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CHIEF SPOKESWOMAN'S RETIREMENT

Prison official will be missed, director says

Thursday, August 27, 2009 3:21 AM

BY **ALAN JOHNSON**

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Andrea Carson has witnessed 27 executions and spent more than two decades working for a state agency that seldom generates good news.

Now, Carson, 54, is ready to retire as chief spokeswoman for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction. Today will be her last day on the job.

"It's time. I've had a good run," she said. "I want to be able to leave at a time when I can go out with my head held high."

In working for three governors, Carson joined the system as it was undergoing rapid growth in the 1980s. More recently, prisons have begun closing as the state's financial ship hit the rocks.

The one constant has been the growth in prison population. Ohio prisons held about 18,000 inmates when Carson went to work there; today they hold more than 51,000 -- nearly three times as many.

Along the way, she suffered personal tragedy. Her husband, John Dean, a prison warden, died Sept. 20, 2001, in an automobile accident on I-71 near Wilmington. She was driving and was seriously injured, but she recuperated and returned to work.

A native of Richmond, Ky., Carson is the daughter of a school teacher and postal worker who taught her the value of hard work and to "treat people the way we wanted to be treated."

Carson became a parole officer in Hamilton County after graduating from Eastern Kentucky University. She joined the state agency in 1983 and became communications director in 2001.



Andrea Carson joined Ohio's prisons in 1983.

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When the state resumed capital punishment after a 36-year hiatus with the execution of Wilford Berry on Feb. 19, 1999, Carson was there. She was there on June 3 this year when Daniel Wilson was lethally injected.

It was her 27th and last time as a witness. Only prison director Terry Collins has seen more -- 31 of 32.

Carson said the experience has not left her scarred or hardened, but compassionate toward families of condemned inmates who, while doing nothing wrong themselves, receive little help and support through the execution process. Victims' families get support and counseling through state victim services.

Collins said Carson's retirement is a loss because of her experience in working with television, radio and print news statewide.

"DRC is certainly losing a wealth of knowledge with Andrea's retirement," the prisons director said. "She has really made her mark in terms of how our agency establishes and maintains media relationships."

Carson plans to travel and work with her church. While she's ready to leave, she said, it will be odd to know when the phone rings it won't be for "the spokeswoman for the department. It'll just be for Andrea Carson."

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Ohio prisons spokeswoman retiring

August 27, 2009 06:30 EDT

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) -- It's the final day for a woman who has witnessed 27 executions and watched Ohio's prison population nearly triple.

Andrea Carson is retiring Thursday as chief spokeswoman for the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, an agency she first joined in 1983.

Fifty-four-year-old Carson says she's had a "good run." She plans to travel and do church work.

Carson says being so close to executions has not left her jaded or shaken. Instead, she grew sympathetic for innocent family members of the condemned.

Prisons director Terry Collins says his department is losing a "wealth of knowledge" with Carson's departure.

The prison system held about 18,000 inmates when she first came on board. Now, there are more than 51,000.

Information from: The Columbus Dispatch,
<http://www.dispatch.com>

High court ruling keeps Danny Hill eligible for death penalty

Thursday, August 27, 2009

STAFF REPORT

WARREN — The Ohio Supreme Court has refused to review a decision by a visiting common pleas court judge who has ruled that Danny Lee Hill is eligible for the death penalty.

The top court said Wednesday in a 5-2 vote that it agreed with Judge Thomas P. Curran of Cuyahoga County, sitting on assignment in Trumbull County, that Hill is not mentally retarded.

That decision exhausts Hill's state appeals and sends Hill's case back to the federal court system, said LuWayne Annos, an assistant Trumbull County prosecutor.

Hill's appeal of his death sentence was at the federal court level when the U.S. Supreme Court said in 2002 that it is inhumane to execute the mentally retarded. That sent Hill's case back to Trumbull County for a determination of whether he is retarded.

Hill, 42, of Warren, was sentenced to death in 1986 at age 19 for the 1985 torture and murder of Raymond Fife, 12, who was beaten, raped, impaled, strangled and burned.

Prosecutors want video testimonies in escape trial

Brad Dicken

ELYRIA - Three convicted killers slated to testify during the October trial of a fourth murderer accused of trying to escape from Lorain Correctional Institution won't have to appear in court to be witnesses in the case if prosecutors and sheriff's deputies have their way.

Instead, the men would be able to testify in John Michael Robinson's trial through a video link between Lorain County Common Pleas Judge Raymond Ewers' courtroom and the Ohio State Penitentiary where they are incarcerated.



Sheriff's Capt. Richard Resendez said he believes the county and prison system have the technological ability to offer the video link, and it could reduce security concerns about bringing three murderers to the county.

"Security is the No. 1 issue," he said.

Robinson has asked his attorney to subpoena Jason Robb, who is on death row for his role in the death of a prison guard and a fellow prisoner while he was a leader of the Aryan Brotherhood during the 1993 uprising at the Southern Ohio Correction Facility in Lucasville.

Also on Robinson's witness list are Martin Scott, who is serving a life prison term for the 1994 shooting death of his father-in-law, and Chris Rowe, who is also serving a life term for killing an acquaintance during a 2001 argument. Scott is eligible for parole in 2041, while Rowe could be released as soon as 2016.

Bill Willis, Robinson's attorney, said his client hasn't told him why he wants the three killers on his witness list. None of the three were at Lorain Correctional when Robinson allegedly tried to escape by hiding in a prison trash container on Sept. 8, 2008.

Although Willis said he understands the security concerns of prosecutors and deputies, it would be unfair to his client for defense witnesses to have to testify over a video link. A jury needs to be able to see a witness in the flesh to gauge whether to believe them, something that is lost in video testimony, Willis said.

"They have to judge the demeanor of a witness," he said. "How do they do that when all they see is a talking head on a TV screen?"

But county Prosecutor Dennis Will said his office has been prepared to use video technology in the past. A nurse who was a key witness in a sex abuse case was prepared to testify via video uplink from Italy, he said. That case ended in a plea bargain and the nurse never needed to testify.

"I would disagree that somehow it's not fair," he said.

Also, county Common Pleas Judge James Burge utilized a video uplink for an expert on lethal injection who couldn't make it to court during the controversial hearings Burge held on the death penalty last year.

Willis has questioned the need to prosecute Robinson, 32, who is serving two consecutive life prison terms plus another 19 years for a string of robberies in Ottawa and Sandusky counties that left two store clerks dead and a bartender wounded in 2000. He is not eligible for parole.

If convicted of the attempted escape charge, Robinson could get an additional five years in prison.

Resendez said he couldn't comment about the details of other security measures or concerns surrounding Robinson's trial.

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County Juvenile Detention Center Closing

by Frank Lewis

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“The county simply does not have enough funds...In the future, those young people who must be detained shall be held in detention facilities outside the county.”

James W. Kirsch, Juvenile/Probate Judge

The Scioto County Juvenile Detention Center, at 526 Fifth St., in Portsmouth, is closing.

According to a news release late Wednesday afternoon, Scioto County Juvenile Court announced that effective Sept. 11 it will cease operations of the Juvenile Detention Center and that all staff will be laid off effective that same date.

According to Scioto County Juvenile/Probate Judge James Kirsch, the action was taken due to the economy.

“The county simply does not have enough funds to continue operation of the Juvenile Detention Center,” Kirsch said in a news release.

“Accordingly, we must cease operations. In the future, those young people who must be detained shall be held in detention facilities outside the county.”

The closing does not come totally as a surprise. In announcing last week that Scioto County is the first county in the history of Ohio to receive a fiscal emergency designation, State Auditor Mary Taylor cited the Juvenile Detention Center as an example of one of the high cost items in the county’s budget.

Scioto County Commissioner Tom Reiser said, at the time of the designation by the state, that a representative from Taylor’s office, David Thompson, met with Kirsch, and Reiser said he had been told Thompson made no recommendations, but Reiser did make what has turned out to be an ominous statement — “But the judge is considering several things, and I know he has considered shutting down the facility.”

Now the considered closing has come to fruition.

Reiser also explained, unlike the Scioto County Jail, the Juvenile Detention Center does not operate out of the county’s general fund.

“Actually the Juvenile Detention Center fund is handled by Juvenile Court, Judge (James) Kirsch directly. That is a separate fund. It’s not part of the general fund. And we don’t really have input into that staffing. They do all of that.”

Taylor’s decision to place Scioto County in a fiscal emergency was made following the results of a fiscal analysis conducted by her office that revealed a combined county fund deficit of more than \$3.5 million as of June 30, 2009. Taylor said the deficit is anticipated to increase unless county officials develop and implement a successful financial recovery plan.

Kirsch was not available at press time, but in the news release, he said arrangements and discussions are already being held with those counties who provide detention services, and those counties who previously used the services provided by the Scioto County Detention Center.



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Ohio prisons spokeswoman retiring

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