skill and time to compromise (security)... No warden wants an escape. You learn to expect them. People locked up away from home against their will will try to escape."

From Route 37 all that is visible of the FCI is the outline of the aging, cream-colored con-

See FCI, Page A-12



News-Times photo

Aerial view of Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury.

FCI warden says main role is the protection of society

Continued from Page A-1

crete buildings, dominated by a bright blue water tower. For most of its 42 years, the prison has been almost as invisible in the everyday lives of Danbury area residents — except when it makes headlines. Food strikes. Celebrities turned inmates. Inmates turned celebrities. The terrible fire of July 7, 1977.

But invisible or not, the prison is what identifies the City of Danbury to many outside Connecticut. People in Danbury call the institution the "prison" or "FCI." People who work for the Bureau of Prisons and people who do time in the bureau's institutions refer to the prison as "Danbury."

Walking through the dormitories, cafeteria, workshops, classrooms and yard of the prison, one gets the impression the warden wants — the FCI is a quiet, orderly facility whose "major role is protection of society, preparing inmates for assuming roles in society."

Inmates dressed in civilian clothing chat with each other, lounge about the machine shop, bend over drafting tables, watch a film on returning to the world outside prison walls. Most of the inmates live in dormitories or private rooms that are locked only at night. A few are restricted to cells.

The FCI currently has 761 inmates — 451 are members of minority groups. It has 188 staff members, 78 of them guards (called correctional officers). There are 12 correctional officer vacancies. Gunnell says about 20 percent of the FCI staff are members of minority groups.

•

One would be hard pressed to find anyone at the FCI — staff or inmate — who would call the prison a "country club," a label sarcastically appied by some area residents and public officials.

Gunnell doesn't appreciate the label. He says being locked up in an aging prison where the amenities are few and the privacy nonexistent is not luxury. And living in such an institution has problems — built-in anxieties — that those on the outside don't understand.

One such fear is being locked up with fire. In the fire that swept an FCI dormitory in 1977, five inmates died and 70 persons were injured.

In the General Accounting Office report on the fire, the prison's fire safety measures were criticized. But in the months that followed, the prison made considerable fire safety improvements. In September, the prison was inspected by the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections — a private group that sets standards for prisons — and scored 100 on life safety items.

From time to time since the fire, Danbury Fire Department officials have been critical of FCI personnel for not calling them about fires at the prison, especially a mattress fire last January.

"We're not going to call them everytime an ashtray goes on fire," says Gunnell.

•

At the time of the 1977 fire, the prison — then housing 839 inmates — was said to be overcrowded. The prison was built to accommodate 511 but has been expanded. Gunnell says there is no set limit to the number of men that can be housed at the prison. He says it would only be overcrowded if he could no longer house, cloth and feed the prisoners.

"I don't consider that I'm overcrowded," he says. "I wouldn't say we're crowded."

Over the years, FCI inmates have staged various food and work strikes. But Gunnell says these were due less to tension caused by overcrowding and more to the "prison code" that allows "a minority of a group of people to influence a larger group." He says some inmates are always "looking for something to complain about."

The usual complaint centers on food, sometimes the only variable in an inmate's day. The most recent food boycott was due to a report that "something" was spotted in one batch of food. Gunnell says that in order to control potential disruptions a batch of food is thrown out whenever an accusation is made that a foreign object is in it.

•

A common assumption by the public is that prisons are rife with homosexual violence. Gunnell blames this belief on the "sensationalism of the media." He says he knows of no violence related to gay activity at the FCI.

"Sure, we've got some homosexuals here," he says. "But they're not a problem to us."

Distrust — even dislike — of the press is a common theme with Gunnell. He thinks news reporters and editors are only interested in the controversial aspects of prison life — the escapes, the violence, the strikes — and thus give a distorted view of prisons to the public.

He says one example of this is the interest reporters have in interviewing prisoners and former prisoners on penal reform.

"The press will believe the words of a convicted felon," he says, rather than someone who has academic and hands-on experience in criminology, sociology, and psychology.

"I really believe that very few inmates can remove themselves sufficiently to be objective."

•

Gunnell, of course, is one of those people with academic and hands-on credentials. He has a Ph.D. in Education from Michigan State University. He started as a teacher in the federal prison system. The FCI in Danbury is the fourth prison in which Gunnell has worked. The others are the federal prisons in Lewisburg, Pa., Texarkana, Texas, and Petersbury, Va.

The federal prison system is organized into six levels of security, with Level I a minimum-security prison camp and Level 6 the most maximum-security penitentiary. Danbury is a Level II medium-security institution. There is only one Level 6 penitentiary — in Marion, Ill. — where the emphasis is on keeping inmates behind bars not helping them change their behavior.

Gunnell puts the emphasis on *helping* inmates reform, not simply rehabilitating them through some magic formula.

"I don't believe in rehabilitation," he says. "I can't rehabilitate another man... Rehabilitation is an internal thing. Somewhere a long the line the person has got to decide he's got to do this, this, and that."

•

Gunnell is a man who likes to accentuate the postive — at least in public. For example, he says he doesn't want to talk much about the FCI's hostage negotiating team, that such talk might encourage inmates to take a person hostage. He prefers to talk about the FCI's educational and trade apprenticeship programs.

But he doesn't pretend he's running a home for displaced Boy Scouts.

In addition to the escapes and the food boycotts during his first 18 months, Gunnell has had to deal with the embarrassment of two employees arrested for drug dealing at the prison.

"It's unfortunate that it happened," he says. "But I don't regret that it happened."

Drug use and efforts to smuggle drugs inside the walls are constant problems at any prison, he says — with the FCI no different in this respect than other institutions. But he says press reports of wide-spread drug use in prisons, of inmate drug barons with prison employees on the payroll are exaggerated and — at least in the case of the FCI — untrue.

"I run Danbury," says Gunnell. "If an inmate gets the idea that he should run it, I get rid of him."

p. 2/2

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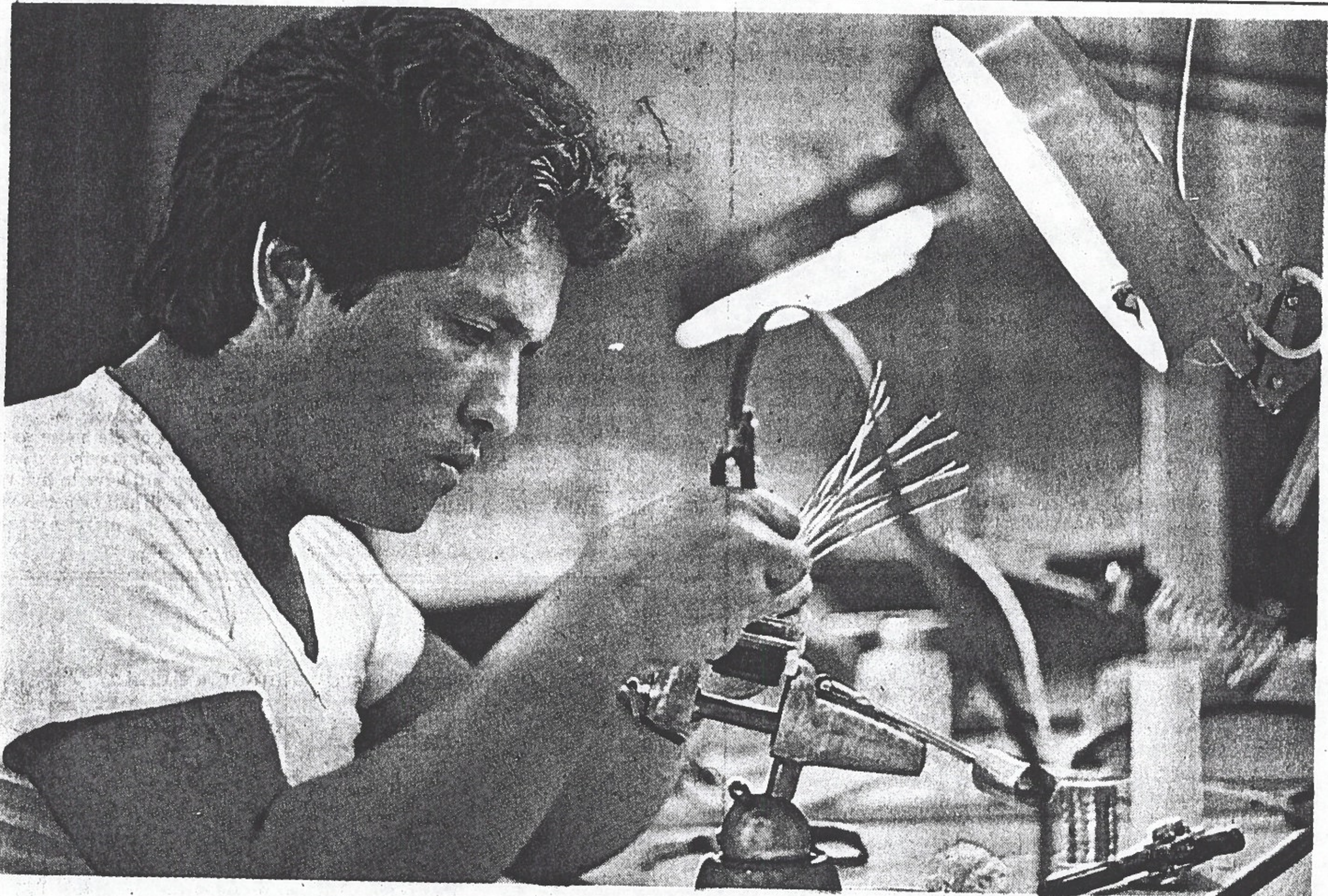
Sunday, August 21, 1983

business



Octavio Prada, a prisoner, does high reliability soldering in the clean room at the Federal Correctional Institution at Danbury.
News-Times/Joseph Cannata Jr.

FCI to launch high-tech research lab

DANBURY — David Silbergeld is waiting for the day his research lab is complete and he can begin government-sponsored projects with microchips and fiber optics. He considers himself, and his co-workers "ice breakers," in unchartered technological waters.

The federal government considers him a criminal and his job rehabilitation.

Officials are hoping that the work of a small group of men at the Federal Correctional Institution — who have nothing but time to develop ideas — will bring significant changes to the electronics industry.

The lab is part of U.S. Industries in Corrections Inc., the nationwide federal prison industries program. In this 50-foot by 50-foot square room, with bright lights and fresh-painted walls, prisoners like Silbergeld will come a long way from making license plates.

Industries Superintendent Bob Cross says he eventually expects to 20 men from the prison population to work in the lab. Silbergeld and David Kupets, another prisoner chosen for research work, put the number lower, perhaps between eight and 10.

"It's going to be difficult to find" men with the right background, Kupets says. But he and Silbergeld are prime examples that prison, higher education and corporate experience are not mutually exclusive.

Robert W. Cross, superintendant of Industries at FCI, is enthusiastic about a prison plan that would bring high tech industry into the prison.
News-Times/Joseph Cannata Jr.

Kupets has a bachelor's degree in math. He attended West Point. His lab job, he hopes, will broaden his technical background enough to land him a high-tech job on the "outside."

Silbergeld holds a Masters in business administration and attended law school. He was a Green Beret. He lists IBM and TRW Inc. as former employers,

See HIGH-TECH, D-2

p. 1/3

Prison-made gloves, cable turn profits

By Ariane Sains
News-Times business writer

DANBURY — Care and precision mark Levi Holmes' work. In the past 2½ months he has been at the Federal Correctional Institution, he has learned to operate a compression molding machine, a trade he hopes will help him when he is released.

On the outside — the term prisoners use to describe the world beyond the medium-security prison — Holmes did auto body work. Compression molding, part of the cable manufacturing process at FCI, can be used in other trades as well.

"It's something new as far as job wise when you get out," Holmes says. "I know there are a whole lot of rubber plants around here. It's possible they may be hiring when I get out."

Cable manufacturing is one of five divisions of UNICOR — U.S. Industries in Corrections Inc.,a federal prison program designed to teach inmates skills, and supply the federal government with a variety of products. At FCI, minimum-security prisoners also manufacture leather industrial gloves.

The operation, says Superintendent of Industries Bob Cross, is self-sustaining. In 1934, Congress appropriated $3 million for the program nationwide. Ross says UNICOR hasn't asked for more federal money since.

In 1982, FCI's cable division made a $848,654 profit on sales of $3,351,544. The smaller glove operation reaped $179,946 in profit on $768,081 in sales.

The money from all the industries, says Cross, is funneled back into the operations, used to pay wages and finance Christmas gifts for every federal prisoner.

For some prisoners, a 7½-hour day or part-time work provides distraction from the monotony of prison life. For others, like Holmes, learning a trade motivates them to join the program.

Larry Cody, a welding trainee, has another motivation: "It come down to money."

Prisoners are paid on a graduated scale, according to ability, Cross says. Salaries range from 34 cents an hour to $1.05.

Cody, who drove a truck in New Jersey, says he'll go back to driving when he gets out. Meanwhile, he works in the "clean room," an area with humidity and temperature controls set to government specifications for high reliability welding.

Wires are welded together to form contacts that fit into cables, some with as many as 20 contact points. Most of the cable manufactured at FCI are moderately complex, but some can take an inmate a week to assemble. A multi-connector for missiles, with its 250 wires, can take 120 hours to make.

A government inspector operates out of an office in the quality control section of the cable shop, double checking the prison's manufacturing conditions and products. The supervision is taken with good grace; the federal government is — by law — UNICOR's only customer.

The number of full- and part-time workers in the cable and glove operations is posted on Cross' office wall daily. Thursday, 310 men, roughly a third of the prisoners, were working in the cable and glove shops, separated by a wall, in the same building.

Currently, 61 inmates from the prison's minimum security "camp" work in the glove factory, 24 full time, and 37 part-time.

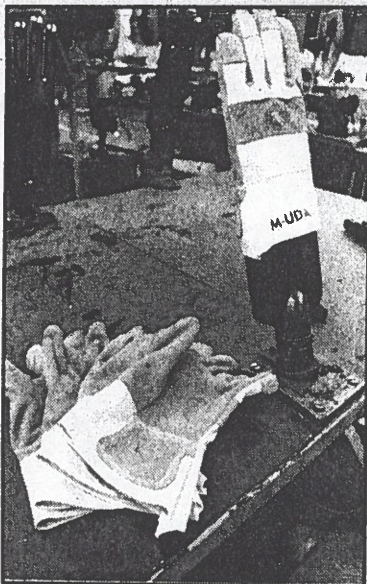
Because of transportation and security problems — camp inmates are not allowed contact with the other prisoners so a separate glove factory is being built on the hill behind the main prison building where the camp is.

Cross says it will be at least four times the size of the current facility. Between 100 and 125 inmates will work in the new plant.

The increased capacity will mean prisoners can manufacture more than just the one style of glove they now make. Gloves are sewn inside out, turned then fitted on hot molds, pressed and packaged.

Cross has been in the prison system for 20 years. It is his third time at Danbury. A large,

See PRISON-MADE, D-2



Gloves made inside the walls of FCI, Danbury, by prisoners netted a profit of $179,946 for the penitenti...

N-T 8-21-83 p. 2/3

High-tech

Continued from Page D-1

then asks the question forming on a listener's lips: "So, what am I doing here?

"I retired in June," he says with one of his frequent smiles, "and ended up getting in trouble and ended up here."

The federal government expects to spend about $20 billion for electronics research in fiscal 1983. The government, Silbergeld says, doesn't have the manpower to devote to long-term research projects. He and Kupets see the FCI lab as a good alternative.

Well groomed and articulate, Silbergeld and Kupets are philosophical about their incarceration and optimistic about life when they leave FCI.

"Because you have to be here, doesn't mean you have to be dormant or stagnate," Kupet notes. For a prospective employer, a criminal record "is always a consideration, especially when you're going into an upper echelon position. It's still not looked on well, but I think the acceptance level has increased."

Says Silbergeld: "If you're good, you'll always be good. I think the guys that have the ability are the most optimistic."

And, adds Kupet, if "nobody will hire you, you'll start a business of your own."

— ARIANE SAINS

Prison-made

Continued from Page D-1

jovial man, Cross has a wide background in manufacturing and sales, including stints with Firestone Tire and Rubber Co., B.F. Goodrich Co., Montgomery Ward and Co. Inc. and the Prudential Insurance Company of America.

Of the prison manufacturing he says: "We try to operate as close to the concepts of outside industries as we can."

Motivational signs adorn the shop walls. Over the entrance to the cable operation hangs a sign: "Danbury Cable Factory. Good enough is not good enough."

In the industrial rooms, cooled by large standing fans, prisoners have done some discrete motivating of their own. Pictures of women from a variety of skin magazines adorn the workplace.

Still, the atmosphere is businesslike. Foremen supervise the prisoners, work is evaluated and it progresses in an orderly way, supervisors say. The government and Cross have standards, and expect them to be met.

"It gets you stable," says Holmes, working at his compressor. "Just sitting around with nothing to do, there's not much chance of getting a job."

N-T 8-21-83 p. 3/3

$1.00 Sunday Danbury, Conn. 06810, Sunday, December 13, 1987

Sunday

News-Times/Wendy Carlson

A prisoner at the state Correctional Institution for Women at Niantic, Tammy Binnette of Danbury sees little of her children, who are in foster homes.

Inmates AND mothers

By Trink Guarino
News-Times staff

DANBURY — Erica stole underwear for her children.

When she was arrested and sentenced to 90 days at the state prison for women in Niantic, she lost her children to foster care.

By the time she was released three months later, she had also lost her apartment. The state Department of Children and Youth Services will not return her children until she has a place to live and a way to support them.

A year later, Erica is still trying to regain the custody of her children.

She is typical of women who go to jail and lose their children in the process. "We have to figure out a way to punish women for their crimes, without punishing literally hundreds of children as well," says Shelley Geballe, an attorney for the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union.

Anne gave birth in prison. The child was promptly placed in foster care. The DCYS had already taken custody of her 3-year-old son.

Four years later, when Anne was released, the infant born to her in prison had developed severe emotional difficulties, the result of having lived in seven foster homes for the first four years of his life. Anne, too, is still trying to regain custody of her children.

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Tammy Binnette, 20, of Keeler Street in Danbury, is still at the Niantic prison, sentenced for possession of narcotics. Her children are in foster care in Weston. Once a month, a social worker drives them three hours each way to visit her for one hour at the prison.

Binnette is permitted to telephone them once a week. In the meantime, two Polaroid photographs of her children are all she has.

Her 4-year-old son, Christopher, calls her "Mommy Tammy," she says, "because he's confused between his foster mother and me."

Her daughter, Dana, 2, is slightly afraid of her mother, not sure who she is.

See MOTHERS, Page A-8

Mothers

Continued from Page A-1

Binnette hasn't drummed up the courage to tell them she's in prison.

"They think this is a school or a vacation for me," she says. "They don't really understand why I can't be with them."

She worries that her daughter will not know her by the time she is released. She is grateful for the care her children get from their foster parents, but she is afraid the foster parents will try to adopt her children, that the state will try to terminate her parental rights.

She is studying to be a nurse's aide and dreaming of the day when she gets out of prison, finds a job and apartment and gets back her children.

"I love my kids to death," Binnette says. "They are the most important thing in my life. They are my only hope."

•

"When a mother is imprisoned, the parent-child bond is not only fractured, but often it is forever broken. It is not only the mother who is punished, it is also her children," Geballe says. "We have to do whatever it takes to keep these families intact."

The CCLU has filed a class-action lawsuit on behalf of women prisoners to force the state to provide ways for children to visit their mothers in prison. The organization is one of several fighting to improve services to families broken by the incarceration of a parent.

"The system has failed these families," says Leila Austin, co-director of Social Justice for Women, an advocacy group in Boston. "If a mother and infant do not maintain contact, not just legally but emotionally, it is very difficult to reunite them."

These groups want longer visits, host homes established nearby the remote prison location to make frequent visits convenient, a nursery inside the prison, "whatever it takes to keep these children with their parent," Geballe says. "It is not in anyone's interest to separate a mother and infant."

The state Department of Corrections is trying, says Marie Cerino, a warden at Niantic. Of the 437 women at Niantic, the state's only prison for women, more than 70 percent have children.

As a result of the CCLU lawsuit, the prison now has a room with toys where mothers and children can visit for up to two hours during the week, up to one hour on weekends. Families in Crisis, a private non-profit agency in Hartford, also runs Sesame Street, a child-care program at Niantic where inmates are caregivers.

In addition, the Department of Corrections has begun a pilot program at Niantic in which an artist from the community comes in to work with children and their mothers dancing, painting, making puppets.

Dana Knapp, 2, and her brother live in a foster home three hours away from the Niantic prison.

"It's a way to provide structure to the visits and teach some parenting skills at the same time," Cerino says.

Parents Anonymous meetings are conducted inside the prison for women who have abused their children. Classes are taught to help mothers become better parents. The state is in the process of hiring a full-time parent-child coordinator, whose job will be to act as a liaison between inmates and the DCYS.

"The programs are a step in the right direction," Cerino says. "I feel for these children because they didn't do anything to cause the separation. And I feel for their mothers who suffer quite acutely because of the separation. My job as warden of this institution is to be an advocate for these women. I have to be one of the loudest voices."

•

The entrance to Niantic is grim.

A door clanks shut and locks as children and their guardians register to see their mothers. The only wall-hanging in the waiting room is a list of rules, among them a warning that violation of the rules may result in loss of visiting rights.

It is one more frightening aspect to a childhood turned upside down by a mother's arrest.

"Watching your mother hauled away in handcuffs is the ultimate trauma," Austin says. "It is terrifying to a child who does not understand what is going on."

Children of imprisoned parents often live in "marginal circumstances, with little money," Austin says. "Sometimes an elderly grandparent takes them on. Sometimes a resentful friend takes them in temporarily. More often, they end up in foster care. They may be ridiculed or shunned. At the very least, they are bewildered."

Typically, these children become confused and depressed. They do poorly in school, may lose their appetite, withdraw into a shell or act out their fears with attention-getting behavior.

"These children need help. Children blame themselves when a parent is arrested," Austin says. "We need to provide them some kind of coordinated therapeutic support."

In the beginning, they need help to recover from the sudden, unexpected shock of separation. As adults around them react to the crisis, they may be treated as a nuisance. They may be separated from brothers and sisters as living arrangements are made.

"Sometimes when a woman is arrested, she is reluctant to tell police there is a child at home alone. A child may be left to his own devices until a relative or friend steps in," says Susan Silver, director of Families in Crisis.

Children under 7 are not allowed in court, "so they don't understand where mommy has gone when mommy goes to jail," Silver says.

Once a mother is incarcerated, the child must adjust to new surroundings. At this point, visits to the mother are imperative, she says.

"Children start to mourn if they can't see mommy," she says. "And infrequent visits are very painful for both mother and children."

Families in Crisis has started a van transportation program to bring children to visit their mothers in jail at least once a week. Vans leave from Waterbury, Hartford and Bridgeport.

The DCYS also is working to organize van transportation, says Carole Porto, the department's acting director for children's protective services. It could begin as early as next month.

How well a child adjusts may also depend on what the child is told has happened to his or her mother, Silver says. Children are most often told that mommy is in the hospital or in school.

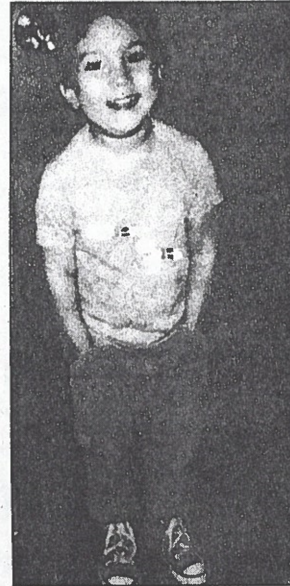
"It's done partly to protect the child, but also because a parent is afraid of being rejected by her child. Parents want to preserve the image of being a child's protector," she says.

The Department of Corrections makes a form letter available to parents, "just to help them find the right words," Cerino says.

"At times you may feel angry at me and think that if I really loved you I wouldn't have left you. I would have stayed at home," the letter reads. "So I want you to understand that I had to go away. . . . Some kids think that if they had been better children, their mothers would have stayed at home. But this isn't true. You had nothing to do with the reason I had to come here, and there was nothing you could have done to have changed what happened to me. I am here because of my own problems."

Binnette has not sent her children a copy of the letter.

"I don't want my kids to know I am here," she says simply, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I just don't want them to know."



Christopher Knapp, 4, calls his mother "Mommy Tammy" to distinguish her from his foster mother.

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Binnette is still dreaming of the day when she is released from prison and has her children returned by the state.

She has yet to face the harsh realities of life after jail that Anne and Erica encountered.

"When a woman gets out of jail, she gets $50 in gate money and the clothes on her back. She has no apartment, no job and little hope of getting back her children," Geballe says.

The DCYS will return children to a released prisoner "only if she has a place to stay with them," Porto says. "And often that is a major obstacle. If she had an apartment before, she probably lost it. If she had a husband or boyfriend, she may have lost him, too. She has very few resources and may have difficulty finding a job or the money to rent an apartment."

So the children remain in foster care.

If mother and children are separated long enough, the state may try to free the children for adoption, Porto says.

"Our goal is to return children to their parents as quickly as possible, but if a child was placed in custody as a newborn, and the parent is in jail for a year, the foster parent is the only real parent that child knows. We may determine that it is in the child's best interest to be adopted by the foster parent."

The DCYS carefully studies the case of each child in its care. Babies who have lived most of their lives with foster parents can still be returned to a parent if there are brothers or sisters who will be making the change at the same time, easing the transition.

For older children, the return depends on how strong the attachment was to the mother, and how long they were separated.

"We try to do what's best for the child," Porto says.

But infrequent visits may strain a child's attachment to his mother.

"For too long this problem has been ignored by the prison system, ignored by the community. Programs have been developed for men, because the majority of prisoners are men," says Neil Houston, director of the Gardiner Howland Shaw Foundation, an advocacy group in Boston.

Women and their children have been largely ignored because they represent a small minority of the prison population.

"They need people to represent them in custody battles with the state," Houston says.

"Somehow we have to keep women and their children together," Austin says.

Families in Crisis, the CCLU and other groups are lobbying for alternative sentencing, possibly halfway houses where mothers can serve their terms without being separated from their children. Other possibilities are nurseries within prison walls.

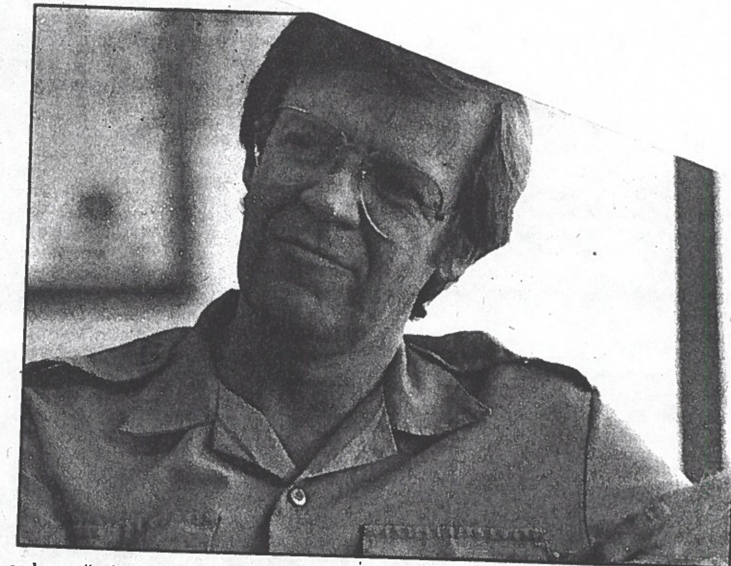
At the very least, children need better support while their mother is in prison, Austin says.

"When a mother is sent to jail, part of her sentence has to include a clearly defined plan for her children," she says. "Otherwise, the system has failed."

N-T 12/13/87 p. 2/2

Prison draws 'invisible' line

By Gina Brisgone
News-Times staff

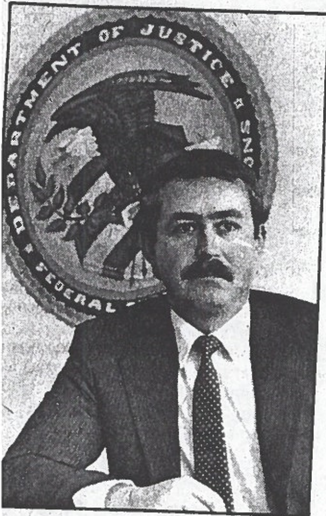


DANBURY — Boundary signs posted 100 yards in every direction from a white, pre-fabricated building are the only reminders that the 175 men inside are not free.

The men, inmates of the minimum security prison "camp" on the grounds of the Federal Correctional Institution, are free to roam within the invisible borders and jog along a makeshift track just within those limits. They can also gaze down at the squat, brick main prison below.

But mostly, these inmates — who look like aging college students dressed in khaki pants, T-shirts and running shoes — work off their time inside the pleasant, skylighted camp building.

A confined life it is, for within the long, narrow building is the stuff of their existence.



Inside, the free hours tick away in classrooms, exercise and game rooms, a cafeteria, or in 8-feet-long by 8-feet-wide bunkrooms. In between the free time, the men work as orderlies, kitchen help, tutors in the camp building or as factory workers in the main prison.

"Compared to society, it's worse. But it's the best thing you can have in a prison system," says a young man serving a four-year sentence for transporting stolen goods across state lines. He asked that his name not be used. "Nobody said that this was going to be a resort," he said.

Gerardo Brandon, 30, of Jersey City, N.J., says that since he committed a crime — drug dealing — and has to pay for it with 18 months in prison, he may as well serve the time here. "I don't say it's bad in here. I'm free to walk and sit and watch TV and do other things."

One of 17 federal minimum-security prisons in the country, this is one of the newest, says Jeff Garbow, the camp administrator.

Originally greeted with skepticism by federal prison officials, the camps are now seen as the cheapest of prisons because they need fewer guards and don't require fortress-like buildings with heavily secured cellblocks, Garbow says.

They also are considered the smoothest running of prisons, he says, because they house the least violent of criminals in the least restrictive way. Visiting hours are liberal — from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. five days a week — and prisoners are eligible for weekend furloughs home when they have less than two years left to serve.

Prison officials now estimate that 60 percent of people convicted of federal crimes are eligible to serve their time in the minimum-security camps.

"Compared to how I'm used to doing time, this is a more peaceful and conducive atmosphere," says William Bryan, 49, of Washington, D.C. "I'm probably used to a little rougher camps."

Bryan, a slim, fit man with just a touch of gray in his short-cropped hair, laughs and says "quite a few times," when asked how often he's been to prison. He is now serving a term of one-to-three years for illegal distribution of drugs.

"In my opinion, it's sort of a halfway house. Only you can't go home," Bryan adds.

Just four men have tried to walk away from the camp since it opened in 1982.

All but one man, who walked off just last month, have been recaptured, says Garbow. Escapees from the camp are usually punished with heavier sentences and assignments to more secure prisons, he adds.

But Garbow says good behavior by the majority of men has less to do with bars and barriers, and more to do with life beyond the prison.

"We have signs posted out there. But believe it or not, there are invisible barriers," says Garbow from his office just above the camp cafeteria. "They certainly know if they do something foolish, they will undoubtedly get more time. I call it an honor camp, but maybe that's just our terminology."

Behavior is also a result of careful screening, he says. Most of the time, prisoners here have short sentences for nonviolent crimes, and are usually first offenders with no history of violence or skipping bail.

Some are "white-collar criminals," such as politicians convicted for Watergate crimes whose residence in minimum-security prisons drew attention and earned the prisons the "resort" label.

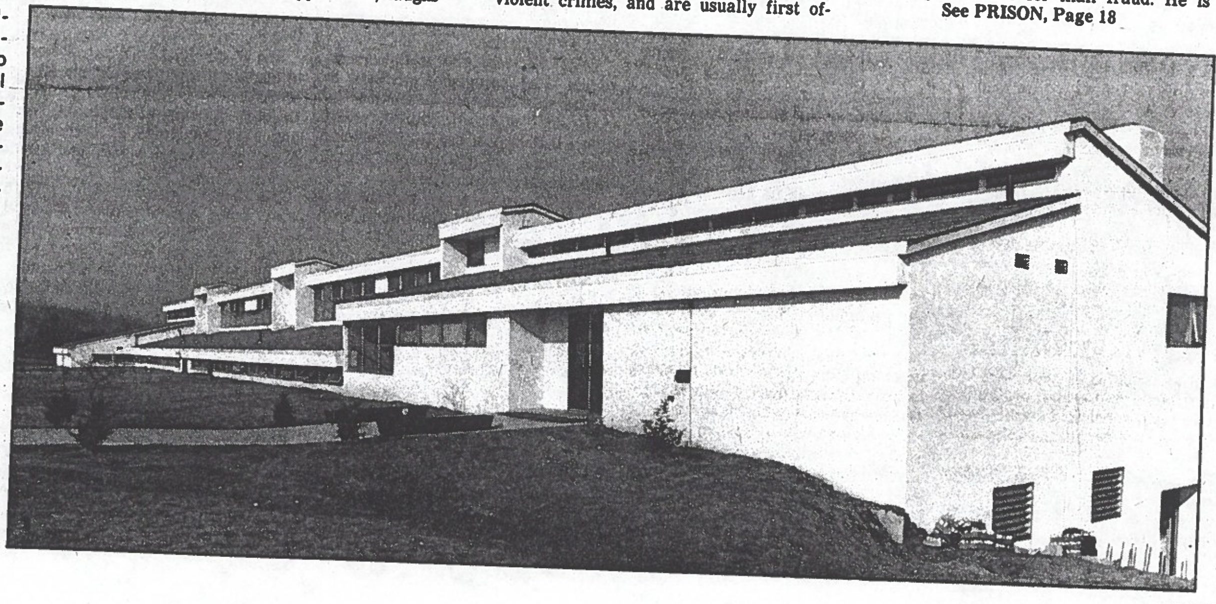
But one so-called "white-collar criminal," Donald Ellison, 41, a slight, sandy-haired, bespectacled banker from New Hampshire, who has already served half of his two-year sentence for embezzlement, dismisses the white-collar stereotype of minimum-security prisons.

"There's a misconception about a unit like this being white collar. Probably more are in here for drug-related crimes," Ellison says. "You come up here with a little fear whether it's a camp or not — it's still a jail and so it takes a while. As long as you do your work and mind your business and maintain as much contact as you can with the outside, then you go along pretty well here."

Until their release date, prisoners often spend their time thinking about getting out.

It's that time after release from prison that concerns Steven Hershenow, 43, a muscular doctor from Boston who is serving eight months for mail fraud. He is

See PRISON, Page 18



Jeff Garbow, above, is administrator of the minimum-security prison camp at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury. Inmate Donald Ellison, above right, a former New Hampshire banker serving a two-year term for embezzlement, says the "white-collar" tag on minimum-security prisoners is a misconception." The prison building, right, opened in 1982.

Photography by Joseph Cannata Jr.

7/8/84

News-Times/ Carol Kaliff

Dennis Luther, new warden of the Federal Correctional Institution, in the prison yard.

New prison warden settles into Danbury

By Mary Connolly
Assistant Sunday editor

DANBURY — Late spring rain has made the lawn in the yard of the Federal Correctional Institution very green. The marigolds are blooming. The hedges are growing faster than they can be kept in trim.

Dennis Luther stands in the midst of this greenery and tries to look serious. He doesn't really want to have his photograph taken. And a few of the inmates who are trimming the lawn are kidding him about the attention he is getting.

Luther arrived in Danbury just a month ago as the new warden of the FCI. He replaces Robert Gunnell, who after three years in Danbury has been transferred to the Bureau of Prisons central office in Washington, D.C.

The musical chairs is a bureau policy. This is the 10th assignment Luther has had since he joined the bureau 13 years ago. For most of that time he has moved every year. The U.S. Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pa. The Federal Prison Camp at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. The central office in Washington, D.C. The regional office in Kansas City, Mo. The Federal Correctional Institution in Milan, Mich. The bureau training center in Atlanta, Ga. The Chicago Metropolitan Correctional Center. And now Danbury, as the FCI is called by inmates and staff.

"The average length of a warden's stay is two to three years," says Luther. "The thinking is you go into a new job with new enthusiasm. This is a very stress-provoking job. There's only so much one individual can see at one institution, can see that needs to be done."

At 38, Luther is low-key and businesslike. He is not one to tell lively tales about prison life, stories of rubbing elbows with famous — or infamous — criminals. Rather, he sees himself as a manager, someone who has the job of making the FCI run

See WARDEN, Page A-8

Warden

Continued from Page A-1

efficiently — from the perspective of inmates and staff.

Luther says he went into corrections because he was "altruistically motivated, believe it or not." He says he "thought it was kind of a forgotten segment of society." He resists imitating or comparing himself to the tough-talking prison wardens Hollywood likes to portray. "I feel I have a very soft and humane and emotional side... tough to the extent that I'm very disciplined... I have very high expectations for both me and my staff... If I need to tell them I'm in charge I've got a problem."

Before being assigned to the FCI, Luther had never been to Danbury. But he is beginning to settle in. His office in the prison is bare, except for a model of the Chicago Metropolitan Correctional Center where he served as warden for the past 4½ years. And he has moved into the lit tle white house on the prison property on Route 37, the residence traditionally used by the FCI warden since the prison opened 44 years ago. The house was not used by the former warden.

"The few conversations I've had with any one in the community have been about my living in the warden's house. They seem very pleased to hear that I'm living there. I haven't understood that... But I love the house. It's like being out in the country, except for the highway."

Luther has also begun to impose his way of doing things on the prison here. Every warden has a system. Part of Luther's system is to walk through some or all of the institution every morning.

"You certainly want to be visible to both staff and inmates. I can get a feel for how the institution is working."

And how the institution is working, says Luther, is not just whether there have been any escapes or violence inside the prison walls. He says a well-run institution is one with a minimum of inmate and staff complaints, a facility that looks good and has good educational programs and work opportunities for inmates. When he leaves Danbury, Luther says he hopes to leave behind that kind of facility, a "correctional facility that the staff can be proud to work at."

In March, the FCI went through a complete audit by the Bureau of Prisons. All aspects of the FCI, the physical plant and educational programs, were reviewed. Luther won't say what changes were recommended. He says audit reports are always filled with lots of suggestions.

"I don't know that there was anything real major."

Luther's introduction to corrections was as a student intern at the U.S. Penitentiary in Marion, Ill, the highest-security prison in the federal system. A native of Pennsylvania, he has a bachelor's degree in corrections from Pennsylvania State University and a master's degree in correctional administration from Southern Illinois University.

He first went to work for the bureau as a case manager at the federal prison in Lewisburg. Since then, because of the bureau's policy of frequently rotating management employees, he has worked at every security level in the prison system.

He says this experience will be an asset now that he is running the FCI — and the minimum-security Federal Prison Camp next door. A career employee of the Bureau of Prisons, Luther earns $60,000 a year. He says being warden at the FCI is a step up the ladder. Danbury is larger than the Chicago Metropolitan Correctional Institution. And the programs it offers inmates are more varied.

The Chicago facility is a jail, usually housing 450 inmates. Luther says people are held there before and during trial and after conviction while awaiting assignment to another prison. Because of the short stays and high turnover — some 22,000 commitments and discharges a year — the educational programs are limited.

While being the warden of the high-security and somewhat notorious federal prisons in Marion, Ill., and Leavenworth, Kan., may provide more career visibility, Luther says being the warden of the FCI in Danbury will probably provide more career satisfaction. He says people who work at high-security prisons have to spend most of their time protecting the community from the inmates and protecting the inmates from each other.

"I'd rather work in a setting where I could be more creative, innovative, where inmates are less interested in killing each other."

In recent years, the FCI and the prison camp have had their share of controversy.

In 1977 there was the fire that killed five inmates and injured 70 people. There have been food boycotts. In 1981 there was the escape of convicted murderer John Patrick O'Shea, while he was at Danbury Hospital. And there were other escapes — some over a fence, others just walk-aways from the prison camp.

Luther seems to think these problems are under control. He says the FCI now has one of the better, if not the best, food service operations in the federal prison system. This year there have been 2 escapes, both from the camp. As at other prisons, overcrowding remains a problem. The FCI has 818 inmates, 68 more than it was designed for. The camp has 190 inmates, 15 more than it was designed for.

Luther says a correctional institution is a "microcosm of the country," and so will reflect the tensions in society. He says the FCI has no more — and no less — problems with violence than any other medium-security facility.

As a 13-year veteran of the Bureau of Prisons, Luther has worked in facilities that critics of America's prison system claim are easy-living country clubs. Danbury's grass is green. But life behind the aging walls is far from that at a country club.

Luther says he wants to have a good relationship with the people who live and work in the Danbury area. He says people are generally curious but misinformed about what goes on in a prison. He says his own friends and relatives are often astonished to learn he walks around inside the prison. They think that's too dangerous. In other communities where he's worked, Luther says he has often spoken to community groups and invited groups to visit the prison. He says he expects to do the same in Danbury.

"I would prefer if people had a better understanding of what goes on here... There are probably few things people should be more concerned about."

p. 2/2

7/20/86

FCI cracks down on trespassers

By Susan Guerrero
Assistant Sunday editor

The Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury has seen many kinds of lawbreakers come and go, but it now has a new and elusive variety on its hands — the common trespasser.

Not that this particular species of perpetrator is serving time at the prison. The trespasser with whom FCI is contending is the kind who, uninvited, insists upon being there.

Over the past two years, incidents of trespassing and vandalism, Warden Dennis M. Luther says, have risen "dramatically" on the prison reservation, 348 heavily wooded acres in northern Danbury. The prison has always had a no-trespassing policy, but "the sheer numbers of people coming onto the property," have, Luther says, forced a crackdown.

In the next few weeks, prison patrolmen will be armed not only with handguns and rifles, but cameras.

"The patrolman will ask (trespassers) for identification and take a

See FCI, Page A-8

FCI

July 30 '86

Continued from A-1

photo of them for documentation," Luther explains. "Should they come back and we discover they have already been warned, it's possible that we will refer them to the U.S. attorney for prosecution."

Last week, prison staff went door to door in the neighborhoods around the prison, distributing a two-page letter from the warden asking area residents for their cooperation in the enforcement of the no-trespassing policy.

No one has been prosecuted for trespassing at FCI in recent years. The current situation is a case, the warden says, of the few ruining things for the many. "If people had used common sense, if they had been careful and not destroyed things, they might be able to use the property as they have, seemingly, in the past."

Until very recently, he explains, trespassers were "asked to leave very politely and informed that they are on federal property."

"The problem is, some people — particularly the younger people — keep coming back. We have instances where we may have asked the same person to leave two or three times."

The reservation is patrolled 24 hours a day, seven days a week, by prison patrolmen in four-wheel drive vehicles, but the size of the reservation makes it possible for trespassers to slip by. Other than the roughly 20 acres on which the medium-security division of the prison stands, the reservation is unfenced. It is a pretty place, with rolling lawns, thick green woods and roughly 1,000 feet of lakefront.

This spring, confronted by what seemed to be a growing problem, prison staff erected red-white-and-blue-plastic laminate "No Trespassing" signs all over the reservation. Apparently, the presence of the phrase "U.S. Government Property" made them attractive trophies, and over the past three or four months, Luther has replaced $800 worth of stolen signs.

"They were indestructible," he says now, "but they weren't burglar-proof." The warden has since decided the signs are of so little effect that there may not be much point in replacing them. If he does, it will be with paper signs. That way, Luther says, "if they want to steal them, it's not a significant loss to the taxpayer."

The brazenness of some of the prison's trespassers frankly amazes FCI officials.One weekend alone, Luther says, residents of staff housing observed "four or five vehicles pulling boats coming up over the hill." The boaters were turned back, but they had apparently entered the reservation prepared to pass not only the closely packed staff residences, but to cross the lawn and drive alongside the high wire fence surrounding the main compound, past various outbuildings, the prison motor pool and a control tower, at the moment unmanned. It is only after the trespasser has run this gantlet that he reaches the bumpy, unpaved dirt road that leads through the woods to the prison beach.

Less flagrant trespassers — on foot, riding motorcycles, all-terrain vehicles and in season, snowmobiles — enter the property through its borders with residential neighborhoods and Bear Mountain Park. A few weeks ago, a band of 30 would-be picnickers was stopped by prison officials as they advanced upon the picnic tables at the FCI staff beach.

Vandalism at the secluded beach, on the shore of Candlewood Lake, has been a continuing headache. The wooden tables have been repeatedly thrown in the water and the portable toilets have been repeatedly overturned. The volleyball net erected every summer has been ripped up and knocked down so many times that this year prison authorities finally decided to roll it up. The boat ramp that appears to be the specific destination of a number of trespassers is blocked off with a thick chain and will no longer be maintained.

FCI's dump, close by the medium-security compound, also attracts uninvited visitors who steal firewood intended for the use of resident staff and the metal waste the prison collects from its manufacturing operations and welding shop and sells as scrap. "People drive in and help themselves," Luther says.

The no-trespassing edict will affect even the people who have for years trained dogs, flown kites and practiced golf strokes in full view of the prison on the vast lawn along Route 37. Prison officials have tended to look the other way, but Luther says he must now "take a hard line."

"How," the warden asks, "do you draw the line?"

Adult and juvenile trespassers apprehended on the reservation could be charged in federal district court with both civil and criminal trespass. Furthermore, as Luther wrote in an underscored passage in his letter to area residents, "cars, motorcycles, boats or other vehicles brought onto the reservation by trespassers are subject to seizure under federal law." Also underscored is the fact "that persons who enter are subject to search and that entrance on the reservation constitutes legal consent to such a search."

Which means that a trespasser driving a jeep with a six-pack of beer in the back could find himself in hot water with the federal government. As the sign at the Route 37 entrance to the prison informs the visitor — or did as of yesterday, when it was still standing — "it is a federal crime to bring on these premises any weapons, ammunition, intoxicants, drugs or contraband."

In particular, Luther hopes to remind the parents of children with ATVs (all-terrain vehicles), who also pose a great problem at adjoining Bear Mountain Park, that they are not allowed on the reservation. But he is not optimistic about securing the cooperation of these young trespassers with gentle reminders.

"We've asked the kids to stop, and they go whizzing by anyway. The situation may not be tolerable indefinately. We hope to use the least restrictive means possible, but obviously we have the manpower to stop a kid on a motor bike," Luther says. "If it continues, we're probably going to have to confiscate a motor bike as an example. We may return it the first time, but not the second time."

Luther's main concern is security. Two hundred of the 1,200 inmates work outside the fenced prison compound, and several unhappy possibilities exist. Trespassers could be a means of providing inmates with drugs, alcohol, weapons or contraband, or, wittingly or unwittingly, a vehicle in which to escape. They might encumber a search for an escapee or worse, be taken hostage.

And how, Luther asks, is a prison patrolman to know the difference between a trespasser with innocuous intentions and a person who intends to smuggle drugs or guns to an inmate? "We must consider," his letter says of trespassers, "that such persons may be involved in illegal or illicit activities."

Increased trespassing also increases the potential for accidents. When, Luther wonders, is a truck driven by an inmate going to collide with an all-terrain vehicle being driven by a visitor? When will an uninvited swimmer drown? When will a trespasser wander into the middle of practice at the prison firing range?

The prison, legal counsel Kevin Manson says, is concerned about the possibility of lawsuits. "Everybody's ready to sue the government," he says.

Luther doesn't know why people so boldly ignore the prison's no trespassing signs. He guesses some trespassers believe that as taxpapers they have a right to use U.S. Government property. The theft of firewood intended for staff use may be generated, he thinks, by the erroneous belief that the residents are receiving some kind of "free ride" from the government. He is quick to point out, in an interview and in his letter to FCI's neighbors, that they pay rent.

"I wonder," he says, musing about the drivers of cars with boat trailers in tow who cross clearly posted land and the people who somehow feel entitled to the prison's scrap metal and firewood. "It's really difficult to understand the mentality."

Protester talks without regret from Danbury prison

By George Esper
AP special correspondent

DANBURY — Martin Holladay was a 17-year-old high school senior when he railed against the war in Vietnam. He was fined $50 for participating in one protest.

Today, Holladay is 30 and a self-employed carpenter who still acts on his beliefs. He has served nine months of an eight-year sentence in the Federal Correctional Institution here for damaging the lid of a nuclear missile silo in Missouri, officially the destruction of national defense material.

His cause has altered. His fervor has not.

"There's every reason to believe that if this arms race continues the only result is going to be nuclear war," said Holladay, a former Yale student of French literature who now makes his home in Wheelcock, Vt. "The arms race continues because of our inability to take personal responsibility. I engaged in civil disobedience because I really thought it was necessary."

His passion runs in the family. His mother, Jean Holladay, a 57-year-old nurse jailed several days for the same Vietnam protest in 1972, is serving a year in the Rhode Island state prison for damaging six Trident II missile tubes at the Quonset Point shipyard in 1984.

Martin's sister, Cathy, 33, who was also arrested in Vietnam protests, was hit and killed by an out-of-control car in Boston last June.

"This has been a rough year for my family," said Holladay. "One thing I've learned is that life is very fragile."

The Holladays belong to a loose collection of about 60 individuals who call themselves the Plowshares, taken from the words of Isaiah in the Old Testament, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks."

The Plowshares' "weapons" are the hammer, vials of human blood and the Bible verse, which they hand to arresting officers.

The silo attack that sent Holladay to prison took place last Feb. 19 and was meant to show support for four Plowshare activists about to stand trial in Kansas City for damaging a silo the previous November. Among them was Helen Woodson, the adoptive mother of six retarded children, who is now serving a 12-year prison sentence.

The Plowshares movement began Sept. 8, 1980, when two priests, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, and six other men and women entered a General Electric plant in King of Prussia, Pa., near Philadelphia, damaged missile nose cones and poured blood on documents.

The Plowshares have since carried out 16 other protests across the country, symbolically disarming nuclear weapons while inflicting minor but real damage on the first-strike MX, Pershing II, Cruise, Minuteman and Trident II missiles and on the weapons systems of Trident submarines. A frequent target has been the General Dynamics Electric Boat Division in Groton, Conn.

All 60 Plowshare activists have been convicted for their actions, some more than once, and 55 have done prison time, ranging from two months to 18 years. They include Liz McAlister, a former nun and the wife of Philip Berrigan, who was eventually dismissed from his order, the Saint Joseph Society of the Sacred Heart, for marrying. She is serving three years for a Thanksgiving Day 1983 attack on a B-52 bomber converted to carry cruise missiles. She is scheduled for release in August.

A year ago, Holladay took a hammer and chisel to a concrete silo cover, spray-painted slogans on it and doused it with human blood poured from a plastic baby bottle. His attack caused $1,000 damage to transmitters, antennas and electrical outlets, according to court papers. Before he sat down to await the police, he raised a banner that read "Swords Into Plowshares."

U.S. District Judge Elmo B. Hunter told Holladay he was making the sentence a stiff eight years because he could have endangered innocent people and to deter other protesters. Hunter said he was not quarreling with Holladay's purpose but with his means.

"You diverted Air Force personnel and created a hazardous situation there because, whether you know it or not, the Air Force is authorized to use maximum power to protect missile sites," he said.

"The message does have to go out, (that) missile sites are dangerous, risky places, that the law will be strictly applied to protect all of us from something that might occur by doing this kind of illegal activity."

Holladay, who is appealing the conviction, can be paroled in October 1987.

His mother's crime, committed with four other activists, was using bolt cutters to enter the Rhode Island shipyard and then hammering the metal rims of six missile tubes, which were also splattered with blood and spray-painted with "Honor the Earth." One of their banners said, "Harvest of Hope — Swords Into Plowshares."

Rhode Island Superior Court Judge John P. Bourcier sentenced Jean Holladay to a year in jail and a $500 fine for malicious damage to property, denying her request that she be sentenced to community service so she could continue to help care for her two young grandchildren, Cathy's offspring. She may be paroled as early as March.

Jean Holladay has been in prison before, for two months in Connecticut and two 30-day sentences and a two-month sentence at the women's prison in Framingham, Mass., where she had once worked as a nurse. The charges ranged from trespassing at a laboratory to pouring blood on blueprints at a plant where nuclear weapons components are produced.

In 1984, Holladay served 4½ months in federal prisons in Lewisburg, Pa., and Danbury for helping to block doors and spray-paint walls at the Pentagon.

Warden hopes to unlock secret to rehabilitation

12/27/94

By John Pirro
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — Charles H. Stewart Jr. wouldn't have spent the past two decades working in the federal prison system if he didn't believe he could make a difference.

The new warden at the Federal Correctional Institution isn't a pie-in-the-sky idealist, either.

"All you can do is put the inmate in a situation where there are programs available to help them, and hope they have the desire and the motivation to get involved," he said. "Some people will do well. Others won't."

Stewart, a 51-year-old Kentucky native, had seen both kinds of inmates long before he took command of the women's prison in early September. But sitting behind the desk in his office last week, he admitted he's no better now at predicting who will stay straight after being released than when he started as a social worker at the federal penitentiary in Lexington in 1974.

"I'm a very poor judge of who will make it and who will not. We hope we can make a difference. None of us would be in this business if we didn't. But at the same time, we're realistic. We know the reincarceration rate," he said.

> "We hope we can make a difference. None of us would be in this business if we didn't. But at the same time, we're realistic. We know the reincarceration rate."
>
> **Charles H. Stewart Jr.**
> **Women's prison warden**

Forty-two percent of all federal prisoners released after completing their sentences will be recommitted, according to Tom Metzger, a spokesman for the Bureau of Prisons.

Earlier this year, FCI, which was built in 1940, completed the transformation from a male to female institution to cope with the rising number of women being jailed for federal crimes.

Since 1988, when the camp at the Route 37 facility began housing women, the female population in federal prisons has increased from 2,949 to more than 6,500. Women now comprise 7.3 percent of all federal prisoners, compared with 6.6 percent six years ago.

Stewart came to Danbury after three years as associate warden of the Federal Medical Facility in Lexington. He succeeded Maureen Atwood, who retired.

Although it's his first assignment dealing with an all-female population, Stewart said it's no more difficult running a women's prison than one with a male population.

"You get the same kind of hard cases in a women's prison as you do with men," he said.

FCI, one of eight federal women's prisons in the country, is designated as a low-security institution. Although about 80 percent of the inmates are there on drug charges, others have been convicted of a range of crimes, including murder.

As warden, Stewart earns $84,900 annually and has the final say over nearly every aspect of life for the 870 inmates in the prison and 200 prisoners in the adjoining, minimum-security camp. He hears all their complaints, from not being able to find the right kind of lipstick in the commissary to work assignments.

▷ Please see SECRET, Page B-2

The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

Charles H. Stewart Jr., the new warden of the federal women's prison in Danbury, says running a women's facility is no more difficult than one that houses men. He says hard cases crop up in both situations.

▷Secret

Continued from Page B-1

"I want to make sure my staff listens to the complaints and is responsive. Not that we'll agree and give them everything they want. But if we keep communications open and they feel the staff is listening, that's 90 percent of the issue," he said.

Stewart received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Bellarmine College in Kentucky, then earned master's degrees in social work, sociology and criminology from the University of Louisville and the University of Kentucky.

He and his wife, Julie, live in a house on the 350-acre prison grounds. They have five children, three of whom are married. A fourth is attending college, and the youngest, a daughter, is a student at Immaculate High School.

Stewart sees his job as warden as threefold. The first is to provide a safe, secure environment for inmates and offer programs that will allow them to rehabilitate themselves, if they so desire.

The second is to provide the 305-person staff under his command with a work environment permitting them to advance in their careers.

"I think he believes very much in that," said FCI union President Lee Gezelman. "Of course, he hasn't been here that long, but in my dealings with him, I sense that wants to give the staff that opportunity."

Stewart's third goal is to make the prison a good neighbor, one that can contribute to the community.

A short, dark-haired man who wears glasses and has a friendly face, Stewart replies in measured tones to questions about his job.

But the stiffness disappears when Stewart discusses the limited impact prisons can have on the rising crime problem.

Providing programs to train and educate inmates is only part of the answer, he said. He agrees with U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno's recommendations that more emphasis be placed on preventive measures aimed at juveniles and families.

"They can program to beat the band, but if they go back into the community unskilled and uneducated, with young children they need to support in a drug-infested neighborhood. . . . We just can't compensate for all that. There's just so much that can be expected of rehabilitation in a correctional institution," he said.

Church helps with prison visits

By Joe Hurley
THE NEWS-TIMES

Maria Rosa wept last week when she learned that her children were coming to visit her. Rosa has seen Crystal, 8, and Coral, 7, only once in more than two years.

On Saturday, the children, Rosa's parents and her grandmother will take a special bus from New York City to the Federal Correctional Institution to make the infrequent visit.

READ ME!
Young readers: Look for this story on Page D-15

"When I heard they were coming, I was so excited I started crying," Rosa said.

Rosa is one of 25 FCI inmates who will get a visit from relatives as part of a program sponsored by St. Edward's Roman Catholic Church in New Fairfield and by the prison's Community Relations Board.

For some, it will be a chance to meet with children they have not seen for more than a year, said Lisa Austin, executive assistant to warden Charles Stewart.

The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Donna Czudak of New Fairfield, and her daughters, Brenna, 4, and Mandy, 8, wrap holiday gifts for the children of FCI inmates. The gift-giving is a project of their church, St. Edward's.

With $1,000 from the church, the community relations board will charter two buses to take relatives from the city to the prison. More than 50 inmates at the all-female prison asked to take part in the program.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. They're already asking when the next buses will be available," Austin said.

▷ Please see PRISON, Page A-8

Dec 11 '91

p. 1/2

▷Prison visits

Continued from Page A-1

The prison is trying to find ways to make it easier for families to visit their relatives at FCI. Austin said Danbury was converted to a women's prison because there were no federal prisons for women in the Northeast. She said many of the prisoners' families are from the New York area, but some of the families don't have the resources to travel.

Female prisoners receive fewer visitors than their male counterparts, Austin said, partly because many of the women are single parents. When single parents are arrested, their children live with foster families or with relatives, often grandparents, who are aged and poor.

Rosa said the only visit she's had from her children was during a similar bus trip sponsored by a Wilton Church last August.

"My mother is taking care of the kids, but she has a lot of problems, especially with money," said Rosa, who is serving a 3½-year sentence for conspiracy to distribute cocaine.

The bus trip is equally important to Teresa Cumming, who has two children in foster care. She said the state is allowing them to come Saturday only because of the special program.

"I miss my kids. It's hard to be away from them," said Cumming, who was arrested for bank robbery.

Norman Puffett, a member of the community relations board, said the visits have the potential to reduce tension for the women. Reducing stress can make the women better prisoners and better citizens when they are released, he said.

"The experts think this is a very important token to show the women they care about them. I think it's worth trying. I think it will work," Puffett said.

The bus program is similar to one at a West Virginia prison where FCI Warden Maureen Atwood worked before taking over in Danbury. Atwood retired this year.

Austin said the prison can't sponsor the trips, but it can help organize them. Once the money was available, the prison asked the inmates to sign up if they wanted to participate.

"Over 50 requested seating, so we made priorities. We started with the inmates who have had the fewest number of visits," she said. The prison was able to accommodate about half the requests.

The two buses will ferry about 90 people — most of them children — to the prison Saturday. The prison will make additional visiting rooms available for the inmates and their visitors.

When the visits are over, each youngster will get a Christmas present donated by St. Edward's parishioners.

Msgr. Martin Ryan, St. Edward's pastor, said parish members responded quickly when they were asked to help the prisoners and their families. The congregation donated $500 at a recent Sunday service and took another $500 from a separate fund to sponsor the buses.

Last Sunday, the church asked parish families to buy and wrap gifts for the children visiting the inmates.

"We had the names on cards and put them out for people to take before the 9 a.m. Mass. There were only a few left at the end of the service," said Dorothy Gallagher, one of the coordinators of the program.

She said so many people wanted to participate that the church is conducting a second present program. The gifts will be given to Danbury-area children.

"People like the one-to-one approach," Ryan said. He said that people who want to contribute to the programs can contact the church, which will forward the money to the community relations board.

The prison's community relations board is also sponsoring a book give-away. The Danbury Public Library and several businesses, including Grolier and Barnes & Noble, are contributing books that will be given to each youngster who visits the prison during the holidays.

There are 830 inmates in FCI's low-level prison and 213 in the adjoining prison camp for non-violent prisoners. A low-level prison is the middle step in the three-tier federal system. A high-level prison is for the most violent offenders.

N-T 12-11-94 p. 2/2

8/21/90

The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

Sarah Thorpe has fun with paints yesterday at the new Wee Wisdom Day Care Center for employees of the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury.

'All comforts of home' at prison day care

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — Daisy Duck, Goofy and Pluto adorn the sparkling white walls above a carpeted play corral where two babies crawl and climb.

A teacher, with her back against the wall and legs stretched out on the floor, feeds an infant cuddled in her arms, while an 11-month-old girl with a tuft of fine blond hair tugs at her skirt.

In an adjoining room, a pair of 2-year-olds make shapes out of green and blue Play-Doh. Next door, four pre-school children stick paintbrushes into watercolors and spread it around, creating their own brand of art.

Lisa Austin wears a proud face as she takes a visitor on a tour of the different rooms, including the bathroom with its tiny toilets and sinks, in the Wee Wisdom Day Care Center.

"All the comforts of home," said Austin — even though it's on the grounds of the Federal Correctional Institution.

The center, for children of FCI staff members, is a first in the federal prison system.

As Austin entered one of the rooms, she is greeted with a hug from an enthusiastic child with curly blond hair. The impromptu affection is followed by "Mommy," revealing this 2½-year-old is Austin's daughter, Brittany.

In just six months, she has created a haven for children whose parents work in the prison.

"We've been waiting for it to open since before we were pregnant with Chelsea," Candis Wheeler-LaManna said of her 11-month-old daughter, who she picked up at the center yesterday afternoon.

Wheeler-LaManna, a secretary in the associate warden's office, said she is comforted just knowing her daughter is so close, and she is free to call the center at any time.

"They're loving," she said about the staff of seven, four of whom have children enrolled in the center. "They all really care about her. It's not like she's stuck in a corner and forgotten about."

"I love it. It's so convenient," said Jan Perry as she arrived to take her 4-year-old son Matthew home.

She said her son likes the center so much that he doesn't even let her walk into the building with him in the morning.

"He has to do it all himself. He loves it here," Perry said.

The praises from the parents are welcome words to Austin and Warden John Sullivan, who has promoted the center since his arrival at the prison 1½ years ago.

"We're really pleased," Sullivan said. 'It's the birth of a program I never expected to see in my 25 years in the system."

He said the state-licensed center is flexible, which allows for occasional care as well as full- and part-time care. The cost is $90 a week for full-time care of infants to children up to age 3; $80 a week for children older than 3. The cost is $18 a day for people who drop off their children for a day.

The doors opened Aug. 1 with eight children, and has since expanded to 18. The center is licensed for up to 41 children.

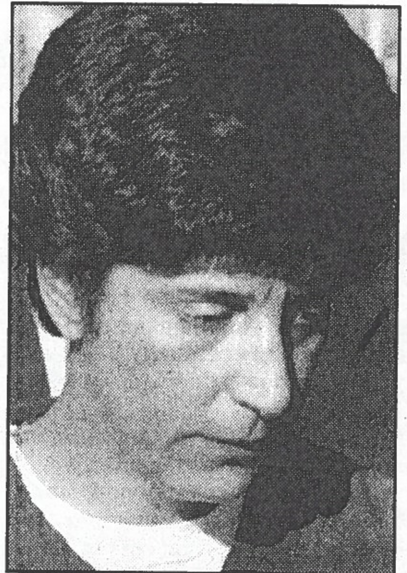
Austin said she expects the center will begin to fill after employees become more familiar with what is offered and hear about it from parents already using the facility.

Inmates are allowed to work in the area only when the children are inside and correctional staff accompany any inmates in the area, Sullivan said.

If an inmate were to escape from the prison, Sullivan said, security patrols would be sent to the center immediately to ensure the children's safety.

"It's warm, a place you'd want to go to," Sullivan said.

10/22/94



Rosario Ames
Asks to go to FCI in Danbury

Spy's wife sentenced to 5¼ years

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — The wife of CIA turncoat Aldrich Ames was sentenced yesterday to 5¼ years in prison after she admitted helping the most damaging spy in U.S. history. She had begged for mercy for herself and her 5-year-old son.

Rosario Ames' lawyer said he would request that the Bureau of Prisons house her in the federal prison camp in Danbury, Conn., which is near New York's Kennedy Airport, so it would be easier for her son to fly from Colombia to see her.

But the Bureau of Prisons probably won't make a decision as to where she will be housed for two more weeks.

The sentence came after the 41-year-old Rosario Ames admitted that she "provided advice and support" for her husband's spying after he told her about it in 1992. But she sought leniency so she could take care of their son, Paul, now living with relatives in her native Bogota, Colombia.

"I beg you to be merciful...," Ames told the judge in a quavering voice.

U.S. District Judge Claude M. Hilton gave her the minimum prison time called for in the deal that she made with prosecutors when she pleaded guilty last April to conspiring to commit espionage and evade taxes.

Her husband, a 52-year-old former head of counterintelligence in the CIA's Soviet branch, is serving life without parole. In nine years of spying for the Soviet Union and Russia, he admits, he was paid more than $2.5 million, compromised dozens of CIA operations and exposed numerous foreigners who were spying for the CIA. The government says at least 10 were executed.

Convicted spy's wife begins FCI term

By John Pirro
THE NEWS-TIMES

Dec 15 94

DANBURY — The Federal Correctional Institution off Pembroke Road has held more than its share of the noted and notorious throughout 50-plus years it's been around.

Disgraced politicians. Mafia kingpins. Watergate conspirators. Last year, New York hotel empress Leona Helmsley served 23 months of her sentence for income tax evasion at the minimum-security camp situated on the prison grounds.

For most of the next four years, Rosario C. Ames will get her mail at FCI, too.

The Colombian-born wife of convicted spy Aldrich H. Ames began serving her 63-month sentence there Nov. 15, after she pleaded guilty in federal court in Virginia to helping her husband spy for Moscow. Ames, a career officer in the Central Intelligence Agency, was paid more than $2.5 million by the Russians for betraying his country's secrets, including the identities of numerous foreigners who were spying for the CIA.

Rosario Ames, who turns 42 next week, was given a minimum sentence as part of a deal to ensure her husband's cooperation in assessing the damage he'd caused to U.S. intelligence-gathering operations.

She asked to do her time in Danbury because it's within driving distance of New York's Kennedy International Airport, where her son, Paul, now in the care of grandparents in Colombia, can fly to visit her.

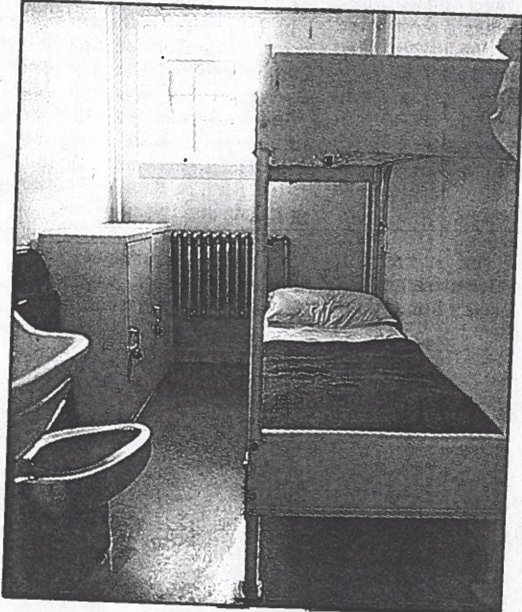
Prison officials refused to discuss any specifics about Ames. But like any other inmate incarcerated in a federal institution, she's required to either attend school or work at a job eight hours a day.

Before she married Aldrich Ames in 1985, she'd been employed as a cultural attache in the Colombian Embassy in Mexico City, where she met her husband. Before that, she'd taught literature and language at the University of the Andes in her native country.

Prison jobs include working in the kitchen or laundry for 26 cents an hour, being part of a maintenance crew, and teaching other inmates trying to earn high school equivalency diplomas.

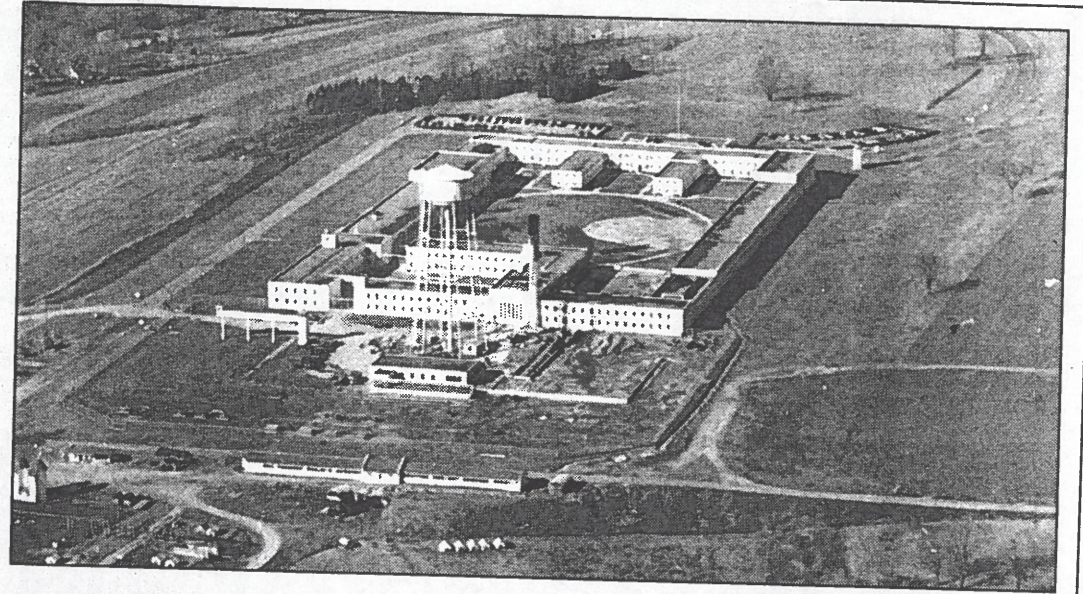
The highest-paying inmate jobs at FCI involve working at a prison factory that has a contract to provide electronics cable to defense contractors. But there is a long waiting list for those positions, which pay up to $1.20 per hour, prison spokesman Lisa Austin said.

8/5/90


The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

FCI at 50

Danbury's federal prison has been an institution in the community for half a century. Observances this weekend mark that time.


Courtesy Scott-Fanton Museum, Danbury
An aerial view of FCI shortly after its completion in 1940. Then, the city's Pembroke District was mostly farms.

Prison wins over reluctant host

8/5/90

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES

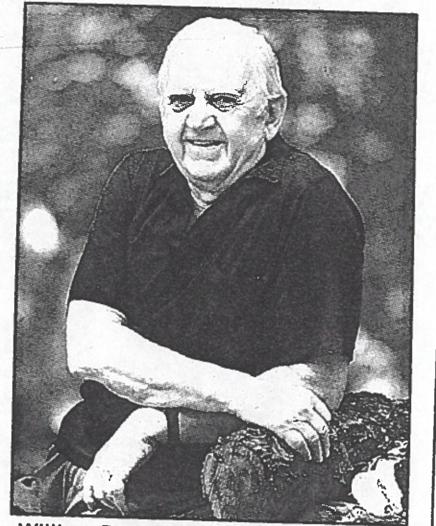
DANBURY — A sea of mud surrounded the new federal prison on a hillside on the northern border of Danbury.

"You've never seen so much mud in your life. There was no grass, no nothing," says William Berth, 72, of Bridgewater. That was 50 years ago; yesterday, Berth, an original FCI staff member, was among the past and present staff members who attended the prison's 50th anniversary party.

The white-haired former prison industries superintendent remembers how wood planks were placed along the ground for walkways.

"There's been a lot of money and hours put into making the prison grounds what they are now," says Berth, who retired in 1967 after 27 years. "It was just a cow pasture."

The anniversary dinner-dance reflected on the prison's history and paid tribute to


William Berth was a member of FCI's staff on the day it opened. "It was just a

p. 1/4

The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

Flowers tended by inmates bloom in the courtyard at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury — a far cry from the mud hole that greeted the prison's first residents 50 years ago.

for walkways.

"There's been a lot of money and hours put into making the prison grounds what they are now," says Berth, who retired in 1967 after 27 years. "It was just a cow pasture."

The anniversary dinner-dance reflected on the prison's history and paid tribute to all the staff, past and present, responsible for maintaining the facility.

FCI's original 200 acres were almost sold to an organization of a much different sort.

The Mid-Fairfield Council of Boy Scouts had eyed the Ruffles Farm for a camp for three years. The scouts were infuriated when the property was sold instead to the government for a prison, and a war of telegrams to Washington, D.C. ensued.

According to the Bridgeport Sunday Post of July 17, 1938, anti-prison missives were launched by those who feared an onslaught of dangerous criminals and "sirens in the night" as well as the plummeting of property values in the summer colonies on Lake Candlewood. On the pro side, the newspaper reported, were labor leaders, businessmen and the city service clubs, who savored the prospect of "a yearly $250,000 payroll to augment the slack in the declining hat manufacturing business." In the end, the prison prevailed.

William Berth was a member of FCI's staff on the day it opened. "It was just a cow pasture," he says of the grounds.

Conceived as a low-security facility for a maximum of 600 male prisoners, FCI now houses about 1,200 male prisoners in the main, medium-security building and about 165 women in a minimum-security prison camp.

Today, green lawns and inmate-tended flowers adorn the former mud hole. As the prison has grown, so have its surroundings. Houses and trees have sprung up in the open fields that once comprised the rural district of Pembroke three miles from the center of Danbury.

Berth, a native of Rhode Island, was unimpressed by what he saw when his train pulled into the White Street train station from Washington, D.C.

See FCI, Page B-3

A place of many changes

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — On John Sullivan's first night at the Federal Correctional Institution, he found himself locked in.

He and some other bachelor prison guards shared second-floor quarters. To Sullivan's dismay, he found himself unable to open the door to leave his room. He pounded on the wall, fearing he and the others had been locked in for the night. But he quickly discovered he wasn't being detained; the door was just stuck.

Sullivan wasn't stuck at FCI — he went on to work at 11 different institutions, most recently as warden of the federal prison in Sandstone, Minn. — but 25 years later, he's back as its warden.

But if Sullivan's presence is a reminder of the past, it's one of the few. The bache-

sonnel offices, just one of many evolutions that have taken place at the prison where Sullivan started his career.

"At one time, this (prison) was sort of the pits because it was in no man's land," said Sullivan, 52, who returned to the prison in February 1989. Sullivan never dreamed he would return, but he was pleased to find FCI less isolated than it was when last he saw it.

Now the land is considered prime real estate, with many a visitor proclaiming that the view of Candlewood Lake from the minimum-security prison camp is the best in the city. Five years ago, Sullivan said, the land alone was valued at $75 million.

In the early days, few people ventured out to the prison, and for the most part the surrounding property was farmland, Sullivan said.

N-T 8-5-90 p. 2/4

FCI

Continued from Page B-1

"I took one look at Danbury and says, 'My gosh, is this where I'm going to be?' I didn't know where the train was going, but I nearly climbed back on."

Before coming to Danbury, Berth and three other men spent about six months in Washington, D.C. purchasing supplies and equipment — "food, beds, blankets, everything that would make the prison go."

And though he had a less than favorable first impression of Danbury, Berth came to consider it a fine place to live.

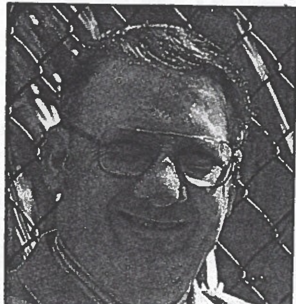
He recalls the first view the public got of FCI on a Sunday in the summer of 1940. Described as "the most modern in the U.S.," it was of a "self-enclosed" design that eliminated the necessity of walls. The "radical" $2 million institution attracted vast crowds.

"Where those people came from I don't know, but they came by the thousands," Berth says.

The first prisoners arrived Aug. 6 of that year. Many were draft resisters.

Over the years, Berth says, the crimes committed by the prisoners ranged from "A to Z." One of the more famous early prisoners was former Boston Mayor James Michael Curley "who was more colorful than Mayor (Edward) Koch ever thought of being." Berth also recalls "some communists, congressmen and during the McCarthy era, some of the Hollywood 10.

After Berth's 1967 retirement, the guest roster included the Berrigan brothers, Daniel and Philip, priests jailed for their anti-war activities; James Pardue, who with his brother blew up the Danbury police station and a local bank; G. Gordon Liddy, the recipient of the longest prison sentence in the Watergate scandal; and the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the leader of the Unification Church who was sentenced to 18 months in 1984 for tax evasion.



The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

A view through one of the cell block windows at FCI. It was originally designed to be self-enclosed, eliminating the need for walls.

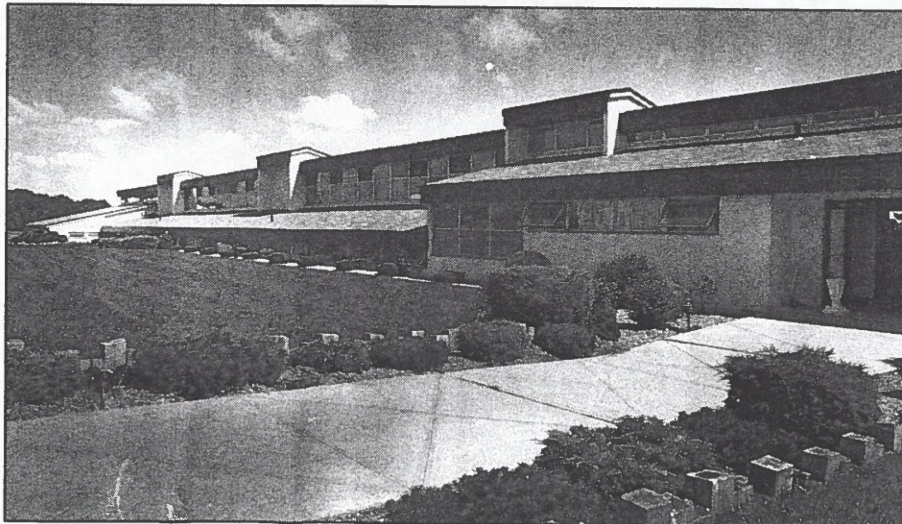
Today, 65 percent of the prisoners are serving time for narcotics violations.

Inmates ate well when Berth was overseeing the glove factory and typewriter repair shop. The prison farm, more than 100 acres in size, produced vegetables, milk, beef and veal, eggs, pork and chicken for the dining hall.

But the farm had another purpose as well: "Because most Danbury inmates come from urban centers, few have any past experience in farming. When assigned to the farm, they learn much about food production and get valuable training and experience in vegetable growing and animal husbandry," according to a post-World War II manual.

The farm is a thing of the past; few traces of it remain. Community resistance to FCI vanished long before woods overtook its rocky fields. Once they were certain the prison was "no Alcatraz," Danburians came to consider it a good neighbor.

"I love it being there," says Gina Weckle, who bought a house near FCI six years ago. "It's very peaceful. The grounds are gorgeous. And I don't worry about anyone escap-



The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

The low-security prison camp, completed in 1982, has no fences or bars. It was converted to a facility for FCI's first female inmates in 1988.

ed, it's your goal to end up there," Weckle says.

you want to do it and where you want to do it, can it be a country

ago, the prison's minimum-security camp was converted to an all-fe-

Through the years

Highlights of FCI's 50-year history:

- 1938 — Announcement is made of plans to build a minimum-security prison for 600 male inmates in Danbury. An allocation of $1.75 million is made to build it. Loud objections are heard from residents and real estate agents but the business community welcomes the idea.
- May 1939 — Construction begins on about 200 acres on what was known as Thomas Mountain.
- July 9, 1940 — Danbury Day, the first public inspection of the new federal prison. Thousands of local residents attend the open house.
- Aug. 6, 1940 — The first prisoners arrive.
- May 17, 1941 — The first escape. Julio Ramires, 23, of New York City, fled the prison, but was later caught in New York City.
- 1943 — A farm is established on the grounds. A saw mill is created to build the farm buildings, a dairy barn, a piggery and a silo. Farm program is phased out about 20 years later.
- 1943 — The Bureau of Prisons approves the purchase of more property, including 1,500 feet of frontage on Lake Candlewood from Connecticut Light and Power Co.
- 1946 — About 50 conscientious objectors attempt to march up FCI's driveway in sympathy with their jailed peers. Among their placards: "Danbury U.S. Concentration Camp." Veterans stage a counter-demonstration.
- 1958 — More than 100 inmates participate in a drug experiment for Pfizer and Co. They test an antibiotic pill.
- 1963 — The School of Horticulture opens. It has since closed.
- 1965 — Inmates start working at local businesses as part of a work-release program. Between 1967 and 1968, 119 inmates participate in the work-release program. Among them were jailed broker Herbert (Johannes) Steel, who became a columnist on stocks for The News-Times.
- In the 1960s and 1970s, anti-war activists were among the inmates. On one occasion, several inmates climbed to the top of the water tower at the prison as a protest. That prompted the

p. 3/4 N-T 8-5-90

John Sullivan
Warden, FCI at Danbury

Change

Continued from Page B-1

"It used to remind me of building a house next to a cemetery — people were afraid of the prison and what was going on up on the hill," Sullivan said. "People used to ask me, 'Why do you work in a prison?' "

One surprise upon his return was the Pembroke Elementary School across the street from the prison and the attractive residential neighborhoods around the block.

Over the years, he said, it seems local residents have adopted a live-and-let-live attitude toward the institution, he said.

The prison was originally built for a maximum of 600 prisoners; today, the main population fluctuates between about 1,100 and 1,200 prisoners daily.

At one time, most prisoners were draft resisters or those serving time for bank robbery, auto theft and white-collar crime, he said. Today, 65 percent of the roughly 1,250 inmates are behind bars for drug offenses, Sullivan said.

Two years ago, a few tongues wagged when women in khaki prison garb started mowing the vast front lawn. In September 1988, the prison camp was converted into a facility for female inmates. The prison camp houses about 165 women, about 14 percent of the entire prison population.

Sullivan said he believes there isn't as much mystery about the prison as once existed. He credits much of that to a more open atmosphere with the local media and with the public at large.

In 1965, about the only time newspaper reporters covered a story at the prison was when there was an escape or a serious assault, Sullivan said. The rest of the time, reporters were unwelcome.

"We used to be a closed society up here," he said.

Local residents are now encouraged to tour the prison and, in recent years, prison officials have hosted an annual open house for all local media.

ful. The grounds are gorgeous. And I don't worry about anyone escaping from there. There's no hard criminals, and if they do escape, they're going to hurry up and get out of here."

Before she bought her house, she knew of the prison's reputation.

"I heard about the famous 'country club,' and if you ever get arrested, it's your goal to end up there," Weckle says.

Berth says FCI won the country club designation before it ever opened, thanks, he believes, to right-wing columnist Westbrook Pegler of New Canaan. He disagrees with the appellation.

"Anytime you're locked up and not doing what you want to do when you want to do it and where you want to do it, can it be a country club?" Berth asked.

"Maybe it's a country club compared to Marion, Ill. (the federal prison system's highest-level security penitentiary). It's all relative," Berth says.

During Berth's tenure, all of the prisoners were males. Two years ago, the prison's minimum-security camp was converted to an all-female facility.

"At one time, this (prison) was sort of the pits because it was in no man's land."

John Sullivan

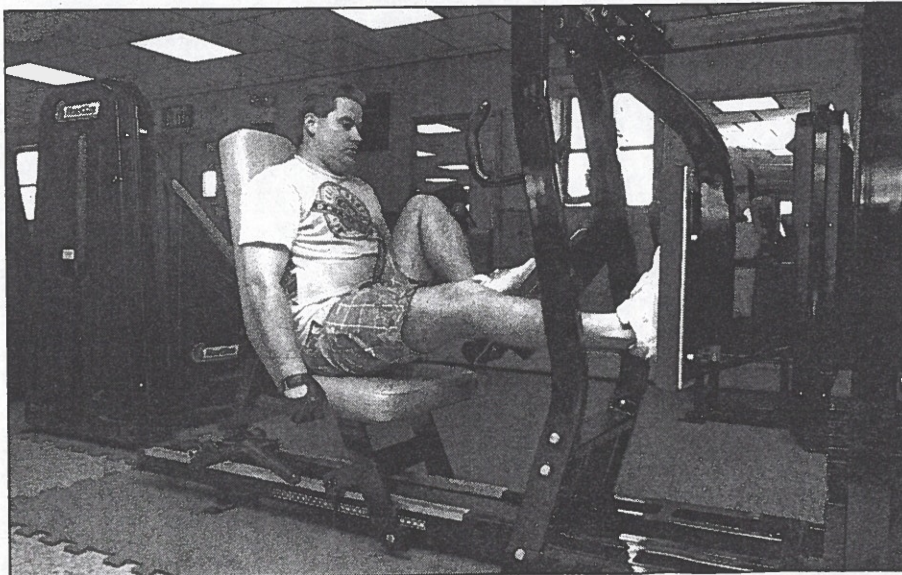
The fact FCI has lasted 50 years "shows that you can have a prison in your community and not jeopardize it," Sullivan said.

"Maybe people don't like prisons, but we've been an industry that has stayed for the good and the bad," Sullivan said. "Nobody is proud of prisons, but there is no alternative. You have to have them.

"We want to thank the community for the first 50 years and hope we won't let you down in the next 50 years," Sullivan said.

The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Lisa Austin, director of FCI's new Day Care Center, with Micah Lamitie, 2½, and his brother, Jacob, 6½, children of an FCI employee.



The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Correctional Officer Bill Austin (no relation to Lisa) does leg presses in the new Wellness Center for staff members.

The prison's mission has changed through the years, alternating between practical considerations and idealistic concerns.

When it was built, FCI's goal was rehabilitating, rather than strictly isolating, criminals. "The prevailing philosophy of education at Danbury," says the manual, "is to consider inmates primarily as adults in need of training and secondarily as criminals in need of reform. The aim is to provide every educational opportunity that experience or sound reasoning shows may be of benefit or interest to inmates in the hope of that they may be fitted to live more competently, satisfyingly and cooperatively in society."

Toward that end, inmates were, and still are, offered classes and vocational training. In the early years, they were also subject to many restrictions. For instance, as The Bridgeport Sunday Post related in an article about the soon-to-be-completed prison in 1939, "married prisoners will not be permitted to write or receive mail from unmarried women unless they are related. Unmarried prisoners are not to correspond with married women unless related." Inmates were to be allowed to read newspapers "but magazines are not permitted."

Since that time, prison officials have relaxed the rules quite a bit. But rehabilitation has come to be viewed as an impossible mission — unless the prisoner is motivated to change.

"The prison was run much differently than it is now," Berth says.

John Sullivan, the current warden, says the prison's duty is to keep people who have committed crimes away from society in a restricted environment. Still, he says, it is important to offer programs to help inmates to improve themselves.

In the 1990s, more changes are expected.

A new staff training and day-care center will open soon and a new jail unit with room for 200 inmates is on the drawing board. Progress is already under way on a $500,000 commissary next to the prison camp. Measures to enhance security have been added, and by 1991, Sullivan hopes to secure a $15 million appropriation for major refurbishing within the main institution.

Berth has visited FCI about three times since he retired to work in a small company.

of the water tower at the prison as a protest. That prompted the installation of a fence at the base of the tower.

- Feb. 28, 1972 — About 500 prisoners refuse to work. The work stoppage lasted for two weeks. Another work protest occurs in December 1973.
- July 11, 1972 — Anti-war priest Daniel Berrigan calls FCI a "popsicle prison." He and his brother, Philip, were sentenced to the prison for their anti-war activities.
- 1975 — FCI begins focus on the hiring of minorities and women in the custodial work force.
- 1975 — A Watergate figure, G. Gordon Liddy, is sentenced to serve time in Danbury. He is released in 1977.
- July 7, 1977 — A fire believed to have been deliberately started in a second-story dormitory causes the death of five inmates, and injuries to 80 prisoners, staff and firefighters.
- Late 1970s — Reconstruction years. Dormitories were remodeled and a new education complex was built.
- October 1978 — Construction of a minimum-security prison camp begins. Completed in 1982, it has no barriers. The camp initially houses 175 male prisoners.
- August 1988 — The prison camp is converted into an all-female facility, now occupied by 165 inmates.
- Late 1980s — Funding approved for a new staff training and day-care center. Construction nears completion.

"The prison work was fascinating," Berth says. "There were days when you should have paid admission for the privilege to work there, and then there were other days when you had no desire to be here because it was just tough, stressful work." The word hadn't yet entered the language, but Berth guesses he had "burn out."

"If I had stayed, I doubt I would have lived to be 55. It was getting to me.

"A prison is a study in human relations at its upmost, in which you have a group of people who are living under abnormal circumstances and their behavior tends to be abnormal. They could not live as they did on the street, so you have a peculiar relationship," Berth says.

As for the guards — "You all have to be working together," he says.

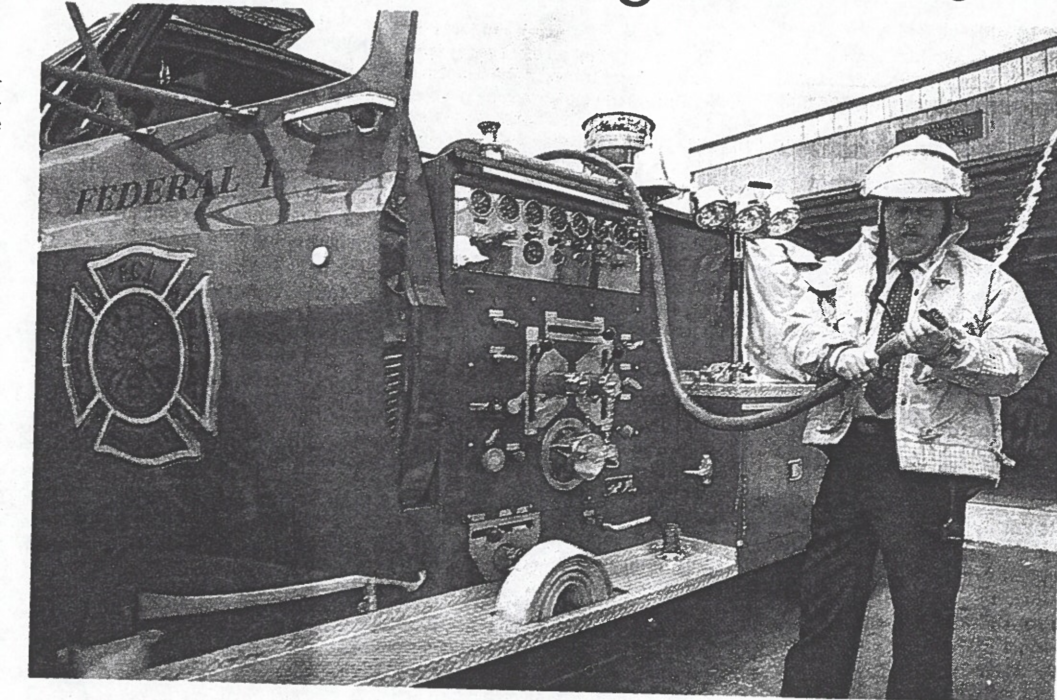
N-T 8-5-90 p.4/4

THE NEWS-TIMES
Tuesday July 3, 1990

NEIGHBORS

FCI firefighters ready, willing and able

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES



The News-Times/Carol Kaliff

Jack Wilson of Danbury, safety manager and fire chief at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, checks the water hose on one of three fire trucks owned by the prison.

DANBURY — David Twomey believes he has one of the premier assignments for a federal prison inmate — he is a firefighter for the Federal Correctional Institution's Fire Department.

The job pays nothing and it won't get him a release from prison any sooner.

But the 44-year-old inmate said the position gives him and other inmates who also are members of the volunteer fire cadre a sense of accomplishment and pride.

"To be selected is an honor in the institution, and for the inmates themselves," said Twomey, who has been at the Federal Correctional Institution on Route 37 in Danbury since December 1987. He is serving a 16-year sentence for conspiracy to defraud and obstruction of justice. Twomey joined the fire corps in June 1988.

Working in the fire department also offers the inmates skills they can use once they are released.

"It's going for something that nothing else can give them," Twomey said. "It gives them the training they need for a job when they leave."

Later this month, the 16 inmates and 10 staff members in the prison's Fire Department will begin a 15-week, 120-hour state course required for beginning firefighter-level certification. And Twomey said that will not only give the inmate volunteers more skills to assist the institution, but once they are released they have at least the minimum requirements needed to join a volunteer department or even a paid department.

FCI safety manager Jack Wilson, who also serves as the prison's fire chief, said the inmate volunteers are carefully selected and the ones chosen are committed to serving and getting the training needed to do the job.

"Our main theme is to give them something they can work at," Wilson said. "Nothing is nobler than saving people's lives and performing a service for the community."

All fire-crew inmates — eight men and eight women — are prisoners with the lowest security level and have community custody, which allows them to leave the prison grounds. Wilson said some of the training is done at the city's fire school near the landfill.

The FCI is only one of five institutions in the entire federal prison system — a total of 62 prisons — that has its own fire department. The unit dates back to the prison's opening in 1940, Wilson said.

The prison originally had its own fire brigade because it was located in one of the most remote areas of the city, said Assistant Warden Steve Dewalt. If the prison was to be built in the same location today, it probably would not have an in-house fire department, he said.

The prison Fire Department is not a replacement for the city's department, Wilson said, but is simply an addition that can increase the service that is available to both the institution and the community.

"The city's been real good to us," he said.

The Danbury Fire Department in April donated a 1973 pumper truck, which is being refurbished in the prison garage. The prison now has three fire engines: two pumpers and a 1,200-gallon tanker, formerly an Air Force gas truck, which also is being refurbished.

"I really look forward to the day that we can give back to the community," Wilson said. "We want to be an integral part of the city's Fire Department."

See FCI, Page N-3

FCI

Continued from Page N-1

And he hopes that once the inmate and staff volunteers become state-certified, the city will view the prison fire crew as an additional resource.

"Before we respond to the city, we want (city officials) to know in their hearts that we are 100 percent capable, and that's the reason we have this course," Wilson said.

Wilson and two other prison officials will teach the course, with some assistance from city Fire Department officials, but the certification testing and proficiency exams will be administered by instructors from the state fire school. He said he expects the course will be offered once a year so that anyone new who joins the prison fire department can be certified.

Danbury Fire Chief Antonio Lagarto said chances are the city would not need to use the prison's firefighters because it has so many other volunteer stations, "but there may be the rare occasion that we would use them."

He said the mutual-aid agreement the department has with the prison is similar to what it has with surrounding towns: The city calls if extra equipment or manpower are required during emergencies.

Lagarto said he believes it is an asset that the prison has its own fire department. He said, however, he still wants the prison to contact the city whenever there is any type of fire, rather than relying on the in-house department and later realizing extra help is needed.

"That's what happened in 1977," Lagarto said, referring to a fire inside the prison that left five inmates dead and 80 others injured.

Wilson gave assurance that if there is a fire, the city certainly will be called. No one at the prison wants a repeat of what happened in 1977, he said.

The advantage of the prison having an in-house department is that it can respond quickly, with the average response time about four minutes, Twomey said.

"And that's quick," Wilson said, adding the crew has a regular training schedule and monthly drills.

"We're not told whether it is a real fire or a drill," Twomey said. "We're prepared to go and do the job."

Warden John Sullivan has been a strong backer of the prison's fire service and of Wilson's $62,000 safety budget, about half of which is allocated to the fire department, Wilson said. The department has up-to-date equipment, including air packs and protective gear.

"We're getting there," Wilson said. "It's not just something you can build from scratch in a day or two. We're a long way from where we want to be, but each day we get closer."

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NEIGHBORS

Women move up in the ranks at FCI

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — Ask Federal Correctional Institution Warden John Sullivan what he thinks about having three women on his executive staff and he quickly says it's about time.

"I never thought I'd see them rise through the ranks," said Sullivan, a 25-year veteran of the federal prison system. "When I was a correctional office here (in Danbury) the two female secretaries had to be escorted everywhere."

Now the six-member executive staff of the prison includes three women: Penny Clarkson, associate warden of industry and education; Doris Meyer, prison camp administrator; and Natalie Landy, executive assistant to the warden.

Even though the FCI now has women in the executive branch, and several other female managers, it is still not the norm throughout the prison system.

"I think it's been a long time coming," Sullivan said. "I'm glad to see it happening."

It is a good sign when people can be mature enough to see "people for their ability versus their gender," he said.

However, Sullivan will admit there are still some places and jobs in the prison system where he would not favor a woman, mostly due to safety reasons. The women counter that some of those jobs would be dangerous regardless of who worked in them.

Clarkson and Meyer are no strangers to being the only women working jobs traditionally considered male-only.

"Throughout my career, many times I have been the only female in my position," said Clarkson, 40, the mother of three children — Stephen, 20, Erika, 18, and Jason, 16. "It doesn't bother me to be one of the few women. I find it challenging. Here at Danbury we are the exception, and that's due to the warden because he is supportive of women and minorities, and treating us equally. I do feel that I am treated equally. I'm comfortable with the people we have now."

Clarkson started her 10-year career with the Bureau of Prisons as a correctional officer in Danbury and was then promoted to a trainee in the glove factory there. From that point she was promoted through the ranks in the industries division at different prisons, she said.

"I never grew up thinking I wanted to go into corrections," she said.

She started in real estate and decided to take a course in criminal justice, which eventually led to a criminal justice degree.

Clarkson oversees a $16 million prison factory operation as well as the prison education program and staffing. She is responsible for the financial aspects of prison industries, purchasing all the materials necessary to build the cables and assuring that Department of Defense contracts are fulfilled. She also must make sure there is always a stable inmate work force.

Meyer, 42, has spent 14 years in the federal prison system. Her transfer to an administrative position at Danbury was a dramatic change from working as a captain at the federal prison in Loretta, Pa.

"I told my son (Chris, 17) after I got the job that I haven't laughed so hard in a long time," Meyer said of heading the prison camp, which houses about 180 female inmates.

Meyer, who previously worked with both male and female inmates in the other seven prisons where she served, said her position gives her a chance to do positive things for the women who serve sentences here. She said many have little education and few job skills. If they can be taught skills, they will be better prepared for the outside world when they leave.

And Meyer seems to be rather nonchalant about being one of the few women who have made it into a prison's administrative hierarchy.

"I don't look at sex of the person I'm working with, I look at them for their competence and how to achieve goals," Meyer said. "I think it is easier on us than it is for our male counterparts. The ones who accept us have a harder time than we do."

For a time, Meyer was the only woman in the entire federal prison system serving as a captain.

"After men get over the shock of seeing a woman doing a job that is predominantly male, and see the competence and ability, they have confidence," Clarkson said.

"This should not be a story, this should just be accepted," said associate warden Jim Rich, who recently was transferred to a prison in Houston.

At the FCI in Danbury, he said, he would bet that the representation of women in the middle-management ranks at the prison probably exceeds the community standard. Of the prison's staff population of about 300, about 80 are women, he said.

"To work well with someone you must respect them and it doesn't matter if that's a man or a woman," said Landy, 42, the mother of three children — Brett, 21, Mark, 20, and Trisha, 18. In May, Landy replaced Craig Apker as the warden's executive assistant. Her job entails fielding media calls, public relations, coordination of community events and any other duties the warden delegates.

Landy started out at the FCI in 1986 as a registered nurse and a year later she was promoted to assistant health services administrator.

She said what is crucial in the prison system is for women who have entered administrative ranks to convince other women that they can reach higher goals and assist them in doing so.

"The best advocates I've had were correctional officers and they were the macho men," Meyer said.

"There is an old saying that behind every successful man there is a woman; well, in our business behind every successful woman is a man," Clarkson said.

Sullivan said seeing the rise of women in the prison system has been an "exhilarating and rewarding experience."

"And there's not one of them I would mind working for," he said.

But he couldn't resist finding at least one drawback.

"They never lift the seat," he joked.

The News-Times/David W. Harple
Doris Meyer, from left, Penny Clarkson and Natalie Landy are in executive positions at the Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury.

Renovations dragging FCI into 21st century

By Nanci G. Hutson
THE NEWS-TIMES

DANBURY — In the 1940s, the Federal Correctional Institution was a state-of-the-art, all-male prison, considered the most modern in the federal penal system.

Today, it's an antique, all-female prison that needs some polishing.

That's why the federal government — over the last three years — has invested some $20 million to bring the prison into the 21st century. Almost all of the prison — from the electrical wiring to the telephone system, from the cells to the cafeteria — has been either replaced or upgraded. The inmates' quarters in the main building have also been upgraded and expanded, with additional space created for inside leisure and recreation.

Visitors to FCI these days will find scaffolding and heavy construction drapes over the main entrance, where the entire front lobby, visitors and control operation areas are under renovation. A temporary entrance is located adjacent to the driveway leading to the minimum-security prison camp.

The control center was obsolete, and the lobby was too small to accommodate the number of people who visit the prison, said Ron Rossi, FCI's chief of mechanical services. The prison is also enlarging the visitors room for inmates' families, including a new area where children and their mothers can meet and where parenting programs will be offered.

The physical appearance of the prison will not change much, as the construction is being done so that new work matches the rest of the facility, Rossi said. The only real difference that will be visible on the exterior is a new style of windows.

The most detectable changes will be those for the staff and inmates, with the prison now having both more space and up-to-date technology, making it not only more attractive and more modern, but also more secure, Rossi said.

"It was well-overdue," Rossi said of the renovations.

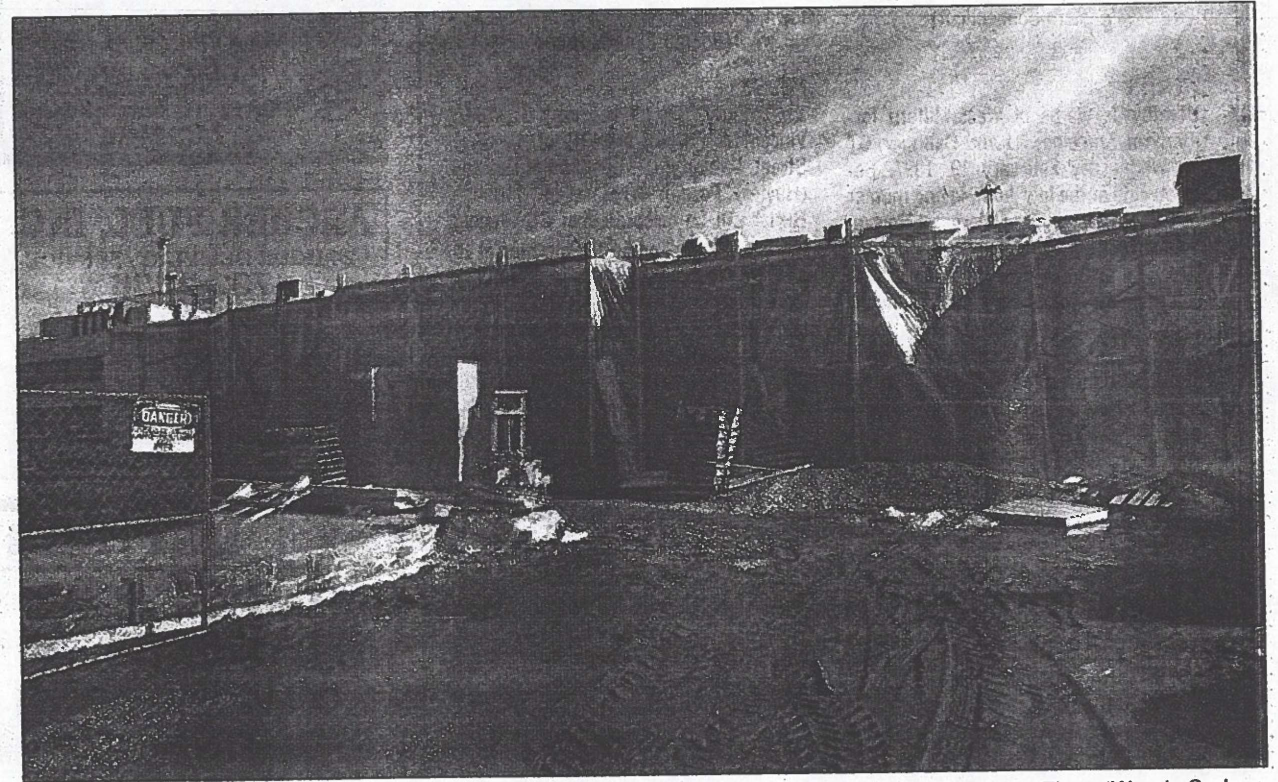
"We've been very pleased with the construction company. They've been right on target with their projections," said Warden Charles H. Stewart Jr. "The quality has been good. It will mean a lot for the institution."

The contractor for the job is Brunilo Construction of Farmington.

Stewart said the construction has been going on without any disruption to prison operations, and he expects the work will be finished by September or October.

The choice to renovate this facility rather than build a new one has much to do with the fact the prison sits on such an attractive piece of land, and new buildings would cost significantly more than the renovations. With the renovations, FCI has 440,000 square feet of building space, and sits on 348 acres overlooking Candlewood Lake. In the mid-1980s, the land alone was valued at $75 million.

"It (the renovation) will bring us into the 21st century, really," Stewart said.



The News-Times/Wendy Carlson

Scaffolding and construction drapes show where the Federal Correctional Institution is undergoing repairs — from the electrical wiring to the telephone system, from the cells to the cafeteria.

Feb 21 97