CNN crew tapes Lafayette inmates for teen TV news

By Bill Decker
Staff Writer

She started forging checks to pay for drugs. She got caught.

Now she's in jail in Lafayette, unable to see her two pre-school children, unable to tell them where she really is.

They live in Washington state. Once a week, they ask by phone: "Mom, aren't you finished with school yet?"

Her parents know where she is, though: "My father had a heart attack the day I went to court."

• Another Lafayette Parish Correctional Center inmate says he had the beat of everything as a kid: Home, clubs, private school. He even won an athletic scholarship to college.

But he smoked dope, and then he sold dope. And he got away with it for 20 years. Then he was indicted.

At age 45, he's been in jail for two years. He's waiting for sentencing.

"When you come to jail, I own you."

Russel Dugas

Another man shot a policeman who accidentally interrupted an armed robbery. Still a young man, the inmate is doing 23 years.

His family isn't in jail, but "they're doing time, too," he said.

They're members of the LPCC Toastmasters, a public-speaking club that stages inmate-to-kid speeches during Teen Court sessions.

On Monday, they were the subjects of a Cable News Network report.

The CNN crew, including Real News for Kids anchor Jenn Harris and producer Lori Metoyer-Brown, taped the inmates for the cable network story.

Teen Court is the Lafayette Parish program in which a board of peers pass judgment on teenage misdemeanor offenders who plead guilty.

The young offenders agree to sentences that might include restitution, community service or apologies to the victim.

The Toastmasters builds self-esteem for the inmates while giving them the chance to help kids, including the 75 Teen Court kids who came to LPCC Monday. Associate LPCC warden Russell Dugas made his own appeal to the youngsters: "When you come to jail, I own you."