

The Sheriff's Corner

Our Jail and who is in it.



The Allegan County Jail

Our current jail and Sheriff's Office was built in 1962 and was constructed to house 62 inmates. It was built only after the Department of Correction threatened to shut down the "old" jail (which is the Old Jail Museum today) for nine reasons. These reasons were:

1. Jail is 56 years old... and has a capacity of 31 prisoners.
2. It is constantly overcrowded ...
3. It is a serious fire hazard...
4. Physical condition and design is such that it constitutes a very poor security risk...
5. Size of jail is entirely inadequate and there is no space for storage or adequate offices.
6. ...two men to a cell which is contrary to regulations.
7. There is little or no segregation between first time offenders and hardened criminals ...
8. Visiting facilities are very poor.
9. Due to design and age of jail, sanitation and ventilation is also very poor.

The director of the Department of Corrections went on to say, "... it would be economically impracticable and financially prohibitive to repair, remodel or enlarge the jail and would result in a waste of public money." (Allegan News and Gazette, November 12, 1959.) Sounds familiar, doesn't it? The County was advised that they had until February 1, 1960 to make arrangements to transfer existing inmates to other facilities. The plan at that time was to transfer all the inmates to the Kent County Jail. The voters of Allegan County were asked to support a millage for a new jail and youth home –the voters approved that request in August 1960.

Over the years there have been several additions to the current building. Our inmate capacity is now rated by the State of Michigan at 173 (almost three times the original designed capacity). None of the additional inmate housing capacity was built to jail construction standards. The additional dorms and cells are all converted rooms like the former upstairs Sheriff's apartment and the space that was originally the detective bureau. The current building was originally constructed so an additional floor could be added. Over the years construction standards, jail standards, and space usage has changed so much that an additional floor is no longer practical or cost effective.

So, who actually is in our jail?

We took an average day (in fact the inmate count was low) and broke down the numbers to see the nature of crimes people were locked up for in the Allegan County Jail. Here are the numbers:

- 5 people jailed for murder, attempted murder or aggravated assault
- 10 people jailed for criminal sexual assault crimes
- 20 people jailed for breaking and entering or larceny crimes
- 10 people jailed for drunk driving (6 for multiple offense drunk driving)
- 23 people jailed for assault and battery crimes
- 27 people jailed for drug violations (the majority for multiple offenses)
- 13 people jailed for embezzlement and writing bad checks
- 13 people jailed on parole detainers – they violated their parole terms and are headed back to the State Prison
- 3 people jailed for Friend of the Court (FOC) violations – child support, etc.

Interestingly, the child support payment violators are with us due to an Attorney General's directive, which means they are more the \$25,000 behind in their support payments! So, when somebody tells you "the only people in our jail are child support violators" – that's just plain wrong!! In fact, right now we have more people locked up waiting for trial on murder and other capital offenses than those locked up for child support or Friend of the Court violations.

Well, those are the facts on the Allegan County Jail. The next article will focus on the programs we offer in the jail. I will also talk about why we should offer programs and why programs make sense (and cents). Also, I will talk about the reasons why programs work better than the old "lock them up and throw away the key" way of doing things.

Until the next time I write – Stay Safe!