

Subject: [Fwd: Correction!]

Date: Thu, 22 Sep 2005 20:20:32 -0700

From: Brian Platts <bplatts@shaw.ca>

To: Corrie Kost <kost@triumf.ca>

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Correction!

Date: Thu, 22 Sep 2005 18:59:15 -0700

From: M E Craver <mecraver@shaw.ca>

To: "Diplock, Dave" <DIPLOCD@tc.gc.ca>, "FONVCA (E-mail)" <fonvca@fonvca.org>

Dear Dave:

Sorry! Wrong State -- not Michigan, but Ohio and some others in the US including Arizona. Okay? These guys are treated humanely. -MC-

Tuesday, May 10, 2005

Chain gang begins its work

Butler County Sheriff Rick Jones launches a new program, saying jails are too "cushy"

By Janice Morse

Cincinnati Enquirer staff writer



ZOOM Photos by Glenn Hartong/The Enquirer

Inmates from the Butler County Jail chained together in groups of five pick up litter along Ohio 129 near Bypass 4 in Fairfield Township. Monday was their first day of work in a chain gang launched by Sheriff Rick Jones.

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ZOOM
A shackle around an inmate's ankle is seen Monday as inmates from the Butler County Jail worked in Fairfield Township. Those who volunteer for the chain gang get some fresh air and a sack lunch, Sheriff Rick Jones said.

Caution: Chain Gang Ahead

Neon-orange signs broadcast that message to motorists along Ohio 129 Monday, as Butler County Sheriff Rick Jones launched a "chain-gang" inmate labor program - Ohio's first modern version and one of only a handful in the nation, experts said.

Two groups of five men, wearing black-and-white horizontal stripes, fanned out picking up litter in the highway median - an experimental start to a program that Jones hopes will make the county cleaner and inmates more productive, even if it causes a stir.

"It is going to be controversial, and I'm OK with that," Jones said. "In my chain gangs, nobody is going to be mistreated, but they are going to have to work."

The inmates were working in view of the Bridgewater Falls shopping center in Fairfield Township, where township resident Regina Leist, a 33-year-old mother of three, said, "I say, 'Put 'em to use.' It is a little scary, having them out in the community. But as long as they're being watched, I think it's all right. Maybe it'll help reform them, too."

Joe Weedon, spokesman for the American Correctional Association, said there has been a national trend toward using inmates for work that benefits communities, and escapes are rare.

Chris Link, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, said she sees no problem with the program itself. "Even the ACLU does not oppose hard work," she said.

But she takes issue with the label, "chain gang."

"It sounds - honestly - a little headline-grabbing," Link said. "There are plenty of prison programs that involve hard work, but the language certainly conjures up very negative pictures."

Jones said lower-level offenders already work in programs that don't require chains. But this program involves "medium-security" offenders, a level above that. "These are not murderers and killers and rapists," Jones said. But he is linking one ankle on each inmate to the four other inmates' ankles to prevent them from running away and to teach them teamwork: "You're going to have to learn to work with the other people that you're on the gang with. When the chain moves, you have to move."

Because chain gangs became notorious for prisoner abuse and were dramatized in movies dating to the 1930s, they were disbanded across the United States by the 1950s. But 10 years ago, Sheriff Joe Arpaio of Maricopa County, Ariz., resurrected an updated version of chain gangs.

In an interview Monday, Arpaio said he has never been sued for any of his chain-gang programs.

Arpaio, who also established no-frills tent jails and makes male inmates wear pink boxer shorts to humble them, has been running what he calls "the world's only all-female chain gang" for nine years. A year ago, he started a chain gang of juveniles charged as adults.

Arpaio was re-elected last November to his fourth four-year term.

Only one or two other U.S. sheriffs have started chain gangs in recent years, Arpaio said, adding, "I have to commend him for at least taking the initiative and trying to do something."

Butler County Commissioner Mike Fox supports the program and wants to see it expand from volunteer-only to mandatory for all able-bodied inmates. He envisions using inmates to sort litter into piles of recyclables that then could be sold to generate revenue for the program.

"When you come to jail, it's not a place to kick back and relax," Fox said. "You'll be expected to work, you'll be expected to contribute, and we're going to get some value out of your time - and the money that the taxpayers spend."

The county spends about \$25,000 to \$35,000 a year to house, feed and care for each inmate, and Fox said taxpayers should get something in exchange.

Jones said he will do a cost-benefit analysis in a few weeks and decide whether to seek to expand the program. Figures were unavailable Monday. The inmates get no pay and nothing off their sentences for volunteering for the chain gang. They get some fresh air and a sack lunch, Jones said.

Jones said he started the program because thinks jails are too "cushy," with inmates dining on meals assembled by dieticians, watching color TV and being provided free health care that is better than many law-abiding Americans can afford.

"I don't want them to come here like it's Disney World, and think, 'Wow, what a great trip. I came here and gained five pounds and didn't do a lick of work.' We're going to change that," Jones said.

Now in his fifth month as sheriff, Jones points out that he formerly worked for the Ohio prison system so he is knowledgeable about corrections. He said the inmates will work hard but they will be treated humanely.

"I'm going to give them plenty of water, sunscreen so they don't get sunburned, and a little portable toilet - and they're going to work," he said. "There are so many things that need to be done, painting the city buildings, cleaning parks and highways - and we have inmates who can do it, so why not?"