ANGOLA — Arnold Schwarzenegger he's not, but Louisiana State Penitentiary Warden John Whitley now shares a distinction with the Terminator and other icons of American pop culture.

Featured on the cover of the Russian language America Illustrated's February issue, Whitley joins the ranks of such celebrities as Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone and Clint Eastwood.

He hasn't read all the magazine says about him, however, because his copy is in Russian and he's still awaiting a translation.

America Illustrated, published by the United States Information Agency, distributes about 50,000 Russian language copies per month in Russia and several other states of the former Soviet Union.

The agency publishes another 50,000 copies for Ukrainian readers, USIA spokeswoman Cathy Stearns said.

"I've never been on the cover of a magazine before," Whitley said on Friday.

He had to think a moment before making that statement, however, because Whitley has attracted national and international attention since he took over the state's largest prison in 1990.

Told that the cover caption describes him as "an unnoticed American hero," Whitley replied, "Oh, come on..."

Publicity about his low-key but effective management style probably peaked in December 1992, when he was the subject of a glowing profile in Time magazine, but the positive fallout from writer Jill Smolowe's article continues.

The article, "Bringing Decency into Hell," caught the attention of America Illustrated's editors, who got permission to reprint it.

"In the last few years since Glasnost, there has been a great influx of American culture into the former Soviet Union, but for the most part, it's what we consider frivolous," said editor George Clack.

A public opinion poll revealed that Schwarzenegger and Stallone are the two most popular Americans in the former Soviet Union, an editor's note in the current edition said.

"This news doesn't bring joy to American intellectuals, who object to the glorification of violence and the idea that 'might makes right,' which shone brightly in the films 'Rambo' and 'Terminator' with these stars," the editors said.

Much to the surprise of America Illustrated's editors, however, their readers said in another survey, "Tell us how ordinary Americans live," Clack said.

Because the magazine's distribution depends largely on newsstand sales, the editors often feature celebrities on the covers.

But this time, the magazine features Whitley, Vicki Whiteford of Los Angeles, the 23-year-old owner of a delivery service; and Gene Finnel, a veterinarian in an Illinois rural area.

The Whiteford article describes the

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obstacles she overcame and the satisfaction she experiences from running her own business.

The magazine’s Russian and Ukrainian readers are hungry for information on small businesses, Clack said.

Finnel’s experience “confirms that in life there are greater values than fame and riches,” the magazine said.

The main reason for including Whitley in the trio of American heroes has to do with Russian hunger for articles on human rights, Clack said.

“The concept of human rights, much less prisoners’ rights, is not that well understood,” he said.

The reprinted Time article gives “specific, vivid examples of an aspect of human rights,” Clack said.

“I think it’s great that a Louisiana prison warden is profiled in an international magazine,” Whitley said.

“It shows that the magazine feels Louisiana and the way Louisiana handles its prison system is of interest to people in other nations.”

The magazine is just now reaching Russian and Ukrainian readers, and USIA officials don’t yet know how they will respond to the Whitley cover story.

“We’re very curious to see what they say,” Clack said.