

**FREE!!!, GET YOUR *GED* HERE!!!**  
**A Report on the: Mendocino County Jail, Holding Cells and Sheriff's  
Evidence Room**

June 18, 2008

***Summary***

On April 15, 2008, the Grand Jury conducted the annual visit to the Mendocino County Jail (MCJ) located on Low Gap Road in Ukiah. Many different agencies, groups, and individuals in the community provide services to inmates within the MCJ and upon their release. This exemplifies the spirit of teamwork and cooperation needed to provide services and programs to inmates. Those principally involved include the following:

- The Ukiah Adult School (UAS) provides adult education classes
- The Ford Street Project facilitates life skills classes which include substance abuse recovery and anger management.
- Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Mendocino County mentors prisoners' children and operates the "Storybook Project."
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
- Jail Chaplain
- Calvary Baptist Church
- First Baptist Church
- Seventh Day Adventist Church
- Consolidated Tribal Health

All programs are voluntary; most are open ended, which means that inmates are free to enroll in the program or course at anytime. Most of the programs are directed toward sentenced male and female inmates.

The original facility was built in 1973, and a second building was added in 1985. Several upgrades and remodels have taken place; some for officer safety and others because of State mandates.

Inmates who are in pretrial status reside in Building 1 and some programs are not available to them. Some civilians do administrative work and are employed by MCJ. Other employees that service the jail are funded in some way by the County. These people, as well as the volunteer organizations, make valuable contributions to the facility.

***Methods***

The Grand Jury visited the MCJ, the Sheriff's evidence room and the Court House holding cells, and interviewed supervisors and staff. Documents reviewed were: the budget, program schedules, inmate population and medical census reports. Environmental Health, Health Department, and Fire and Safety inspection reports by the California State Fire Marshal were also reviewed.

## ***Background***

California Penal Code §919(b) states that "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the conditions and management of the public prisons within the County".

## ***Findings***

1. The present staff consists of:
  - 1 Captain
  - 2 Lieutenants
  - 8 Sergeants
  - 44 Correctional Officers, with 2 additional unfilled positions
  - 5 Sheriff Booking Technicians
  - 1 Inmate Services Program Coordinator
  - 1 Kitchen Manager, and 2 Cooks
  - 1 Laundry Supervisor
  - 1 Account Clerk II
  - 1 Officer Assistant II, who manages the inmates funds.
2. Eight staff members are bilingual. Correctional Officers work 12-hour shifts, with a minimum of eight officers per shift.
3. The capacity of the MCJ is 305 inmates. In 2007 the average inmate population was 268. In January 2007 the population was 236, and in October 2007 the population was 294.
4. Building 1 holds the booking area, holding cells, and sally port.<sup>1</sup> The recent renovation of Building 1 included replacement of the sally port, and the addition of three more holding and security cells, which comply with both the ADA (Americans with Disability Act) and Title 24 (State guidelines on construction of jails). Construction included an interview room, a non-contact attorney room, and an open-air sally port.
5. The Mendocino County General Services Agency assigned one full-time maintenance person to the jail, due to continuing maintenance problems. Last year's Grand Jury reported two full-time maintenance personnel were assigned to the jail.
6. Inmate housing consists of seven units for males and two separate units for females. Temporary beds are placed in the common area when the capacity is exceeded.
7. Security cameras monitor the doors and common areas.
8. The cells are either single, double, triple occupancy, or barracks style.
9. All inmates are allowed exercise privileges, but inmates in "lock-down," are only allowed out of their cells 30 minutes per day.
10. Inmates are segregated based on history and type of crime committed, previous incarceration, gang affiliations and violent tendencies.

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<sup>1</sup> A sally port is a secure area used to move prisoners between a vehicle and the jail.

11. Coveralls are color coded to easily identify inmate types. Green is for sentenced inmates, orange is for un-sentenced inmates, white is for protective custody inmates, and red is for administrative segregation inmates (ADSEG—violent or high risk).
12. Inmates who exhibit good behavior may work while in jail. Opportunities include the kitchen, laundry, garden, and “work crew.” The “work crew” provides labor anywhere in the county, and is supervised by correctional officers.
13. The kitchen staff prepares 270 to 300 meals three times a day. Breakfast is prepared the night before and served in the morning. A supervisor and two cooks oversee and direct inmate labor. Inmates eat meals in their housing units.
14. The kitchen facilities and food storage areas were observed to be clean and sanitary.
15. A registered dietician oversees and approves the menu, which is prepared by the kitchen manager. The menu is rotated monthly.
16. Special diets are prepared for inmates with special needs.
17. Kitchen personnel and inmate helpers were observed to be clean. They were dressed in white and wore gloves and hair nets.
18. Food vendors bid on contracts to supply food. The contract might not go to the low bidder because of quality concerns.
19. The garden is certified organic, overseen by a professional horticulturalist, and the produce is either used in the kitchen or donated to various community service providers.
20. The laundry facility is adequate for the inmate population. Trip hazards were observed in the laundry room and on the sidewalk outside the entrance.
21. The air in the booking area was hot and stifling. Staff responded to questions regarding the poor air quality, saying that the heat and air conditioning system is inefficient and temperatures vary widely from room to room.
22. Inmates with medical needs are identified at the sally port before they are booked.
23. Mendocino County contracts with California Forensic Medical Group to provide medical care at the jail. The medical center staff at the MCJ comprises: a general practitioner working two days a week, one part-time dentist, one health service administrator registered nurse, who is the program manager, one *sick call* registered nurse, one full-time administrative assistant, and two licensed vocational nurses.
24. Mental Health Branch uses Mendocino County general funds to provide one part-time psychiatrist and one full-time psychiatric registered nurse to the jail.
25. Mental Health, in conjunction with the Sheriff’s Department, applied and received a Department of Justice federal grant for one full-time person to institute the “Bridge Program”.
26. The “Bridge Program” entails the sharing of personal medical information between the jail and the Mental Health Branch. To participate, an inmate must sign the “Permission to Share Personal Medical Information and

Records" form.

27. In 2007, the psychiatrist made 1,385 visits and the mental health nurse made 4,184 visits. Distributing medicine is not counted as a visit.
28. The jail population has a higher frequency of medical and mental problems than the general population; thus requiring extensive medical and mental health services. Data indicate the following communicable diseases: one positive test for tuberculosis, 23 cases of sexually transmitted diseases, 10 cases of lice or scabies, and 63 cases of drug resistant staphylococcus.
29. Abuse of alcohol and other drugs was cited as the primary reason for medical services required by incoming MCJ inmates.
30. Medical staff stated that the closure of Mental Health's Psychiatric Health Facility in 2000 has caused an increase in the number of persons with mental disorders who are incarcerated.
31. There is a Work Furlough Program in which the inmates leave the jail for their jobs in the morning and return to jail after the workday is over. This provides an opportunity for the inmates to receive work experience and it reduces the number of inmates at the jail site during the day.
32. The Work Release Program administered by the Probation Department reduces jail population by having adult offenders serve their sentence while remaining in the community.
33. The Home Detention Program allows an individual to stay at home wearing an electronic monitoring ankle bracelet. The inmate must pay a daily fee to participate.
34. An Incentive Program, through an agreement with the Superior Court Judge and the Sheriff's Office, encourages an inmate to obtain a General Education Diploma (GED) and/or a Life Skills Program Certificate, which will reduce their sentence by five days for each achievement.
35. A library is available with books donated by Mendocino Book Store, Ukiah's Friends of the Library and private donors.
36. A law library is provided in Building 1 to ensure all inmates have full access to legal information, as prescribed by law. Access requires good behavior and an appointment is necessary.
37. Computers and tapes are available in the education center. There is no internet access.
38. Programs include Adult School, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous and Life Skills. Counseling and religious services are also available. Participation is voluntary.
39. The Mendocino County Office of Education provides adult education classes with an emphasis on obtaining a GED.
40. Correspondence courses are available for un-sentenced inmates and inmates who cannot leave their housing units.

### **Evidence Room**

41. The Grand Jury visited the evidence room August 28, 2007. The Mendocino County Sheriff's Office central evidence facility, located in Ukiah, is the

- depository for most evidence collected from crime scenes.
42. Budgeted staff consists of one and one-half positions.
  43. This facility also processes evidence such as fingerprints, shoe prints, tire treads, etc. Some evidence is sent for testing to outside facilities.
  44. Evidence room personnel strictly control all evidence. This fulfills the need to maintain the "chain of evidence" necessary for criminal prosecutions.
  45. All records of evidence are kept by hand on paper.
  46. Purging of evidence is a laborious task. Evidence may not be disposed of until there is final disposition of a case, which means the inmate must complete their sentence. Determining when the final disposition has taken place requires intensive investigation by the Evidence Clerk.
  47. Depending on what it is and how it was obtained, items held at this facility must be kept until the court orders its disposal or it is released by the District Attorney.
  48. Evidence room operations, including purging and disposition of evidence, require greater staff time than is presently available.
  49. The evidence room requires refrigeration for certain evidence. At present, the refrigeration and freezer units are aging and the capacity is insufficient.
  50. There is no generator to maintain electricity for refrigeration in case of power outage.
  51. Staff and others state that the odor from marijuana stored in the evidence room is pungent and the ventilation system is insufficient to clear the odor from the facility. Stored marijuana may mold and can cause respiratory illness.
  52. There are no fireproof containers for files, 911 tapes, fingerprint cards, or other flammable evidence.
  53. Evidence in dismissed cases can be returned to the owner. A court order is required to return certain evidence, such as marijuana, weapons, or any evidence obtained by search warrant.

### **Mendocino County Courthouse Holdings Cells**

54. On May 13, 2008, the Grand Jury visited the four Courthouse holding cells used to hold prisoners awaiting court hearings. They were found to be clean and in good working order.
55. One cell has a privacy screen between the toilet and sink for female inmates.
56. Each cell is equipped with a fire sprinkler.
57. Prisoners who are transported and held must be kept separate according to the color designation of their coveralls.
58. When there is a jury trial, the presiding judge may order that the inmate wear street clothes, rather than jail colored coveralls. A prisoner changes from the colored coveralls to street clothes at the jail.
59. There is an attorney-inmate interview room in the holding cell area.
60. All prisoners are transported by correctional officers, who are mostly working on overtime. There must be more than one officer if there are five or more general population inmates being transported.

61. Prisoners are usually in the holdings cells for about 30 minutes before their court hearing, although they may remain there longer.
62. A small area in the ceiling at the end of the hall in the holding cell facility is deteriorating.
63. Mirrors are used to monitor the hall area, but direct visual observation of inmates is required at least twice every half hour. The correctional officer cannot leave the holding cell area while inmates are present.

### ***Recommendations***

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. Mendocino County General Services Agency repair the laundry room floor and the sidewalk outside the laundry room entrance; (Finding 20)
2. General Services Agency investigate the ventilation system at MCJ in Building 1 and make necessary changes to ensure adequate air flow and quality and to stabilize the unequal temperature from room to room; (Finding 21)
3. General Services Agency improve air quality and ventilation in the evidence room; (Finding 51)
4. Mendocino County Mental Health Branch and Sheriff's Department re-apply for a Federal Grant from the Department of Justice for one full-time person to continue the "Bridge" program; (Findings 25, 26)
5. Mendocino County Board of Supervisors fund one full-time person for the "Bridge" program, if no grant can be obtained; (Findings 25, 26)
6. Board of Supervisors budget for one additional position for the evidence room; (Findings 42, 46, 48)
7. Board of Supervisors budget funds for a bar coding system for the Sheriff's main evidence room; (Finding 45)
8. Mendocino County District Attorney's office notify the Sheriff's main evidence room when there is final disposition of a case; (Findings 46-48)
9. Mendocino County Sheriff investigate the use of asset forfeiture funds for the bar coding system, refrigerator/freezer replacement and a generator for back-up power. (Findings 45, 48, 49).

### ***Comments***

The Mendocino County Jail is not a great place to be, but the facility offers many

programs that may make an inmate less likely to return. Especially notable, is the encouragement by staff that inmates utilize the opportunity to achieve academic and life skills. These programs may reduce recidivism.

The correctional officers and their staff are maintaining a safe and functional environment for the staff and inmates. The MCJ operates under the same minimal budget as other County departments.

***Required Responses***

Board of Supervisors, (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)

District Attorney, Mendocino County (Finding 45-48; Recommendations 7 and 9)

Mendocino County General Services Agency Director (Findings 20-21, 51; Recommendations 1-3)

## The Grand Jury Report Process

The role of the Mendocino County Civil Grand Jury is to oversee and shed light on local and County government. Jurors conduct oversight inquiries and investigate matters of public interest. Any individual can file a complaint with the Grand Jury using forms available online at [www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.mendocino.ca.us/grandjury).

A Grand Jury inquiry begins when a topic is approved by a minimum of 12 of the 19 seated Jurors. A committee then undertakes extensive research and drafts the report.

Findings are verified against documents and interview notes and are reviewed for accuracy with key individuals in the agency of interest. The draft is then reviewed by an internal Edit committee and must receive approval by the Full Panel. It is then sent to County Counsel and to the Presiding Judge for final review before public release.

## Members of the 2007/2008 Grand Jury

Bob Coppock  
Brad Hunter  
Kathy Johnson  
Nancy Kleiber  
Lois Lockart  
Chas Moser  
George Pacheco  
Lillian Pacini  
Carolyn Pavlovic  
Barbara Reed  
Wendy Roberts  
James Schweig  
Dennis Scoles  
Bill Stambaugh  
Sherry Stambaugh  
Finley Williams

### Partial Year

Thomas Clay, Al Pierce, Brent Rusert, Pamela Shilling, Thelma Thompson



*The cover photo for this report was taken at Point Cabrillo Light Station Historic Park by Donald F. Roberts. This report was produced with the generous assistance of Tony and Maureen Eppstein. Information on Point Cabrillo State Historic Park and the Lighthouse Inn is available at [www.pointcabrillo.org](http://www.pointcabrillo.org)*



