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Plane SJ offenders prepare for work with Habitat for Humanity

Through the only program of its kind in the nation, female offenders at TDCJ's Plane State Jail in Dayton can earn professional certification in construction carpentry.

The Habitat for Humanity Prison Partnership program at Plane is one of three such prison programs for female offenders in the nation, all three of which are in Texas. The other two are on-the-job training programs at the Gatesville and Woodman units in where offenders do construction work on-site without the benefit of classroom instruction for certification. At Plane, participants will be given safety training and 600 hours of classroom instruction through the Windham School District. About six weeks into their instruction, they will begin building 8-foot wall panels for Habitat projects in an area outside the classroom. To become certified, the offender must pay a fee and pass a standard exam given throughout the industry

"There are more than 300 prison Habitat partnerships in the nation, but only three involve females," said Debby Miller, special projects coordinator for TDCJ's Executive Services office, who helped launch the one-of-a-kind program. "This is the only female Habitat program where they will actually get a certification."

Miller said the certification program began taking shape last fall after Plane Senior Warden Freda Richie expressed an interest in having a non-traditional vocational course added to the curriculum at the 2,144-bed facility.

"We've been wanting non-traditional vocational classes for quite a while because there are not enough vocational programs for females that can allow them to make a living," Richie said. "When we talk about vocational programs for females, we're talking about cooking and cleaning and, maybe, horticulture. These are not things these people can make a living at."

Richie said the hot housing construction market makes the unit's carpentry course particularly relevant.

"The overall economy might be poor now but the contractors are hiring," she said. "When I've gone out in the community and I've talked to people, these contractors tell me that if they can get somebody trained, they'll hire them."



They don't care whether they're an ex-felon or not. And the majority of contractors told me that if they could get some females with basic carpentry skills they'd hire them before they'd hire men because women are more detail oriented."

Classroom instruction began in February with approximately 25 offenders enrolled. Offenders without serious disciplinary offenses and who will be incarcerated long enough to complete the program were among those selected to participate.

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Ruiz litigation results in Agency becoming more proactive

With the passing of the Ruiz litigation, TDCJ has assumed the responsibility to make sure that the need for Ruiz never again arises. Indeed, TDCJ assumed that responsibility long before Ruiz's end. Otherwise, Ruiz would still be with us. The challenge is ... What can TDCJ do to maintain constitutional and correctionally sound prison conditions?

The Director of Preventive Law within the Office of General Counsel is one of several internal oversight mechanisms used by TDCJ to meet that challenge. Generally, Preventive Law monitors emerging and persistent correctional legal issues from around the United States and translates them back to the Agency. Preventive Law, along with other arms of the Agency, also participates in the identification of patterns within the prison system that might be affected by those legal issues.

Some of those patterns and legal issues are quite familiar: the use of force on offenders has always required, and always will require, careful scrutiny. The Director of Preventive Law is currently coordinating a technical assistance project with the National Institute of Corrections regarding the use of force within TDCJ-ID. The mission of the technical assistance project is not to point out what is wrong with the use of force within TDCJ, but to provide TDCJ with advice about what it can do at the unit level to improve the implementation of force. This is significant. No longer must TDCJ dutifully reflect back to a judge and plaintiffs' counsel compliance with court-imposed use of force standards. Rather, TDCJ is taking actions on its own to ensure compliance with constitutional standards and sound correctional practices.

The use of force consultants, one from the Colorado prison system and one from the Maryland prison system, reviewed TDCJ's policies and procedures regarding the use of force, along with numerous use of force statistics. Then they, and the Director of Preventive Law, visited the Gib Lewis Expansion Cellblock and the Polunsky Unit to review the implementation of policy at the unit level and to visit with staff. By the end of September, the consultants will have visited six more units. Not surprisingly, the consultants have been impressed with the way force is implemented and monitored at the units visited. Wardens and security staff around the system have successfully struggled for the last several years to reduce uses of force, to reduce the need for the use of force through verbal intervention, and to take more responsibility at the unit level for necessary corrective action. The consultants noticed. They returned to

their states carrying a lot of good ideas about what to do in their own systems. They left behind some good advice and pointers about what the units can do at their own level to improve practices.

Texas is completely free from Ruiz jurisdiction, but Texas will never be free, nor should it be, from doing what is right – morally, legally and practically – in operating the prison system. Further post-Ruiz initiatives will be described in later issues of Connections.

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'Everyone's friend'

Wiley colleagues remember their fallen co-worker

One day five years ago, Clifton Cooper got mad and quit his job as a correctional officer at the Clements Unit in Amarillo. He handed over his ID card and stormed out, vowing never to return. Then he got call from a fellow officer and friend, Stanley Wiley.



Stanley Wiley

"The one who was concerned about me and called me at home was Officer Wiley," Cooper said. "How he got my number, I don't know because it's unlisted. He wanted to know how I was getting along and he told me that he'd like to see me come back, reminding me that I was throwing away everything I had worked for. I'll never forget that."

Cooper did return to work at Wiley's urging and is now a CO V with more than 13 years with the Agency.

"He was concerned about me and sometimes that's what a person needs," Cooper said. "You can't find better friends than that."

Colleagues of Wiley, who was working as an industrial supervisor when he was fatally assaulted inside the shoe factory at Clements on Jan. 29, described him as a quiet, mild-mannered man who was devoted to his family and treated everyone, officers and offenders alike, with respect. In a word, Sgt. Larry Craven described Wiley as "exceptional."

"He was the kind of man that all women should marry," Craven said of his former colleague who was a lifelong bachelor.

Wiley, grew up in Amarillo and joined TDCJ as a correctional officer at Clements in June 1994. After three years there, he worked for about a year at the nearby Neal Unit while attending Amarillo College. He then returned to Clements and put in for an industrial supervisor position in the shoe factory. Craven and other security officers recommended him for the job.

"I think it was just something different," Craven said about Wiley wanting to leave security for a job with Texas Correctional Industries. "He did a good job

no matter where he was, but at the same time, he wanted to continue to learn different things."

Wiley worked the night shift for about three years, supervising offenders in the making of canvas shoes. He had just transferred to the day shift when he became the first TCI employee to die violently in the line of duty.

"It's just hard to believe that somebody would want to hurt somebody like him," Craven said. "Somebody that nice and easy-going. It's just hard to imagine that anybody would want to hurt him."

CO V Jacky Austin and Wiley became fast friends while working in security together at Clements.

"He was the type of guy who couldn't make an enemy," Austin said. "He wasn't one to holler and scream. He conducted himself in a professional manner. As far as I'm concerned, he was as good as you can get."

"If you were putting a shift together, you'd like to have a whole shift like him," Craven said.

Stuart Williams, manager of the shoe factory at Clements, said Wiley was business-like on the job.

"He was the type of employee you want, fair but firm," said Williams, adding that he has no words to describe the pain associated with Wiley's loss.

Several of Wiley's co-workers described him as friendly, yet somewhat reserved around strangers.

"?He was quiet unless he knew you," Austin said. "If he knew you, he'd laugh all the time. He always had a smile on his face."

Those who knew Wiley said he enjoyed video games and spending time with his family. He lost his mother in November and was concerned about keeping his father's spirits up and keeping him active. They joined a gym together.

"I know he spent a lot of time with his family, with his nieces and nephews, because he'd come to work and talk about spending time with them and the things that they did," Craven said.

Williams said he was surprised to learn at Wiley's funeral that he had been dyslexic as a child.

"He had an obstacle in his life he had to overcome, so he had to be a pretty strong-willed person to do that," Williams said.

Craven said Wiley was "a man who liked to save his money." And although he never married, he liked to flirt with women he found attractive, telling them in jest that he had a lot of money in the bank and would therefore make a good husband.

"It's not a bad trick," Craven laughed. "I can't do that."

Cooper said he'll feel the loss of his former shift mate for a long time.

"I really thought the world of him," Cooper said. "It just makes a real dark hole that can't be replaced anytime soon. It's just a very painful thing for me and everybody out here because he was everyone's friend."

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