

On Friday, August 6, 2009 Raymond Whelan, a reporter for The River Cities Daily Tribune published an article titled "New Jail Whittles Down State Prisoner Backlog".

Burnet. In just a few short months, the new Burnet County Jail has whittled down a significant statewide backlog of prison inmates seeking treatment for substance abuse, Texas officials said Thursday.

The 587-bed facility is participating in a 16 year old program originally envisioned by Gov. Ann Richards to treat convicts for substance abuse while they are still behind bars.

"The Burnet County facility is helping to reduce the number of offenders waiting for substance-abuse treatment", Texas Department of Criminal Justice spokesman Jason Clark said Thursday. "There is currently no backlog of offenders waiting to get into substance-abuse treatment beds".

Officials commended Burnet County officials earlier this week for helping facilitate the state substance abuse program.

State Sen. John Whitmire, D-Houston, the Senate Criminal Justice Committee chairman, was among several officials who applauded the county for its willingness to provide beds for the TDCJ substance abuse program at the Burnet County Jail, 900 County Lane, starting last June.

Whitmire supported Richards and has advocated therapeutic rehabilitation and treatment of drug offenders for many years, said Lawrence Coleman, the Committee policy director. "He is glad it is being implemented in Burnet County", Coleman added. "It is a big part of returning treatment and rehabilitation to the prison system".

After surviving an outcry of protest from nearby residents for several weeks, the County Commissioners opened the jail near the state Ellen Halbert Unit for woman last April.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Bill Neve is president of the Burnet Public Facility Corp., the group charged by the state to administer the jail managed by the private firm Southwestern Correctional LLC. "When we saw we had a chance to get the (TDCJ) program, we knew it was something we needed", Neve said.

Burnet County Jail Monitor Capt. Richard Gauldin reported 412 inmates were detained at the jail earlier this week, including 286 parolees and probationers enrolled in the program who comprise about 70 percent of the jail population. Warden Bruce Armstrong and other jail officers "have absolutely no problem with those prisoners", Neve said.

On a statewide basis, the program has helped lower the recidivism rate of former inmates previously incarcerated because of drug-related offenses, Neve said. "The program is set up so that people who do right know it is good for them", he added.

Also, the terms of the contract between the county, Southwestern and TDC3 (including the substance-abuse program and payments in lieu of taxes from Southwestern) effectively lowers the daily cost per bed from \$40 to \$26.50 at the jail, officials have said.

“It is good for the system as a whole, and it gives the county inmates who are safe and easy to work with”, Neve said.