New Assumption Parish jail praised by law officials

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NAPOLEONVILLE — The new Assumption Parish jail has been open for a year, but neither time nor experience has diminished the enthusiasm of parish law enforcement officials for the facility.

“I’ve visited parish jails throughout the state, and there’s nothing to compare with what we have here,” said Warden Dickie St. Germain.

The first complement of prisoners moved into the jail in September 1984, according to St. Germain. Since then, more than 1,400 inmates have done time in the parish prison, he said.

The prison, which replaced an antiquated 26-cell facility next to the parish Courthouse in Napoleonville, can accommodate 56 men, women and juveniles in its one-person cells, said St. Germain.

Located on six acres of land in Napoleonville that was formerly used to grow sugarcane, the jail consists of two main cell blocks each containing cells for 24 adult male prisoners. Cells for women and juveniles are located in a different area of the prison.

“This facility is one of the best. Security-wise, it can’t be beat,” St. Germain said.

Construction of the new $2.8 million prison was ordered in 1983 when parish authorities signed a consent decree to settle a federal lawsuit filed by the Louisiana Coalition for Jails and Prisons.

The coalition sued authorities in Assumption and in other parishes to improve prison conditions statewide.

“The other one was a deathtrap,” said Sheriff Anthony G. “Tony” Falterman. “There was only one way out of the old jail.”

The old jail was obsolete. We couldn’t operate from it anymore,” said St. Germain.

Construction of the prison began in March 1983, Falterman said.

The facility was built with funds from the state and the parish, said Falterman. The sheriff’s office obtained a state grant that guaranteed 70 percent state funding, with the rest coming from the parish, he said.

The Police Jury’s share of the cost is being repaid over a 20 years at about $50,000 per year.

Falterman said the jail is modeled roughly after a prison he visited in Rome, Georgia. The design has attracted law enforcement officers from throughout Louisiana, and several jail facilities in other parishes have been modeled after Assumption’s.

“The design is terrific,” said Falterman. “We’re still ironing out the bugs. We’re still in a learning process.”

Although it is superior to the old facility, the new jail is also considerably more expensive to operate, Falterman said. The jail’s utility bill alone runs between $4,000 and $6,000 a month, he said.

Taxpayers get their money’s worth out of the facility through the additional security it provides and the added...
Cells for adult males are housed in groups of six, and each group is equipped with a so-called dayroom that includes a television set and tables for eating.

Although the jail is equipped with a cafeteria, inmate meals are prepared by the Assumption General Hospital in Napoleonville, officials said.

The jail also includes a laundry room, two recreation yards, several holding cells and offices for law enforcement officers. The facility is equipped with central heating and air conditioning.

"The inmates suffer for nothing here. They are treated very well," said St. Germain.

But the inmates are closely scrutinized by prison officials, and every aspect of their daily lives is documented, the warden said.

"We have to for our own protection," St. Germain said.