

Work release over prison, probation director said

By **JOHN FOX**
Reporter

Anyone who has had any dealings with the Dauphin County Prison or probation system in the last 30 years has probably heard about or directly dealt with Terry Davis. Davis is currently the director of Adult Probation and the Work Release Center (WRC) in Dauphin County.

Davis has a no-nonsense reputation among the people he has incarcerated. "Our offenders know not to mess with me and get on my bad side. I don't lose any sleep over putting people in jail. I have guys in here that have been in the system since the 70s and they'll tell you 'Terry Davis locked me up many times.' But, they will also tell you that they were responsible for it. I always make them aware that this is their responsibility and are being held accountable for their actions," Davis said.

Despite his stern approach, Davis strives to be fair. "Most of these people know that I'm honest and I'm going to try to do something to help them," Davis said. "I think people know that it's neither a race issue nor a money issue. I think people know that I'm fair and also if they cannot communicate with their probation officer they can call me. I answer my phone. I talk to the public."

Many people may not realize that it costs \$60 a day per inmate to house a criminal in Dauphin County Prison. Davis estimates that DCP houses one thousand inmates, which would make the average cost to the taxpayer \$21.9 million a year.

The WRC, in comparison, has an average cost of \$3-\$4 a day per inmate but does not rely on taxpayer funding. The WRC is a self-sufficient, fiscally sound alternative to incarceration because the inmates pay for just about everything. While they are part of the program they are required to pay rent, fines, and child support. They are also responsible to provide their own food, medical needs, and transportation.

"I bring in millions of dollars to the taxpayer every year," Davis beamed. A large chunk of the money earned at the WRC comes from the commissary, which consists of the use of laundry facilities, telephones, and various Coke products made available for the inmates to purchase.

"I am the largest Coke user in Central Pennsylvania," Davis said. In 2003, the WRC profited an estimated \$50,000 from Coke products purchased by the inmates, \$30-\$40,000 from the laundry facilities, and \$40-\$50,000 from the telephones.

"The \$130,000 plus we make off the commissary alone goes back into the facility to keep the overhead down," Davis said.

Davis outlined how Dauphin County stacks up with other counties in the area. "Dauphin County has a high crime rate," he said. "I believe that York and Lancaster Counties have more cases than us, but on a per capita basis, we have much more crime as well as a higher murder rate." Davis also explained that Cumberland and Perry Counties experience very low crime in comparison. He said that drugs and DUI's account for roughly 1,000 inmates a year and property crimes such as theft round out the top three problems facing Dauphin County.

In the United States, there are an estimated two million people who are incarcerated. "This is something we will always struggle with. I think these numbers will continue to go up. This country is very aggressive," Davis said.

Shifting to illegal drugs, Davis said, "The drug arena is very powerful. Legalizing drugs is not the answer. Putting everyone in jail that has a drug problem isn't the answer. Unfortunately, when you take someone with a drug addiction and put him or her through rehab it's a proven fact that they will fail the first 5-6 times. It's very expensive to put people back into drug programs. That's why I'm more in favor of housing programs where you can watch them 24 hours a day and change their life patterns."

Davis views prisons as cages that are a waste of time and taxpayer money. He said the answer is to imple-

ment more programs like the WRC.

"We need more programs where you can treat a person like a human being but at the same time punish and control them so we can change behavioral issues. Putting them in individual cages is very, very costly and I can't afford another 500 cages in Dauphin County at \$60 a day. It's like they say in the movie, 'If you build it, they will come.' We just need more facilities that are economic where people live but are not required to be confined in a cage. Cages are for animals," Davis said.

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