

# The Maplehurst escapes

The popularity of prison work gangs has grown in the five years since Maplehurst Correctional Centre opened in Milton.

But the inmate population has also changed. Many are no longer first time offenders and a growing percentage are serving sentences for violent crimes such as rape, indecent assault and armed robbery.

The number of escapes has also risen over the last few years. To date this year, 12 men have escaped custody. Seventeen additional inmates have failed to return from temporary absence passes.

But Maplehurst officials maintain the figure is practically in-

consequential in comparison to the volume of prisoners who work successfully in the community.

Champion reporter Linda Kirby spoke with various officials this week. In the following stories, Maplehurst officers explain how they select prisoners for work programs and temporary absence passes, and why they feel prison security is adequate.

Police feel satisfied the number of escapes is not serious and Staff Sergeant Ron Southgate of Halton Regional Police explains why.

And one young prisoner tells his story of why he chose to escape and gives his opinion on the security standards at Maplehurst.

## Inmates are strictly screened

Work gangs are a popular occupation with many inmates at Maplehurst, but not everyone is permitted to work outside the correctional centre.

Approximately 200 prisoners are enrolled in the centre's daily program which includes a number of community projects, ministry tasks and the newly

adopted self sufficiency gardening program.

Prior to their assignment to a project, prisoners are required to pass an assessment period which ranges from two weeks to one month.

Those regarded as suitable for work

projects are first placed on internal work groups, cleaning floors, helping in the kitchen or working in the laundry room.

Once a week, a three-man board meets to determine job re-classifications and placement of individuals on an outside gang.

The task is not simple, according to Leo Gies, supervisor of the correctional centre.

### SOME CAN'T GO

These include individuals serving a sentence for serious sex crimes (child molesting, rape, indecent assault), arson, and drug trafficking.

The board does not consider prisoners with a record of escaped custody or those with outstanding charges.

The outside work gang program has a potential of 80 inmates, but Maplehurst averages 57 prisoners a day working outside the fence.

"We have never reached our maximum potential, because of the strict screening," said Mr. Gies.

He feels one dozen escapes this year is a "very low" figure in light of the numbers working.

Extensive precaution is taken to select trustworthy inmates for outside tasks, he said. A number of police reports and the family background files are reviewed when looking at inmates for various projects.

The result is a fairly competent work force of enthusiastic inmates who are credited with an estimated \$10,000 worth of community work this year alone.

A "gang log book" keeps a daily written account of inmates' behavior and attitude.

If an inmate behaves poorly or shows signs of being a security risk, he is pulled off the gang.

By the same token, a hardworking prisoner can earn several privileges.

### 30 DAYS EQUALS 15

A total of 15 remission days for every 30 good working days can be earned by a prisoner. He is also encouraged to promote himself through various jobs to eventually receive a paying job.

Ontario Pallet is one local firm that employs inmates, in addition to local fruit and vegetable farmers.

There is little or no supervision and according to Mr. Gies, Maplehurst has never lost one inmate from a paying job.

The work projects have received the gratitude of the community and appreciation from many inmates who want the opportunity to better themselves, said Mr. Gies.

He related one incident where an inmate escaped while on a temporary absence pass. A member of an outside work gang, his actions prompted many inmates to turn against him when he was returned to Maplehurst to the extent that he sought and was given protective custody.

Similar to the labor gang committee, a separate group of officials sits once a week to review applications for temporary absences, which vary from one to 15 days.

"We are very, very cautious on who we allow to go home," said Bob Groom, temporary assistant of the TAP program.

Just over half of those who apply for a few days off are granted permission to leave the institution.

Every inmate must, however, have been in Maplehurst for three to four months before applying for a temporary pass.

Each is judged on his own merit, behavior and the particular circumstances of his situation.

### ASK FAMILY FIRST

The family of the prisoner is always contacted by Maplehurst to determine if he will be welcomed home.

An unstable home situation is not regarded as suitable and a prisoner's request may be turned down for that reason.

Some parents do not want their son back, said Mr. Groom, and there are some wives who don't want to see their husbands ever again.

Inmates who have committed serious sexual offences or violent crimes are rarely granted a pass unless an emergency situation arises, such as a serious illness or death in the immediate family.

In the case of an illness, Maplehurst officials contact the doctor to check if a visit by an inmate is considered beneficial or not.

And if it is felt necessary, the correctional centre will provide an escort to an inmate who is granted a pass.

"Our main concern is to protect society," admitted Mr. Groom.

Last Christmas, 125 inmates were allowed to go home on temporary absence passes. Of that number, only three failed to return on time. The trio arrived late, the result of too much partying, according to Mr. Groom.

Maplehurst regards the passes as extremely beneficial to inmates who are seeking to resume a normal life following the completion of their sentence.

"The program does help to relax a lot of frustrations," he said.

### "GOOD EXPERIENCE"

"The inmate can go home and solve various problems with his family. He has the opportunity to discuss plans and then return here to work on those ideas."

"It is a good experience. It is helping him keep active within society, for eventually he is going to be back on the street."

He has a few examples of those who will be granted a pass.

There is a 22-year-old inmate serving a sentence for armed robbery. He has an excellent school report from his studies at Maplehurst and has earned several remission days for good behavior. He is anxious to begin hunting for a job once he is released. Based on a number of recommendations, he is permitted a pass.

A 16-year-old inmate applying for his third pass (he has completed two previous passes without problems) wants to go home for his grandfather's birthday. Serving time for break, enter and theft, he is described as well behaved and no problem. There are no arguments against allowing him to go out.

Another 16-year-old applying for a pass to strengthen his parole chances is turned down. His school grades at Maplehurst are poor and he is termed unpredictable.

A temporary absence pass is a privilege and not a right, stressed Mr. Groom.

"His conduct here and his ability to get along with his peers play a significant role in our decision," he said, adding the board also goes to great lengths to establish the validity of an inmate's request.



Reviewing a case. Maplehurst officials Leo Gies, Ed MacNevin and Ray Bartlett review an application from a Maplehurst inmate for a job on an outside work gang. Extreme care is taken in selecting prisoners for jobs, they said, and only a small percentage abuse the privilege and escape.

# Champion Perspective

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## Superintendent says

### Escapes 'a failure' but program works

"Anybody who feels you can run a prison without an incident is on cloud nine."

That is the belief of Allan Roberts, 42-year-old superintendent of Maplehurst Correctional Centre, who has been involved in corrections for a number of years in both Canada and England.

He doesn't like the fact there have been 12 escapes to date from Maplehurst.

"We see escapes as a failure on our part," he said, adding each incident is carefully investigated to determine security improvements.

But while this year's total is higher than normal, consideration must also be paid to the growing number of inmates working in the community, he pointed out.

A rehabilitation program for inmates and a cheap means of community labor are not possible without some risk, he said.

"We are doing everything we can to screen people and select the right ones for community tasks."

"But we cannot be 100 per cent successful. What we are doing is minimizing the risk," said the superintendent.

During the month of September the institution averaged 57 inmates a day working off the prison grounds.

A maximum of 10 inmates is permitted on a work gang, but the aver-



ALLAN ROBERTS  
Superintendent

age is between six and seven, said Mr. Roberts.

Escapes for that month totalled five.

Based on annual statistics, it is estimated one inmate out of 1,000 working prisoners escapes every month.

That figure compares favorably with other correctional centres, said Mr. Roberts, adding Maplehurst is on par with Guelph Correctional Centre, but the local institution has more working prisoners.

He admits it is simple for working inmates to escape.

"It is easy to escape from an outside work gang."

"It would be stupid to say anything else. They have ample opportunity to take off," said Mr. Roberts.

Escaping from within the institution is "considerably more difficult," he said, but "not insurmountable."

The proximity of Highway 401 allows for an accessible and fast getaway and prisoners are rarely tracked down in the immediate area.

Although the number of escapes has risen, Mr. Roberts said there are no plans to change the work program.

"We will change the procedure when we feel the need, but not until," he said.

Changes have been made, however, within the institution following last year's riot involving more than 100 inmates.

Equipment valued at over \$50,000 destroyed in the incident has not been replaced and strong security measures have been taken to prevent a similar occurrence, he said.

Where at one time as many as 100 prisoners were permitted in the gymnasium, that number has now been halved.

Inmates from the adult training centre and the correctional centre no longer mix during social functions.

Structural changes to the gym include grill-work on all windows and access points to adjoining rooms and an upper level have been blocked off.

But the stepped-up security does not mean a move towards a maximum institution, said Mr. Roberts.

"It has always been a medium security centre. There are no plans to make it anything else," he said.



Work gangs prove productive. As many as 60 inmates work in the Milton community daily on such projects as Halton Women's Place, cutting wood in North Halton forest tracts (above) and helping out farmers.

## Police view

### Says jail is doing its job

As far as Staff Sergeant Ron Southgate is concerned, the number of Maplehurst escapes hasn't caused that much anxiety to the police department.

"We have had a few complaints from the public, but not many."

The 40-year-old policeman who now heads the criminal investigation bureau for the North Halton district feels people have over-reacted to escapes.

He blamed media coverage of a recent Kingston incident for several worried callers from the community.

In his opinion, Maplehurst is doing everything possible to prevent escapes.

He is satisfied with the screening process which permits as many as 80 inmates a day to be employed on community work gangs.

Escapes will take place, but inmates rarely pose problems for the immediate area, he said.

"They usually escape by stealth and don't want to be seen. They try to get away from the area and are generally not interested in hanging around," he said.

But that has not always been the case.

On more than one occasion an escapee has stolen a vehicle as a means of a fast getaway.

A Campbellville woman escaped serious injury one year ago when an escaped convict knocked her over after stealing the family car.

And stolen vehicles are rarely returned in the same state as they were taken.

They are usually found several hundred miles away, sometimes damaged and frequently filthy.

The relationship between police and Maplehurst officials has not always been as amicable as it now appears to be.

Confusion arose on several occasions when police were not called immediately about an escape.

During one incident police did not receive notification of an escape for one hour.

That problem has been solved as a result of meetings between the two organizations, said Staff Sergeant Southgate.

On Sept. 10, 1980 a two-page procedure was drawn up, outlining the steps to be taken by police and Maplehurst in the event of an escape.

"It is our ballgame now, once an escape has taken place."

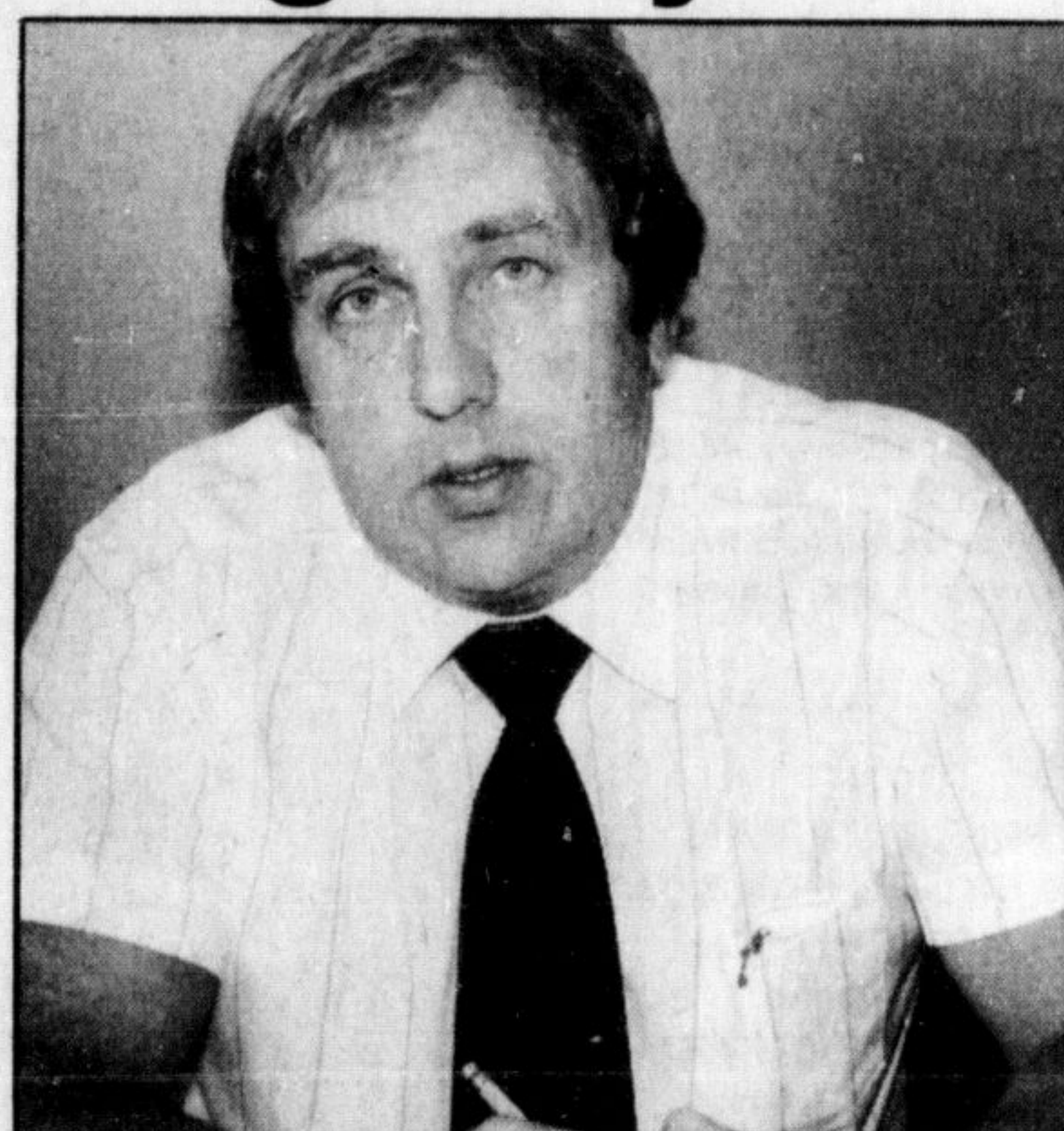
"We co-ordinate the search and they assist," according to police.

Every escape is costly in terms of manpower and the money that must be spent searching for an inmate, admitted the staff sergeant.

At least four or five police officers pulled from throughout the region plus correctional staff will take part in a search that can last for three to four hours, he said, no doubt it is a drain on manpower," he said.

Although the majority of escapes do take place involving inmates on an outside work gang, police don't place the blame on lack of supervision.

"I think it is fantastic that they can have one guard



Escapes drain police manpower. But Halton Regional Police Staff Sergeant Ron Southgate said he is satisfied with Maplehurst's security.

## Escapes Maplehurst

### An inmate tells why

"I knew I was going to be caught, but for me, it was worth it."

Maplehurst escapee James Schram, 19, feels he had just cause to escape from a work gang.

And when he decided to do it in August, he found it very simple.

According to Schram, who is now back in Maplehurst serving an additional six months for the escape, it is not hard to get away. In fact it is relatively easy, he said in an interview.

"If a guy wants out, he will try for an outside gang. The opportunity is always there," he said.

In his case he was desperate to visit a sick grandmother.

He considers his grandmother special, having lived with her for most of his life after his parents separated.

Schram applied for a temporary pass but was turned down. He figures he was refused because it was felt by the authorities that his grandmother was not immediate family and the situation was not serious.

He made no elaborate plans for his exit. He was working outside the fence near the edge of Maplehurst property when he decided to leave.

"I had stopped working and was sitting on the grass. I looked at the 401 and I looked at the gang boss. He was at the other end of the field."

"And I just took off."

He had only 23 days left to go of an 11-month sentence he was serving for break, enter and theft.

"I almost turned around to come back," he admitted, but he was determined to see his grandmother in Windsor. He knew he

would be caught anyway, so he figured he might as well see her first.

When he arrived home, he told his mother and grandmother he was out on a pass. He was glad he had done it. His grandmother's condition had worsened and he was happy to be near.

A few days later, he admitted to his mother he had escaped and asked her to drive him to Windsor City Police where he turned himself in.

"There were other ways I could have gone home," he said.

"I know now that I could have appealed the decision on my temporary pass, but I didn't then."

Although he feels it was personally worth his while to take off, he is the first to admit an escape is not smart.

"It is stupid to go out, because you are only going to get caught and pay for it."



Seeking permission. Approximately half of those inmates who apply for a temporary absence pass are refused. Officials grant passes to those who have proven to be a small security risk and who must return home for an emergency situation, such as sickness or a death in the family.

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