

Haitians

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federal penitentiary that once housed athletes for the Olympic Games.

He is acting as a liaison between 40 Haitians who are being detained here and the outside world. He describes himself as a "conduit for information." He volunteered for the post when his predecessor had to leave his tour early.

The Haitians were brought to Ray Brook from their landing site in Florida last July. They are among nearly 2,500 such people from Haiti who are considered by the State Department (and consequently the Justice Department) to be "illegal aliens," persons who don't have an acceptable reason for entering the U.S.

Each Haitian will have to go through the courts to demonstrate his worthiness to remain in this country.

The 40 at Raybrook have been waiting three months. And, as the frigid weather settles in here, that length of time has become somewhat of a nettle even to the prison officials.

Paul Lefebvre, a Ray Brook executive, has been doing this kind of work for the past 10 years. (His boss, a 22-year man who chuckles that he still wonders "if I should make a career of this," calls him a tyro in the system.) Lefebvre said that when the Haitians first arrived, prison officials were expecting a "three-week detention. Our programs and facilities are geared to that."

As the detention stretches on, however, "We're in a poor position," especially in regards to planning for the future, he said.

As are the Haitians, he acknowledged.

For one thing, he said, "We can't provide answers to their legitimate questions," nor ease the natural anxieties they feel during the present separation from their families, he said.

However, "Personally, I'm still convinced there's a legitimate reason for their detention. The issue is a legalistic one. There is a clear law."

Lefebvre, a parishioner at St. Bernard's Church in nearby Saranac Lake, is



executive assistant at Ray Brook to Warden George Rodgers. Both men have shared a tour of duty in San Diego, where both were in charge of detaining illegal immigrants from Mexico.

The buildings at Ray Brook are handsome things, both outside and inside.

Last Wednesday, a contingent from Rochester for the second time visited the Haitians at Ray Brook. The group, John Walker, executive secretary of the Office of Black Ministries; Lionel Honorat, representative of the Cuban/Haitian Refugee Committee; and Jocelyn Gregoire, a staffer at Catholic Family Center, entered the facility under theegis of Catholic Charities. They were accompanied by Father John Yonkovic, an associate pastor of St. Bernard's Parish.

The group, with the exception of Father Yonkovic, had interviewed the Haitians in August, and the return trip was to ascertain whether conditions at Ray Brook in regards the Haitians there had been ameliorated.

Ms. Gregoire, the group's official interpreter, was ill, but she had flown into the area the evening before. Father Steven Gratto of the Ogdensburg diocesan Catholic Charities and the chief link between the Haitians and the state's bishops also was ill, and, with a temperature above 100, had phoned to say he could not enter Ray Brook as part of the group.

He had at the last minute, nevertheless, impressed Paul Lefebvre into easing entry procedure for the contingent. Lefebvre greeted the group cordially at the admission point and escorted it to the Haitians' detention area, chatting the while of his Massachusetts birth and of the chill of the day.

The moment the doors were opened the Haitian detainees rushed forward, shaking hands. "Bonjour, bonjour, bonjour," mouths wide in greeting, Lefebvre,

who speaks French, was evidently a welcome arrival: the Rochester group an enthusiastically awaited presence. John Walker turned aside and said, "You know they are fighting for their lives."

The Rochesterians heard some complaints; it was learned: the prison diet, which at one time, after a hunger strike was staged, was more to the detainees' liking, had again returned to normal fare; the mail delivery system seemed confused.

On both points Lefebvre explained that prison administration felt somewhat helpless in the face not only of the language barrier but also of the cultural barrier. Nevertheless, he said, attempts, somewhat ineffectual, had been made to accommodate the detainees.

In an interview later, however, Warden Rodgers said that the prison diet is only altered for reasons of health or religion. On the question of mail delivery, he opined that the detainees expected letters that were simply not sent to them.

Following its Aug. 28 visit to Ray Brook, the Rochester group had issued a report which expressed worry that the detention of the Haitians would lead to mental breakdown, appearance of homosexuality where the first victims will be the children, development of kaposi's sarcoma and pneumocystis and violence outbreaks.

Observations made during the most recent visit give "no sign of relief of that situation," Lionel Honorat said late last week.

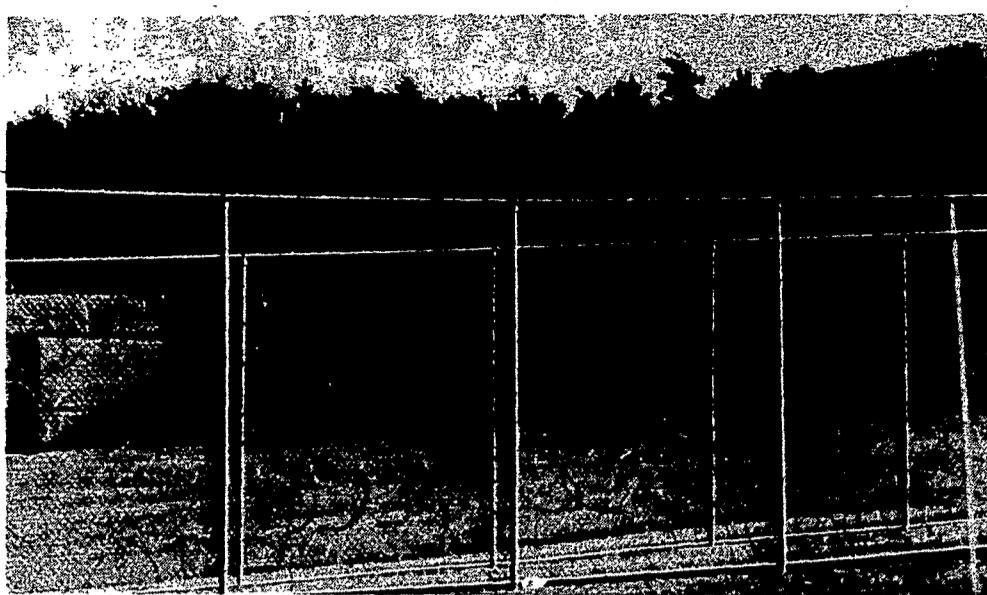
"Kaposi's sarcoma," he said, "is a form of skin cancer which appears with developing homosexuality."

Pneumocystis is a form of bronchitis, he said.

Honorat said also that the Haitians are now able to receive the sacraments on a rather regular basis, contrary to an earlier situation.

Lefebvre confirmed that two of the detainees claim to be less than 18, a situation, Honorat said, "is just as intolerable as it was before."

The case of the youngsters is particularly worrisome to diocesan Catholic Charities and, Honorat said, pressure



Barbed wire encircles Ray Brook.

will continue to be applied to release the children to homes willing to sponsor them.

In the meantime hearings to determine which, if any, of the detainees would be allowed to remain in the U.S. that were slated to begin last Monday were postponed indefinitely because of court action in Florida, also a center of Haitian detention.

The immediate impact of that postponement, Walker said, is that the Haitians at Ray Brook will be there at least until Dec. 31.

All of this is of little consequence to Elisnord Bernavil who struggles to shape the letters of his name with a pen, but whose leadership among the 40 at Ray Brook is generally acknowledged.

Bernavil speaks the Creole dialect of French used in Haiti. It is said that he also

NTID Show Scheduled

"Sunshine Foo," the popular traveling theater troupe from the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, will perform at 3 p.m., Sunday, Oct. 11, at Nazareth Arts Center in the free Sunday Afternoon Series at Nazareth.

"Sunshine Too" has six performers, three of whom are deaf. Each has previously been involved in NTID productions and some work with other theater organizations. Their performances include many different types of materials such as sign-mime, poetry, signed songs, personal stories, some instructions to signing and deaf awareness, skits and one-act plays.

Further information is available at 586-2420.

Teen Day In YOW

Palmyra — The Yates, Ontario and Wayne counties religious education coordinators last week held a day, "Just for Teens," at St. Anne's center here.

The program will be presented again on Dec. 12 at St. John the Evangelist in Clyde.

Featured were classes taught by Father David Mura, Tom Driscoll, Matthew Kawiak and Susan Sullivan, Kathleen Mahoney.

FREE CONCERT

Pianist David Burge will perform works of Mozart, Schubert, Tom Johnson and Schumann at 8 p.m., Thursday, Oct. 8, at Kilbourn Hall, 26 Gibbs St. The concert is free and open to the public.

can communicate in English and in Spanish. Interviewed last week, however, Bernavil spoke in Creole through an interpreter.

"I left," he said of his flight from Haiti, "because I dislike the Haitian government way. There are many other reasons."

Foremost among them is that "my family suffered from government actions," he said.

Bernavil described himself in Haiti as an enlisted man in the Haitian army, stationed in the National Palace.

He learned he was in trouble with the government, he said, from a radio broadcast. The broadcast, he said, "accused me of putting fire in Port-au-Prince," Haiti's capital.

Not by setting a physical fire, he said, but by subversion. "They thought I was trying to subvert the order in Haiti because I was part of a group in the Dominican Republic and in contact with Toni."

Toni, John Walker explained later, is a political exile from Haiti.

"When I came back to Haiti," he said, "they accused me of plotting against the regime (of "Baby Doc" Duvalier)."

"Were you plotting?" Bernavil was asked.

"Oui," he answered.

"When I learned what the government received and what the people are suffering — their lack of survival — I was appalled by this fact," he said.

"I was forced to leave and seek refuge outside of Haiti. My family is still in Haiti," he said.

"Are you afraid for them?" he was asked.

"Oui," he replied.

But, "I would rather die here, than live again in Haiti," his fingers driving downward to the table in the room in the prison, as he says again, "Ici!"



Bernavil, Maxene Petit-Frere, Celavoire Trezy, Dujour Beaujour and Reynold Nelson discuss legal matters with Walker and Honorat.

Editorial: A Sa For

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