

COOPERATION WORKS

SIX OHIO JURISDICTIONS JOIN FORCES TO CREATE REGIONAL JAIL

By Jim Dennis

The Corrections Commission of Northwest Ohio was formed in 1987 to oversee the construction and operation of the Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio (CCNO), Ohio's first regional jail, and the first of its type in the United States. By pooling their resources, several jurisdictions were able to create one facility that could efficiently meet all of their needs in the present, as well as the future.

Lack of Public Confidence

CCNO was to be built at the intersection of four rural counties and received a great deal of criticism from people in nearby communities who didn't want a correctional facility in their neighborhoods. The public feared escapes, lowered property values and political turf wars that could cause the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) to come in and take over the facility. They also worried that the center would become a money pit for commissioners. Many sheriffs were concerned that the five sheriffs involved in the regional endeavor were somehow avoiding the responsibility of running their own jails.

Prior to construction, six jurisdictions joined together and combined their resources: five counties (Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas and Williams), and the city of Toledo. Seventeen elected officials and one appointed official formed the commission, with each jurisdiction represented. The politics and agendas were diverse. Each of the pre-existing jails did not meet standards or were under court order. The four rural counties were considered politically conservative and rural, while Lucas County and Toledo were liberal and urban. Would big Lucas County and To-

do swallow up the four rural counties? Would the four rural counties gang up on the big city? Who would win the war?

Long-Term Success

There never was a war. Under the commission's leadership, CCNO opened in July 1990. CCNO's mission is "to protect the public, employees and inmates while operating a cost-effective detention center for Defiance, Fulton, Henry, Lucas and Williams counties and the city of Toledo."

Cooperation and consensus among commission members has been the key to CCNO's success. Each of the 18 members has one vote, no matter what percentage of the budget he or she provides. The sharing of expenses to build and operate CCNO is the thrust of its existence.

There have been no escapes from the facility, and property values in the area have actually increased. The communities support and want inmates working in their neighborhoods; inmates provide community service in more than 15 communities. This joint effort has encouraged other cooperative ventures between the jurisdictions (i.e., landfills, ditch drainage systems, juvenile detention and drug interdiction).

Budget Considerations

CCNO routinely operates under budget and generates sufficient revenue to reduce operating costs from 5 to 12 percent annually, depending on bed utilization. 1996's actual operating cost was lower because bed rentals netted approximately \$1.5 million in revenue. Increased bed utilization by member jurisdictions eliminated large-scale bed

Table 1
CCNO 1997 Budgeted Per Diem vs. Actual Cost Per Diem

	Bed Percentage	CCNO Budgeted	Average CCNO Actual	Jurisdiction Actual
Defiance County	09.35%	42.56	37.44	39.90
Fulton County	08.65%	42.56	37.44	35.42
Henry County	05.86%	42.56	37.44	37.24
Lucas County	31.84%	42.56	37.44	37.11
City of Toledo	35.65%	42.56	37.44	41.53
Williams County	08.65%	42.56	37.44	38.31

Table 2
Full-Service Jails in Ohio vs. CCNO

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Ohio Jail Per Diem*	60.83	54.49	50.88	54.54	56.56
National Jail Per Diem**	47.70	46.97	52.67	55.41	NA
CCNO Budgeted	41.24	41.13	41.79	42.47	42.56
CCNO Actual Cost	34.74	35.19	39.26	34.98	37.44

*As reported by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction

**As reported in the Corrections Yearbook, Jails

rentals in 1996 and 1997. CCNO's 1997 budget was \$9,973,358 for the 642-bed, 184-employee jail.

The six member jurisdictions share proportionately in the cost of operating the facility based on the number of beds each is allocated. Members are billed quarterly for their operating portions. CCNO also produces revenue in a variety of ways, including bed rentals, bed overutilization penalty assessments, inmate telephone system, medical fees for service, pay-to-stay programs, vending machines and interest on accounts. Revenues are credited back to each jurisdiction during a quarterly billing.

In addition, any leftover monies or carryover from the previous year also are included in the net credits. All net credits are proportionally noted in the billing except for bed overutilization charges. Jurisdictions are penalized for exceeding their allotted beds at per diem and a half, or \$65 per day, per bed. Only jurisdictions with empty beds are credited with this revenue.

The commission has set the maximum operating capacity at 90 percent, or 587 beds. An administrative release process also is initiated by jail staff and any jurisdictional courts when that jurisdiction overutilizes beds. These overutilization penalty charges have the potential to eliminate any savings gained through other credits. Formulas, reports and policies enable commission members to know their individual costs. This information also is helpful when considering expansion construction or alternatives to incarceration.

Cost-Effectiveness

Per-diem food costs and medical and dental services are traditional measures of cost-effectiveness in corrections. Contracting for services in jails is very competitive, thus CCNO often enjoys lower prices. However, fear of the unknown often prevents many counties and states from providing services in this way.

Outsourcing is the way of the future. A facility must have a good contract, a provider with a solid history and accountable supervision by facility staff who know and understand the professional standards. Also, contract staff must be and feel a part of the facility team. Table 1 compares CCNO's lower per-diem rates with other jails in Ohio and nationally.

Bidding and outsourcing has resulted in budget savings and increased quality of services. Medical services, food services, commissary, substance abuse programming, psychological counseling and educational services, including vocational training, are all contracted out. The director includes contractors in regular meetings, planning sessions and all in-service training twice per year. All contractors also are included in CCNO's organizational chart.

In 1996, the food bids resulted in a savings of almost \$0.10 per meal from 1995, a savings of approximately \$36,000 annually. In 1997, the per-meal cost was lowered to \$0.789 at CCNO. The average cost at Ohio's full-service jails was \$1.78 per meal, according to an ODRC survey. (See Table 2)

In 1997, medical was budgeted at \$823,764, a \$50,000 savings over 1996. In addition, members collectively set aside \$50,000 for hospital stays and other medical services not provided in-house. Most inmates are court-furloughed when admitted to a hospital, thus making them financially responsible and reducing expenses. Any unused portion of the medical fund is returned as a credit.

Housing and Transportation

Approximately 65 percent of all CCNO inmates are misdemeanants and believed to be low security risks. This is evident in the design, which features 192 cells and 450

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dorm beds. The dorm beds house minimum security (300) and community security (150) or work release and community service. The largest dorm houses 60 inmates, supervised by one correctional officer. The 192 cells house medium, maximum, disciplinary segregation and administrative segregation inmates. The largest medium security-celled unit houses 30 inmates. CCNO also supervises approximately 40 to 60 offenders assigned to house arrest and electronic monitoring, which is funded by the DRC/Community Corrections Act grant funds through the five counties.

CCNO also provides centralized transportation through five buses. Four of these buses are 44-seat Blue Bird buses and the other is a 12-seat minibus. There are nine transportation officers in the department. Bus service is provided three times per day to the rural courts and twice per day to Lucas County, five days per week. On the weekends, a transportation run is made once per day to each participating jurisdiction. This prevents a large number of single transports by deputies and police officers. Sheriffs can concentrate on road patrols and investigating felonies. The sheriffs' deputies supervise felony court inmates and transfer them to the court. Police officers escort and provide security to municipal courts. CCNO's transportation costs are included in its budget.

CCNO has met its mission and will continue to do so, while operating a cost-effective detention center.

Conclusion

CCNO's security assessment, design and direct supervision philosophy has a record of no escapes, riots, hostage situations or suicides in eight years, with operating costs below state and national norms. The average daily population has increased from 547 in 1997 to 589 in the first six

months of 1998. Expanded community correctional programs, such as electronic monitoring, intensive supervision, probation, and construction of a 50-bed, community-based correctional facility for low-level felons will hopefully offset the population growth until after

the year 2000. Serious discussions about expansion of the facility will begin this year among member jurisdictions. In 1996, the original architects designed expansion for approximately 300 additional beds.

CCNO employees use a variety of group techniques to improve operations and security. The commissioners meet four times a year to review the budget in detail and discuss recommended efficiencies. CCNO has met its mission and will continue to do so, while operating a cost-effective detention center.

Jim Dennis is executive director of the Corrections Center of Northwest Ohio, a position he has held since 1993.