

Retirement

Former justice convenes class for inmates

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

As Torrey town justice, Doris Pace found that all too often she would sentence someone — usually for stealing or breaking into a cottage, "something like that" — only to see that same person return on a new charge.

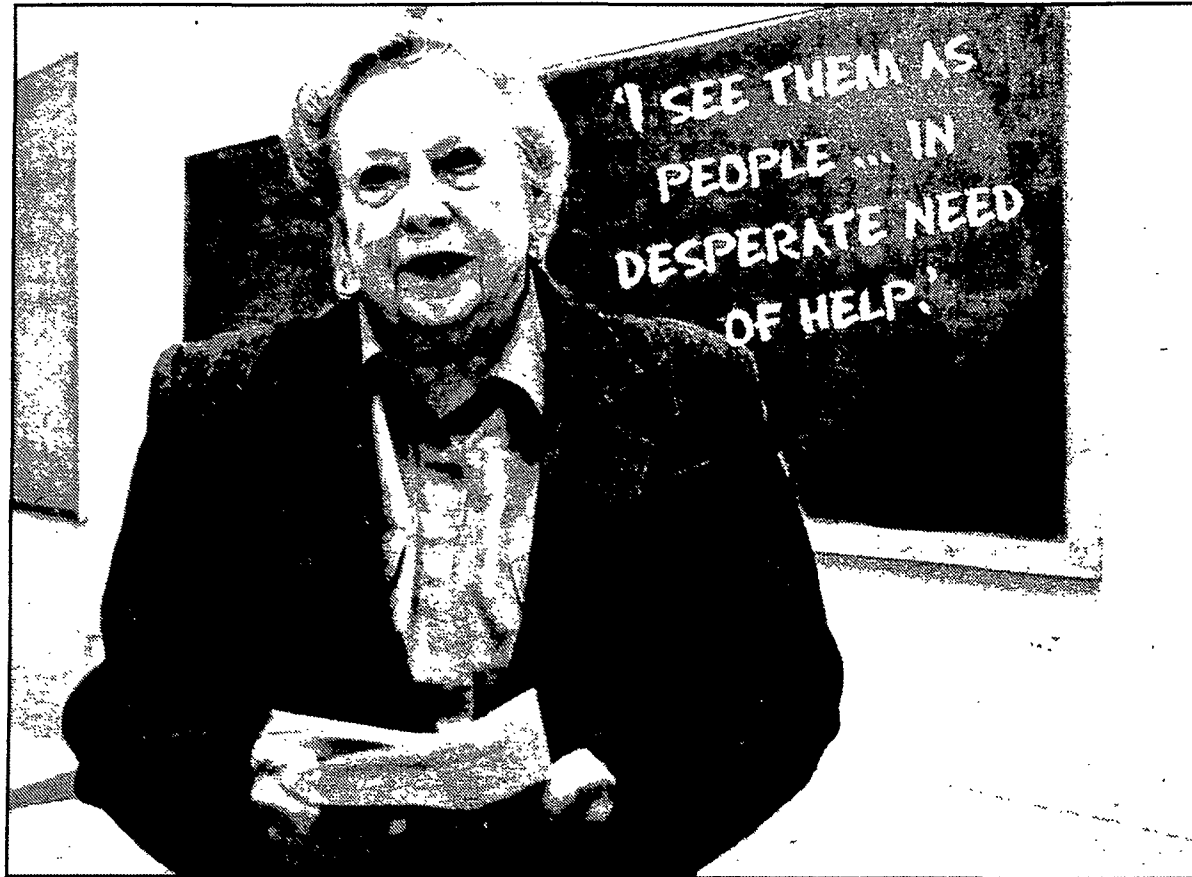
Now Pace, who retired in 1980, convenes not court, but classes, weekly in Yates County Jail, Penn Yan. She serves as a volunteer with the Yates County Council of Churches jail ministry and also studies Scripture and shares her faith with inmates through the ecumenical Spirit Inside ministry.

"I really got interested because of my experiences as town justice," she said. "I enjoy doing it because I feel it is doing good."

Rather than see the students simply as law-breakers, she said, "I see them as people who have had a terrible life and terrible things have happened to them, and who are in desperate need of help. So I want to help as much as I can, to help them get out of the awful life they are living. They want to get out too."

She began 15 years ago teaching inmates spelling and grammar. She got the idea after accompanying a friend who taught art at the jail.

"You probably think it's minor to learn how to say 'different from' and 'different than,' but these are little things people judge you on," she told her students.



Former Torrey Town Justice Doris Pace now volunteers as a teacher and minister in the Yates County Jail.

Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

From there, her teaching broadened into creative writing to help them think about life. She asks her students to write papers on such questions as: What do you want to be doing 10 years from now, what are your basic needs, what are your hurtful feelings, what are the most important things in life, and what would you do if you won the lot-

tery.

"The only thing I think has really surprised me is when I ask about the lottery, they can't seem to think of anything they particularly want," Pace said.

Yet when she thinks about it, that doesn't really surprise her.

"The problem is they don't think about themselves," she said.

"They just fall into whatever happens. I want them to think about what they want out of life, what they want to be and want to do, and to make plans to do it, and not to get tripped up this way."

While she's dedicated to her jail work, Pace doesn't spend all her time there. A 1982 convert to Catholicism, she also is a member

of St. Michael's Church social ministry committee and of the Catholic Daughters of America at the parish, part of the church's prayer line, policy chair of the Penn Yan American Association of University Women, and a genealogy researcher. Every month she also helps to organize a coffee hour for residents at Clinton Crest in Penn Yan retirement home.

And she hopes to do some archaeological digging at Bluff Point on Keuka Lake this spring or summer.

"There are very strange mysterious ruins out there," she said.

Perhaps those plans are more understandable to some people than her jail work. She said, "A lot of people have nothing but contempt for people in jail. ...But if they're punished and go back out and do the same thing, what good does that do?"

Pace is one of less than a dozen active volunteers, according to Sheriff Ron Spike, at a jail averaging 60 inmates.

"She is a very caring lady," he said of Pace. "If we have any rehabilitative efforts at all, it is through those people volunteering their time."

She really is not so different from any other people doing special work, Pace, a widow who's raised three children, protested.

"I think when everybody gets into something quite deeply it's because they really want to do it," she said. "This is something I really want to do."

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