

From the Office of the Sheriff:

Several months ago we started to see a significant increase in our local jail population. We also identified that many of those with jail commitments were short-term, 30-days or less, and for non-violent offenses such as OWI. For years we have used our inmate work program to employ many Huber inmates who are serving lengthy jail sentences but really did not have anything for short term boarders.

We also know the elderly are being driven from their homes because of financial or health reasons. They find it difficult to keep up with home maintenance, mowing the lawn, raking the leaves, or shoveling the snow from around the fire hydrant. So in response to a challenge put to our jail staff, we are very close to a joint partnership with the Dodge County Human Services and Commission of Aging. A recent meeting of the minds was very positive and we have a draft Jail Diversion Program that will keep non-violent offenders out of jail and the elderly in their homes.

How will it work? Our programs staff will pre-qualify those for jail diversion based upon their offense. Violent offenders e.g. sex offenses, drug offenders, burglars, would not be eligible. OWI offenders, those that fail to pay fines or child support could qualify. Offenders will be assigned to a day reporting program in which they report to the jail in the morning and be assigned to a work crew. Staff could take them around the county performing those tasks the elderly can not do themselves. The customer would be identified by the Commission on Aging and we will focus on those in greatest need. We could have two day reporting programs, one for weekdays and another for weekends. This allows those who must serve jail time to maintain employment or serve their time on their days off. Though those that qualify for the program will not require direct supervision, we are prepared to use staff, volunteer organizations, and our Posse for transportation of the participants.

Is this a break for those who owe a debt to society? No way. I would rather have a bad check writer raking a lawn to keep an elderly person in their home than sitting in jail watching TV and playing dominoes. This program will allow for the participant to build self-esteem, pay their debt to society, provide more options for our judges, and provide an economic relief to the elderly. We are also looking at expanding our garden program to several acres and raise vegetables for the county home. These programs are a win-win for the inmate, customer, and the taxpayer.

On the school front, the academic rigors remain the same as our professors continually challenge us with thought provoking subjects and demand strategic thinking. I have also started tutoring 3-5<sup>th</sup> graders at an inner city school. The school has some of the lowest reading proficiency scores in Washington D.C. Several of us travel to the school over our lunch hour and work one-on-one with a select student. The principal estimates that over 70% of her students live a life at or under the poverty rate. It is a super opportunity to make a difference. Two hundred forty seven coffee filters to go, thanks for listening, [tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us](mailto:tnehls@co.dodge.wi.us).