—Park Heights

Continued from page 1

But in these days of more repressive state correctional philosophy, humanistic thinking must be balanced with nuts and bolts policy.

"This program is very structured," she said firmly. "They, (the residents), have to fall in immediately. Most women are used to living on the streets. But when they come here, they are screened so that they can make their choice between here and Jessup."

Jessup, or the Women's Detention Center, is where all of the residents are from. Women selected for the pre-release program must have sentences of less than three years and-or be eligible for parole within ninety days.

Ms. Mobley says that the difference between Jessup and the Park Heights facility is one of more than distance.

"They come from a dependent program, (at Jessup), to one where they are responsible," she said.

At the center, the women have to either get a job or attend classes. They are responsible for maintenance around the facility, and are accorded privileges which increase with their length of stay and behaviour.

Despite the "social worker's approach," Ms. Mobley implements, rules at the center are stringent.

The women are required to take weekly urinalysis tests to determine if any are using drugs, and failure to take the tests could result in the revocation of visiting or liberty privileges.

The activites of the women are closely monitored, and their purses are checked upon returning to the center from employment or school.

Regardless of these restrictions, most women at the pre-release unit say they have no qualms about being there.

Regardless of these restrictions, most women at the pre-release unit say they have no qualms about being there.

"It's a lot of pressure off of me," said Cathy Smith, (not her real name). "It's more quiet here . . . at Jessup you have to deal with a lot of people you don't have to deal with here."

Smith was serving a sentence for violation of parole, which grew out of her arrest for attempting to use a stolen credit card.

"I was doing it for a friend," she admitted, "I was trying to get a color television."

Now Cathy works part-time in a nearby day care center, and is pursuing her GED diploma at Calvert Educational Center. She says she has dreams of going to business school and becoming a secretary.

Mary Jones, (an assumed name), is also doing time for violation of parole. She was originally sent to Jessup for theft, ("I was in the wrong place at the wrong time.")

"The guards were so nasty, (at Jessup). Here I have a chance to get out and do things."

When asked what "things" she did with her weekend pass, she smiled and replied, "I get to spend time with my daughter."

Rachelle Smith, (not her real name), is a former heroin user whose drug habit led her to thievery. She said that while at Jessup during a previous prison term, she had joined a drug abuse program and had kicked the habit.

"I had the choice to stop once before," she said, "but I went back because of the environment. I was in . . . since I've been her my whole environment has changed."

"The things I used to do," said Karen Jones, (not her real name), "when I was out on the street, I don't do anymore. At the center, you get a chance to start your life over again."

The four women range in age from 23 to 25, and Ms. Mobley says that they represent the average resident.

"The average client is 23, black, with a 6th grade education and no vocational skills," she said. "No vocational skills and two children. Our work is cut out for us."

She said that women in the corrections system should be given treatment geared specifically towards their needs, but that these needs often go unattended in a prison society composed overwhelmingly of men.

"Women are a minority within the corrections system, and most decisions are geared toward men," she said. "Women aren't looked at as having special needs."

There are 8,000 prisoners doing time in Maryland facilities, and women comprise one sixteenth, or 230, of that total.

Women at the center recieve training in consumer awareness, parent effectiveness, legal affairs, and other areas which may be of assistance to them once they gain freedom.

Ms. Mobley feels that the women all need as much interaction as possible with the outside world, so, besides their daily classes or jobs, the clients are urged to participate in community activities and to attend lectures sponsored by the center.

One asset in the re-integration of the women into society is the support given by a group of Park Heights residents who form the Community Involvement Board of the center. The board is headed by Catholic Deacon Americus Roy.

"One of the unique things about this center is its community involvement," said Roy. "The board is an advisory one, we rally around the program and help plan its future."

The community apparently is so concerened about the maintenance of the center that a group of board members actually went down to Annapolis to lobby for the program's survival after the guidelines for centers such as the Park Heights facility were changed.

Last year, a ruling by State's Attorney Steven Sachs, which was requested by then-Secretary of Public Safety and Corrections Gordon Kamka forced the center to reduce its complement of residents.

Until that time, the center had been operating under guidelines designed for Community Adult Rehabilitation Centers, or CARC's, instead of state requirements for pre-release units.

As a result of the decision, 16 women had to be transferred from the Park Heights center because they didn't fit the delineated requirements.

As a result the center, which has a capacity for 32 women, is currently serving only ten.

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TV rental company fined for violating consumer laws

A television rental company, whose debt collectors were accused of impersonating police officers and brandishing guns, has been ordered to pay $20,400 in fines for violating consumer protection laws.

Circuit Court Judge Mary Arabian ruled Tuesday that Action TV, a firm based in Baltimore County, had violated the Maryland debt collection law when it used threats of force while collecting debts.

Court testimony also showed that in addition to threats from gun brandishing employees, customers were harassed by late night telephone calls demanding payments on television sets, stereos or appliances they were renting from Action TV.

Assistant Attorney General H. Robert Erwin said, "this decision serves as a stern warning to debt collectors that they must abide by the rules established under Maryland's law, which gives them ample recourse for collecting just debts."

Ms. Arabian also held that Action TV, which has been in business in the Baltimore area since 1976, violated a previous agreement with the consumer protection division in which they promised to inform consumers that some of their goods were used.

But in her 51 page opinion, Ms. Arabian rejected the contention of lawyers from the consumer protection division of the Maryland attorney general's office that Action TV's practices violated the state's retail installment sales act.

Erwin, who heads the consumer protection division, said of the rejection, "This is a close legal question. Its importance demands that it be answered by the state's appellate courts. We will appeal."

Erwin said his office may also appeal Ms. Arabian's decision to absolve Action TV of the accusation it improperly advertised used equipment as new and failed to honor commitments regarding warranties and repairs.

Birrane innocent of wrongful spending, says aide

An aide to Maryland insurance commissioner Edward Birrane defended allegations that Birrane used funds from insurance companies he controlled for personal travel expenses, saying "If you rob an old lady's purse, you've done more than he's done.

The Evening Sun reported Tuesday that Birrane used his control over the affairs of at least two firms both of them under receivership, to award more than $4 mmillion in jobs and contracts.

But Byron Roberts, public affairs chief for the commission, maintained the article revealed no evidence of wrong doing by his boss, who was out of town and unavailable for comment.

"He has made some trips," said Roberts. "But the state says he can't go out of state on business and use state money to pay for it. If there's something wrong, it would be with the state of Maryland for not paying for those trips."

The commissioner made personal use of a 1980 automobile leaded by one of the companies, American Centennial Life Insurance Company, the newspaper said.

"He (Birrane) said maybe he used bad judgment on the automobile, but if you rob an old lady's purse, you've done more than he's done."

Birrane told the newspaper he used the car to commute to his state job, had driven it to meetings as far away as Detroit and had used the vehicle, a Buick LaSabre for other personal business.

But he maintained use of the car and his travel billings had been cleared by auditors and attorneys for the companies.

Birrane also billed American Centennial and Maryland Indemnity Insurance Company for travel expenses related to meetings of the National Association of Insurance Companies, the newspaper said.

Roberts said the trips had potential benefits for the companies because Birrane is legally charged with the responsibility of finding a buyer for the firms.

Representatives of the companies involved declined to release the amount of the billings to the Evening Sun.

City Supreme Bench Judge James A. Perrott, who has overseen the receivership proceedings of the companies, said he was unawarefunds of the firms were being used for Birrane's travel expenses.

"As I understand the law, the purpose of the money is to go to the claimant, so that people who have sustained a loss can claim the loss," Perrott said.

Roberts also said that Birrance was legally bound to assign contracts to lawyers to handle the affairs of the firms because he is the commissioner.

"The commissioner has to be the receiver, whether he likes it or not," Roberts said. "For all intents and purposes, he is the president of the company."

Roberts conceded some of the attorneys who received the fees are acquaintances of Birrane's, but said all of the transactions were approved by the court.

Workers spared disciplinary action

Disciplinary action will not be taken against 52 sanitation workers who refused to sign a statement saying they understood the city's re regulation against accepting money for services, officials said this week.

"The rule was read to them. They're fully aware of it and the rule is still binding upon them," said Francis Kuchta, director of the public works department.

Sanitation department officials initiated an "educational program" last week after nine workers were suspended.

The suspensions were the result of a department investigation into charges published in the News American that some sanitation workers were taking money from Korean merchants in exchange for picking up more than the allowed amount of garbage.

Kuchta, sanitation chief Edward Moore, and city Solicitor Benjamin L. Brown announced the suspensions last Thursday.

The group said each sanitation worker would be required to read and sign a copy of rule no. 56 of the city charger, called "cause for removal or discharge."

The rule prohibits the acceptance of money given "by any person in the hope or expectation of receiving a favor or better treatment than that accorded to other persons."

Moore's deputy, Leonard Folio, said 52 workers refused to sign the statement, 722 have signed and the department is waiting for 105 workers now on vacation or sick leave to sign the document.

But the vice president of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees Local 44, Charles Johnson, estimates that "more than half" of the workers refused to sign.

"Nobody has to sign it. I wouldn't sign it," Johnson said.

Percy Matthews, a 16-year-old veteran of the sanitation department, refused to sign because he said it might put his job in jeopardy. "If somebody gives you something on the street, you've lost your job."

Matthews said it is a common and widespread practice among sanitation workers to take money from businesses that put out more than the allotted for 20 gallion garbage containers each collection day.

Now unveils plan for $$ walk-a-thon

Members of Maryland's 14 chapters of the National Organization for Women unveiled plans for a money-raising walk-a-thon for the equal rights amendment.

Carol Klemm, president of the umbrella group Maryland NOW, said all money raised will be sent to NOW's national action center in Washington and later funneled to NOW members in various states that have not yet ratified the ERA.

so far, only 35 states have ratified the era. If three more states do not ratify the amendment by nedt June 30 it will fail.

ERA members and their families will solicit per-mile donations for the Oct. 24 10 mile walk that will begin and end at Baltimore's Inner Harbor, Ms. Klemm said.

The walk-a-thon is one of many being held across the country to raise money for the ERA, Ms. Klemm said.

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