



Auburn Hospitality Center

Volunteers Open Shelter For Inmates' Families

Outside the walls of Auburn Correctional Facility, families of the prisoners now can find shelter from the winter winds and a pleasant place to wait on visiting days.

The new Hospitality Center opened December 1, the fruit of a dedicated volunteer effort.

"For many people coming to visit, especially those from metropolitan areas, the trip is possible only by traveling at night to avoid motel costs," explained Keith Batman, director of Hospitality Center.

"After the expense of visiting, often traveling long distances by public transportation, perhaps anxious and filled with guilt about not having been able to come sooner, it is welcoming to know there is somewhere to refresh themselves before seeing their loved ones," said Batman.

The center is located across State Street from the facility in a former service station owned by the state and renovated by the cooperation of the Auburn facility and the Hospitality Association.

It provides shelter before visiting hours, during the lunch break, for people waiting to visit, and after the facility closes, for those waiting transportation.

"Before the center opened, waiting was hardest on the children as there was nothing to do," Batman said. "People waited in parked cars or huddled outside the institution waiting for visiting hours or transportation, with no place to go in a strange city.

"Now the children can play, the adults relax, and the volunteers staffing the center can answer questions about the city or visiting procedures, or just lend a sympathetic ear."

The Auburn Hospitality Association, composed of representatives from civic and church organizations, was created

in May as a response to the need for more waiting space for the increased number of visitors.

The small waiting area at the correctional facility is cramped, especially on week ends when residents can be allowed only 2 visitors at a time. The visiting room can accommodate only about 80 people for a resident population of over 1400.

Groups taking part in the association included NAACP, Auburn Interfaith Ministry, Jaycees, Cayuga County Action Program Church Women United, Welfare Rights Organization and Auburn Community College.

"Visitors to the center seem to appreciate our being here," observed Batman. "I've noticed they like to talk about their trip and the relative they are visiting. We have been able to clarify misunderstandings about procedures and respond to specific needs of individuals unfamiliar with local resources.

"We were even called upon to find baby food on a recent holiday when most stores were closed," said Batman.

"The center has been an example of the community responding in a positive way to make visitors to the facility feel more welcome," commented Father John Mulligan, chairman of the executive committee. "Volunteers are from the area and the center was furnished from items donated by local people. We have received both verbal and financial support from the facility residents themselves and look forward to increased service to the families and friends to show the residents the community cares."

Statewide support is being sought because the center serves visitors from across New York.

The center, now open 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday, will expand its hours to 7 days a week shortly.



Father John Mulligan works on painting outside.



Volunteer Frank Figueroa talks with visitors.