

Convent Is Now a Center for Prisoners

BY PAT PETRASKE

A visionary dream for progressive penologists would be a community setting for prisoners whose time is almost up and whose greatest need is a facility to help them make a smooth transition into the outside world.

Off the planning boards and operating in the former Immaculate Conception Convent on Greig Street is the state's first Community Correctional Center.

Thirty-five inmates from Albion, Auburn, Attica and other penal institutions live in what used to be a prosperous neighborhood and leave each morning like the majority of Rochesterians for a day on the job. The 95 men who have filtered through the center since its inception in February were not on probation nor on parole when they arrived. They were waiting for the first

official taste of freedom, which on the average is only 72 days away.

The center is the brainchild of the New York State Department of Correctional Services which hopes eventually to have seven such homes for a total of 350 sentenced men.

"Right now we're trying it out. It's only a working model, but so far there has been no adverse reaction," said director Richard Fietz.

Sixteen men staff the center, which is in an area torn up for urban renewal. The convent, built in 1905, was for seven years an Urban Youth Home in the Division for Youth.

"We're leading a charmed life," grinned Fietz. He explained that all of the 42 men paroled since March are still on parole. "This is

unusual because two-thirds of the violations usually occur during the first six months," he said.

The tall, balding director realizes this luck can not go on indefinitely and that at some time a careful selection of a resident will not be made. "We do not just take cream puffs; I mean, these are not first time bicycle thieves. A person gets to a state correction institution after everything else has failed," Fietz commented.

Residents for the center are first nominated by the counselors at their respective institutions. They are then screened by officials from the Inmate Classification Movement Department. A final decision is made by the director of correctional services.

While the correctional center has been fortunate with the conduct of the men finally released on parole, it's had to return 16 prisoners to maximum security institutions. This is close to the 15 per cent failure rate estimated by the planning consultants. The basic problem, according to Fietz, is that "some people aren't grown up enough" to handle this much freedom.

"I'm a really conservative person," Fietz said, admitting to his New England upbringing. "I tend to get a man out and will not be permissive in what goes on."

One resident who came back 23 hours late on a pass was transferred back to an "institution where he will not have to make decisions," Fietz sighed in exasperation. A couple of residents were found "unsuitable for the program" because they left the center for a few hours after they had returned from a full weekend pass. "They just kicked the program in the head," he said.

Decisions "to get a man out," however, are made on an individual basis. Fietz recalled one young resident who was found home with his parents 18 hours after the designated return time. It was fear and stupidity that kept him from returning, not hostility towards the program, according to the director.

Restrictions are few at the center. At an orientation meeting for three men sent down from Albion, Fietz explained the basic purpose of the transitional facility, "We're trying to get you involved in the mainstream of life. To do this we want you to spend time with your family." Two of the three men have relatives living in the Rochester area.

Beginning next weekend they will be given a Sunday pass and be required to sign in and out, with a designated time of return. After three weeks they will be allowed a full weekend furlough. Those men who do not have relatives in the area, must specify how they plan to spend their time.

"We encourage the wholesome use of leisure which precludes going to a corner bar," said Fietz, who added that volunteers from the community have taken men to events such as baseball games, wrestling matches, concerts and plays.

He stressed that the center "was not a place where 35 criminals are out to have a good time." Furloughs are strictly planned. They allow for visiting, shopping, employment interviews and school. A violation of the "extended bounds of confinement" the designated areas where the prisoners are supposed to be at a certain time, results in the loss of a weekend pass. "I've seen men cry when they lose a

pass," Fietz said. Subsequent violations could result in a transfer to an institution of maximum security.

A working relation with the various police agencies helps to regulate residents' outside activities. Fietz is acutely sensitive to public opinion, and realizes that public intoxication or drug use would reflect on the institution. He added that, "So far no one has left that hasn't come back. I guess that could be a testimony to the maturity of the fellows." Alcoholics Anonymous holds weekly meetings, and several men have begun to attend outside AA meetings. Bridge, Inc. which tries to "bridge the gap" between inmates and society, also works with the residents.

Bridge's director, Pat Terry, praised the center's efforts in "preparing men to take responsibility." Residents are secured a job usually within a week of arrival and then surrender their paycheck to the duty officer to be placed in the inmate deposit fund. "One man who worked for Xerox was able to get his wife off welfare and even bought her a washer and dryer," Terry said. Bridge also supplements the emergency allowance funds for residents.

Fietz stated that he gets "upset" when he sees men being exploited. A job must be up to certain standards in pay and working conditions. Wages usually do not go below \$2.50 per hour. "We try to get them a job they can keep when they get out. This is not a source of cheap labor. If they're going to make it on parole, they have to have a decent job. They'll know the people and they have the advantage of having a job that they're used to. Only one or two people need to know they're doing time," Fietz said.

Hornell Ministerium Admits Three Sisters

By PEG PEASE

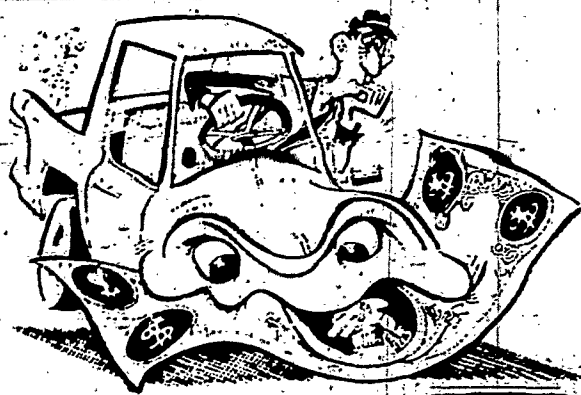
Hornell — Chalk up three for Women's Lib as an all-male tradition was broken Sept. 24 at the initial meeting of the Hornell Ministerium at St. Ann's Annex. The meeting resulted in the induction of three sisters to the previously all-male organization.

Sister Scholastica from St. James Mercy Hospital; Sister Vincenza, religious education coordinator at St. Ann's; and Sister Mary from the Office of Human Development, Steuben County, became official members, perhaps to the consternation of the male chauvinists present.

New members attending their first meeting were Father William Cosgrove, Rev. John Lyga, Arkport Methodist Church and Lt. Kellus VanOver, Salvation Army.

Those named to the executive committee were Rev. Ralph Wagner, First Baptist Church, president; Rev. John Fisher, Free Methodist Church, vice president; Rev. Bradley Lines, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, treasurer; and Father Lewis Brown, St. Ann's, secretary.

Father Cosgrove, chaplain of St. James Mercy Hospital, invited the ministers to join the "Pastoral Care Department" which he plans to develop at the hospital.



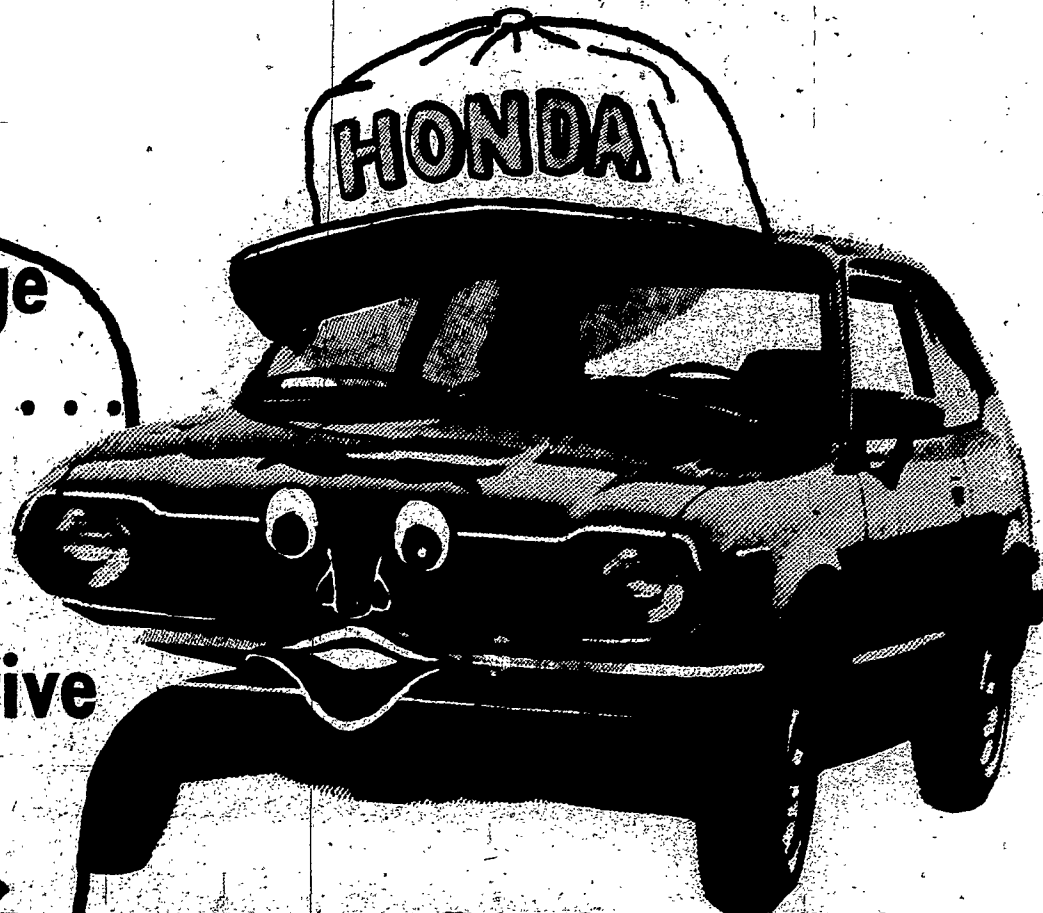
Is your present car eating up your money?

The Gas Shortage Doesn't Bother Me ... I'm a '73 HONDA 'Civic' Sedan; with Front Wheel Drive and 30 M.P.G.

FULL DELIVERED PRICE IN ROCHESTER

\$2265

NO other Charges For Preparation, Freight or Clean-Up THIS IS THE PRICE!



RALPH PONTIAC & IMPORTS

685 Main St. W. 235-3635

Mon.-Thurs. 'til 9

Fri. 'til 6 Sat. 'til 5