'Boss Ross' says federal court role helped prisons

By JAMES MINTON
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Ross Maggio Jr. said “Cool Hand Luke” starring Paul Newman is his favorite prison movie “because certain aspects of it remind me of Angola when I first went to work up there in the ’60s.”

Maggio said Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, then one of two state prisons, was underfunded, overcrowded, dirty, rundown and dangerous for inmates and employees alike when he arrived as a prison agri-business employee in 1967.

Sexual predators preyed on weaker inmates, most prisoners carried knives for protection, killings were commonplace and inmate cliques and convict guards ran Angola.

“You couldn’t get any work out of the inmates,” said Maggio, who became Angola’s warden shortly after U.S. District Judge E. Gordon West ordered sweeping reforms in June 1975.

Maggio later served as a prison adviser to U.S. District Judge Frank Polozola, who took over the prison case from West.

Maggio had an insider’s view of how the two federal judges greatly influenced Louisiana adult prison operations for nearly 25 years.

The U.S. Congress, complaining of “federal interference” in the running of state prisons, adopted legislation in 1996 designed to curb the authority of federal judges in such cases.

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Ross Maggio Jr., former warden of both Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola and Hunt Correctional Center,20 pauses Monday outside of his home in Slaughter.

Ross Maggio Jr.

2007-2012: District Attorney, Orleans Parish

Campaign contributions: Consultant to public and private corrections agencies and inmate advocates.

Current occupation: Consultant to public and private corrections agencies

Career highlights:

1970-72: Assistant Secretary, Louisiana State Department of Corrections.


1959-64: Court Expert on Prisons and jails, United States District Court for the Middle District of Louisiana.

Advocate graphics

The court order gave us the resources for physical plant construction and hiring new staff. At the same time, we developed a philosophy that didn't exist before that the administration was going to run the prison and not share power with inmate cliques and strong- armers. As common sense as that may seem, that's not always the practice in prison.

Ross Maggio

Advocate staff photo by Mark Sather