

Prison!

A visit to one can be enlightening

By **WALLY KOCHER**
Staff Correspondent

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Staff Correspondent Wally Kocher and Staff Photographer Eddie Campbell were assigned to cover the graduation ceremonies at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas last week. Prison officials invited the two to tour the prison facilities prior to the ceremonies. Following is Wally's observations of what he saw.)

Prison. What thoughts come to mind when you hear that word? Dark, dreary, rat-infested cells with guards parceling out the bread and water to the inmates? Or do you on the other hand, think of color television in every cell, steak for every meal and "health resort" condominiums? Both visions are wrong.

When my editor asked me to cover the graduation ceremonies at the State Correctional Institute at Dallas, I thought it would be an opportune time to visit the entire prison and see just what makes it tick.

I thought that when I arrived, I would be met by at least two burly guards with guns. As I would be escorted through the halls, the inmates would be yelling and banging their tin cups on the bars. I was very wrong!

I arrived around 11:30 in the morning. After parking my car, and making sure that all doors were locked, I proceeded toward the main gate. I tried to open the door but was unsuccessful. Eddie, the photographer, had been to the prison before, so he just laughed at me. As hard as I tried to turn the door knob, it just would not budge.

Meanwhile, Eddie was still laughing. I was becoming upset when all of a sudden, a sharp "bang" sort of sound came from the door, and

suddenly it was easy to open. That was my first lesson, about 99 percent of the doors at the prison were electronically locked. A man behind a control panel had to let you in, you just didn't walk in.

After making it through all the security measures including metal detectors, and searches, we were escorted to another gate inside the prison fence.

Again, a guard stood by to open the gate for us. On the other side was a man dressed in a nice new suit.

"That can't be our guide," I thought. "He doesn't have a gun."

Lo and behold it was! His name was Tom Figmik, and he was the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent.

I explained to Mr. Figmik that I had never been to the prison before, and I didn't really know what all there was to see.

He understood, and commanded Eddie and I to follow him. We obeyed.

Our first stop was a cell block. Actually it was a couple of cell blocks, along with a hospital, barber shop, mattress factory, and other points of interest all under one roof.

I couldn't help but think of the Wyoming Valley Mall. Not that it reminded me of it in appearance, but that it seemed to have everything the inmates needed under one roof.

As we walked down the long hallway, there were no tin cups, and very little screaming. In fact, the inmates weren't in their cells. By then it was lunch time, so many of them were either going to the dining area, or just walking around.

This made me extremely uneasy. Especially after Mr. Figmik told us that we were in one of the worst cell blocks in the prison. Many of the more violent inmates were kept there.

"But they're not locked up!" I kept saying.

Mr. Figmik just laughed and informed me that there were only 22 who were under constant lock up.

Near the end of the tour of the cell block, Mr. Figmik asked me if I had noticed that there were no weapons carried by the guards. I hadn't noticed.

He informed me that some carried batons and mace, but no guns. Everyone was required to carry a whistle.

After I thought about it, it did make sense. If a guard was carrying a gun, an inmate might try to take it from him. Who would want a whistle?

Upon leaving the cell block, we came across a group of men. Each one had a hammer.

"Do you know why these men have hammers?" asked Mr. Figmik.

At first I thought that perhaps they forgot their whistles, but Mr. Figmik informed me that they were a part of security.

The men actually go to each cell block to tap on the bars with their hammers. They check for weak areas.

I was impressed. In fact I was impressed with all of the prison's security measures. The fences, barbed wire, watch towers, and not to mention the electric doors. I now have the utmost respect for anyone who can escape from that prison from within. It would be impossible, I should think.

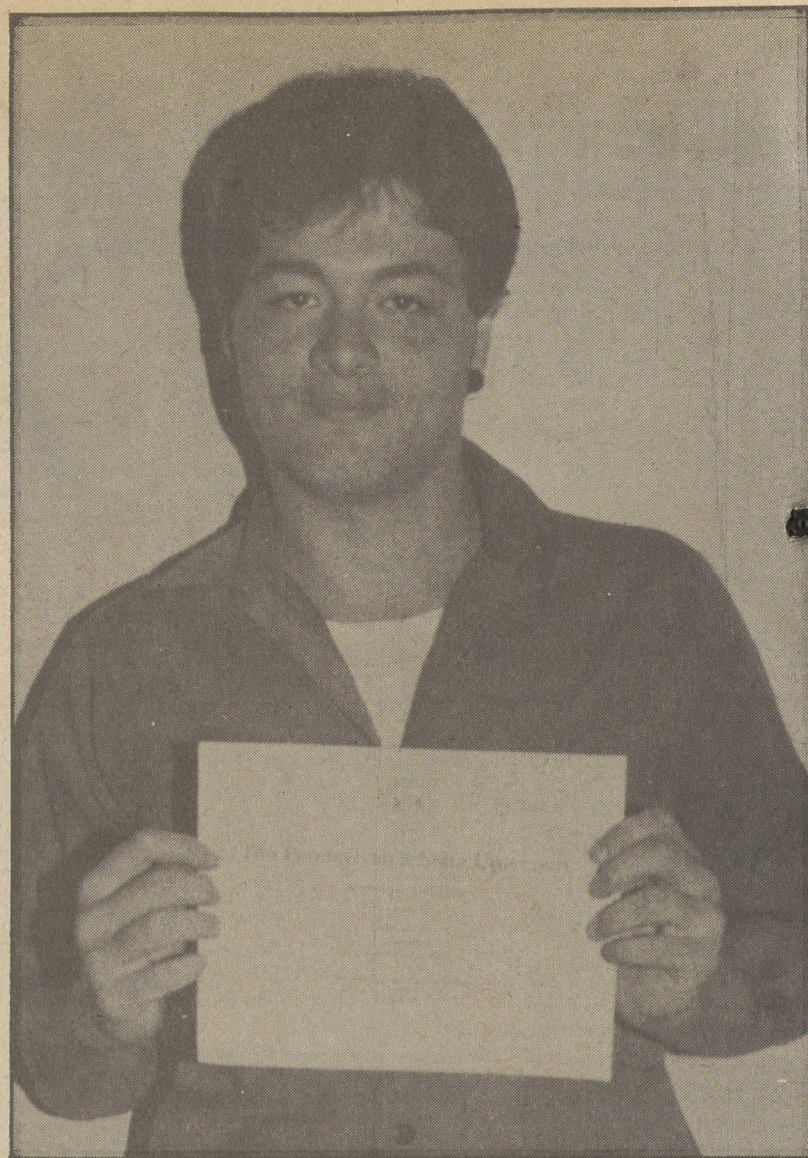
Our last stop for the day was the visiting area.

I expected to see walls of glass with visitors on one side and inmates on the other. Wrong again!

The visiting room is much like a sunny lounge where the inmates and their families can eat and talk with each other.

They even have a small playground for any children that might come.

As I stood there observing, I realized that the majority of these men are not to be feared.



Dallas Post/Ed Campbell

Inmate honored

Andrew Arroyo, 20, of Reading, an inmate at the State Correctional Institution at Dallas, received a certificate in Drafting and Mechanical Engineering during ceremonies held recently at the prison.

Inmates receive college degrees

By **WALLY KOCHER**
Staff Correspondent

"Education is the Key to Success."

This is the theme for a very special educational program. However, the program isn't conducted in a grade school, high school or even college, for that matter. In fact, the courses for this program don't take place in a school at all. They take place in a prison. And the students aren't your average adolescents, but rather a group of inmates at the State Correctional Institute at Dallas.

Recently, four inmates in the program graduated with associate of science degrees from Luzerne County Community College, and over 150 others received GED diplomas, drafting and surveying certificates from Pennsylvania State University.

At the ceremony, which was attended by the inmates' friends and families, those receiving the special honors were congratulated by a number of dignitaries.

State Senator Edwin G. Holl, of Philadelphia, expressed his feelings about the program during a brief message.

"I feel strongly that this program should be continued," he said. "I commend the educational staff here at the prison for expanding the program and encouraging the inmates. By continuing the program, inmates will be able to be accepted into society better."

Sen. Holl also mentioned that he and other state legislators will meet with Commissioner Glen Jeffes to talk about lending financial aid to the program.

"There's no better way to spend taxpayers' dollars," he said. "Of course, if there was more money, there would be more residents in the program."

A letter from Governor Dick Thornburgh was read to the graduates by Superintendent Joseph Ryan.

In it, the governor expressed his regrets for not being able to attend the ceremony, but said that he was especially pleased to be able to

congratulate the graduates.

The keynote address was given by Thomas Leary, Associate Dean of Admissions at LCCC. In the address, Leary stated reasons why this was such an accomplishment for the inmates.

"You must have realized that all the time and work you put into this still would not entitle you to awards that others get," he said, "but still you did it."

"There are no easy solutions to today's problems, but you've begun," Leary added. "You have proven to others, and most importantly to yourself, that you want to be a part of that solution."

After all the speeches were made, the diplomas and certificates were given out. John Kolesar, professor of civil engineering at Penn State University, and Lee Sweinberg, professor of mechanical engineering at Penn State University, handed out the drafting and surveying certificates.

Next the recipients of the associate degrees were presented with their diplomas. They were: William Rowan, Joseph Ball, Thurmond Berry, and John Pauze.

Andrew Arroyo, 20, formerly of Reading, was one inmate that received a Drafting-Mechanical Engineering Certificate.

"I will definitely be continuing my education," he said. "I'll be getting out in November, and going back home to Reading. Professor Sweinberg is then going to help me get into the Berks Campus of Penn State."

Arroyo, who is serving an 18 month sentence for negligent arson, said that his interest in drafting and mechanical engineering began before enrolling in the prison's 10 month program.

"I was pretty good in it in high school," he said. "I wanted to go on to college, but instead I joined the Navy for a year. After that, I was sent here. This program gave me the opportunity to continue my studies."

According to Mike Vaccarello, chairman for the program and an inmate himself, there is a backlog of inmates wanting to enroll in the program.



Dallas Post/Ed Campbell

New history book available

A limited supply of Wyoming Valley's newest history book, "The Wyoming Valley: An American Portrait" is now available at the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce.

The history book, written by Dr. Edward Hanlon of King's College, covers the Wyoming Valley's history in words and pictures.

The 300 page book includes over 200 photographs of the Wyoming Valley. It is the most modern, comprehensive treatment of Wilkes-Barre's history.

The book devotes an entire section to the birth and development of business and industry in the Valley.

Sponsored by the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce, the book sells for \$24.95. It is available to Chamber members for \$19.95.

To obtain a copy, visit the Greater Wilkes-Barre Chamber of Commerce at 92 South Franklin Street, Wilkes-Barre.

Coslett appointed

Rep. Frank Coslett has been named to a special bipartisan House committee to study the problems of the chronic homeless.

"There are thousands of Pennsylvania citizens who are without permanent shelter and who are without adequate means of support," Coslett said. "For them mere existence is a day-to-day thing."

The 120th District lawmaker noted that a large segment of the new breed of homeless are younger and are able to work. They can be productive members of society but are in dramatic need of job counseling and training, he said.

House Resolution 249, which was cosponsored by Coslett, states that a unified statewide approach to the problem of the chronic homeless is needed with a consistent set of policies and programs.

A welcome sight

The Holcomb Road Project, completed recently by Kingston Township, sure shows a lot of improvement in an empty field on Route 309, adjacent to Holcomb Road. The photo above depicts the landscaping improvements done to the property earlier this year.

Holcomb Road Project completed

The Holcomb Road Project, a \$6900 improvement project to an empty field on Route 309, adjacent to Holcomb Road in Kingston Township, was completed recently. The project, which included \$3000 worth of landscaping and \$3900 worth of stream channeling improvements, was the result of efforts on the part of Kingston Township officials.

According to Mark Kunkle, Kingston Township manager, the township purchased by the property for

\$1 from the Luzerne County Redevelopment Authority following the 1972 flood. During the flood, Holcomb Creek, which runs alongside Holcomb Road, totally ruined two homes which were situated on the property.

The Redevelopment Authority razed the flood-damaged homes and sold the property to Kingston Township with the stipulation that nothing would be built on it.

According to Kunkle, the property

had been in the overgrown state since 1973 but the township was not in a position to make any improvements. However, in 1984, when it also became necessary to slow down a stream that runs on the field, the township funded the project and made the improvements to the property.

The shrubbery and trees were planted by Rave's Landscaping in Shavertown while the stream channel improvements, made to keep the banks of the stream from eroding, were done by Connolly and Sons.

The entire project was funded by Kingston Township.

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