



Maximum capacity: More than 200 people are on waiting list to serve jail time

By Lee Morrison

The Times-Reporter

Posted Jan 08, 2009 @ 11:29 PM

More inmates are spending more time in Tuscarawas County jail.

The average length of an inmate's stay has increased to 30 days from 10 days over the years, said Lt. Doug Goudy, jail commander.

"Obviously, we have a high recidivism rate," he said. "Even on misdemeanor charges, like repeat traffic offenders with four or five convictions, the judges are giving longer jail sentences because the person didn't learn anything."

Because of the longer stays, it's easier to fill the jail, he said.

During 2008, the average daily number of inmates was 116 in the 100-bed facility at New Philadelphia. There were several weekends that rose to 130, with 137 the most.

"Rarely did we ever drop below 100, except between Thanksgiving and Christmas when it was in the low 90s and high 80s," Goudy said, adding the time of service is determined by the courts.

There were 95 inmates Thursday, and the number will rise, he said.

More than 200 people are on a waiting list to serve jail time. However, at the smaller old jail the list often topped 600 during the 1980s and early 1990s.

"The courts in our county do a pretty good job with jail diversion programs and community control sanctions," Goudy said. "It really helps us out or we would be in a lot worse situation."

As seen in national trends, more Tuscarawas County residents are committing more serious crimes.

"Our felony population has increased, and it's not just because of the change in the early 2000s," Goudy said of a state change that meant people previously sent to prison for a 5th-degree felony conviction instead would stay at the county jail level.

"We're seeing more drug offenses, serious assaults, large thefts valued at \$5,000 and over, and serious property damage," he said.

A rising volume of inmates are relatives of previous inmates, even more so than in the past, he said.

"It's an environment thing – kids grow up and imitate what they see," the former teacher said. "It's 'the apple doesn't fall very far from the tree' syndrome. They go back to the same environment that got them into jail in the first place."

Goudy was at a loss to explain why there's been an increase in the number of women inmates.

"We're seeing more females sent to jail on felony and drug offenses, as well as forging checks and credit card theft," he said. "A lot of the offenses are for prescription medications, rather than street drugs. There continue to be street drug charges, too. We're seeing about as many drug trafficking charges as just for possession any more."

Arrests among Hispanics rises as their population in the county increases.

"Many of them don't have a driver's license, and alcohol is almost always involved in some form," he said. "Even though illegal aliens are picked up by federal enforcement officers, the inmates are responsible for jail time on local convictions."

Copyright © 2009 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.