

He fights crime from behind a desk

Simmons helps clients 'make it'

By RICH BRUER
Of the Emerald

"It's very rewarding to see my clients making it in society. Sometimes I receive a letter from a former client thanking me for the help I gave him in resolving his problems. That makes me feel good."

Sound like a doctor or a lawyer or maybe a psychiatrist speaking? Perhaps a synthesis of the three would best describe George Simmons, a parole and

in the Air Force after high school and graduated from EWU in 1976.

Inspired by advice from several professors, Simmons decided to enter the parole and probation officer field. After a six-month practicum in Spokane he moved to Oregon.

He spent one year working as a corrections officer at a state work-release center in Salem before he assumed his present position as an adult parole and

probation officer's work, one need only imagine the mammoth size the Lane County Jail would have to be without parole or probation.

Simmons describes his duties as basically twofold; primarily to protect the community from any further criminal behavior by his client and second, to assist his client in making a smooth transition into mainstream society.

Most of Simmons' working day is spent on "office work." He spends much of his time reviewing monthly reports submitted to him by his clients. These reports inform Simmons of the client's employment status and state whether the client has been arrested in the last month.

At other times, he completes pre-sentence investigations that document a convicted criminal's background, including his or her past criminal record and lifestyle. Simmons recommends to the judge whether the criminal should be released on probation. He says that 90-95 percent of the time the judge concurs with the recommendation.

Occasionally Simmons makes unannounced evening visits to his clients' homes, "to catch them in their natural state," he says. He rarely sees something he shouldn't.

Simmons has no "typical" clients. Of his 62 clients, 61 are male and most are white, lack a marketable skill and are between the ages of 18 and 30.

Each client is treated individually. Depending on the client's problem — such as alcohol, marital or mental health — each program is "tailor-made" to fit the client's needs.

"There are different methods of treatment for each individual," he says. "Just as a doctor can't give a shot of penicillin to every patient and ex-

pect them to be cured, I can't prescribe the same treatment for every client."

Simmons will often direct his clients to medical, legal, vocational or counseling agencies in the county.

Simmons says he tries to be "firm, fair and friendly" with his clients, and views himself as a mixture of police and welfare officer.

He tries to relax his clients, especially during the initial visit. Some are on probation for the first time and are tense because they don't know what to expect.

Only a small percentage of his clients fail to take advantage of the services the office provides; those who don't usually find after a period in prison that probation was a better alternative, he says.

The majority of Simmons' clients complete their probationary period successfully. "They should," he says. "We

give more help to them than the average citizen would get." He will often help his client find work or get money to return to school.

Although he is not advocating the abolition of prisons, Simmons says he would like more inmates released on probation and a wider use of probation centers. He believes that doing so could help alleviate much of the congestion the jails are experiencing now.

He finds his work satisfying but admits to certain pressures. The stresses of dealing with the unexpected, report deadlines and people's problems take their toll.

"You have to have a pretty good wife in this business," Simmons says. Although fame and fortune are wanting, pictures of his wife and two children on his desk and the wall behind remind him of his support at home.

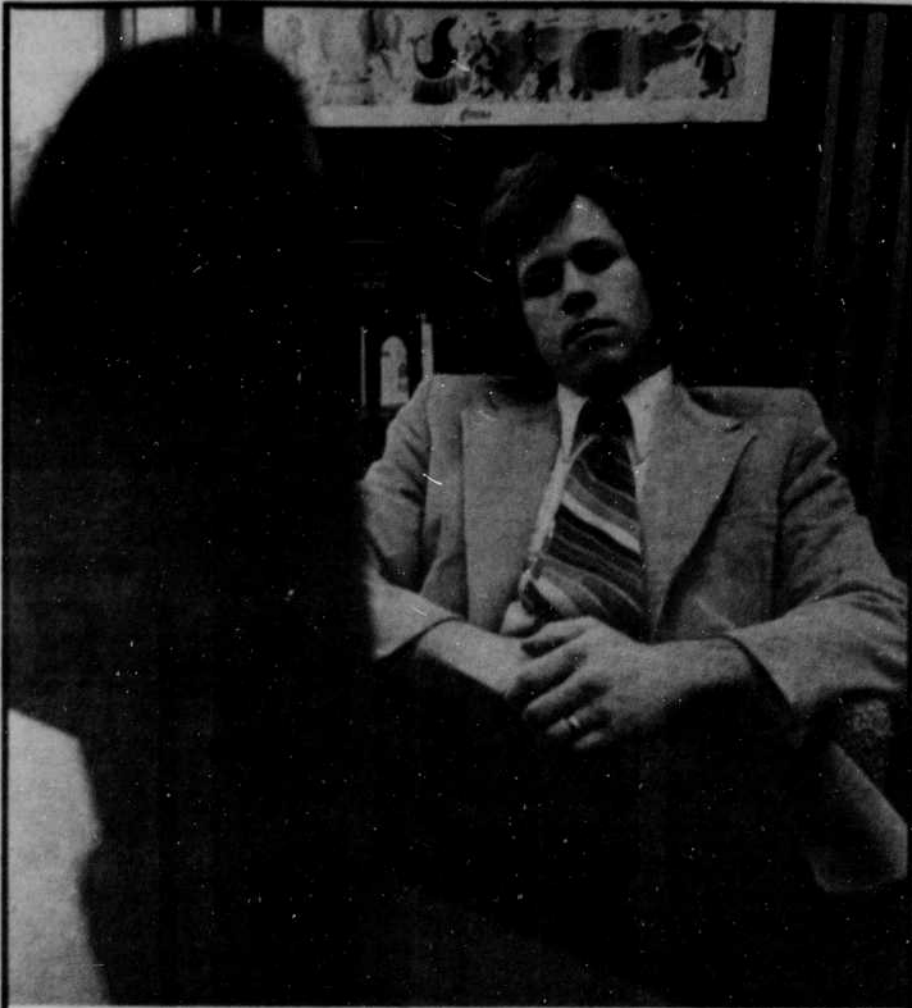


Photo by Bob Baker

George Simmons, a state parole and probation officer, finds his job unglamorous but sometimes rewarding. His jobs are helping some people find their way back into society after a prison term and helping make sure those people don't repeat their crimes.

probation officer for the Oregon State Corrections Division.

While society rewards its doctors, lawyers and psychiatrists with handsome paychecks and high status, George Simmons sits in an office marked only by two wall dividers and crowded into the third floor of Eugene's state office building.

There, he marks time by either staring up at Skinner's Butte or confronting society's least favorite element, the criminal.

Simmons' interest in human behavior prompted his decision to study sociology at Eastern Washington University in Spokane. Simmons spent four years

probation officer for Lane County two years ago. Simmons is responsible for handling cases from the Cottage Grove area.

A glamorous profession it isn't. Simmons will be the first to say there are "very few pats on the back." Only a small minority of people appreciate the work of a parole and probation officer because society is generally unaware of what he and others like him do, Simmons says.

"You don't see parole and probation officer stories on television," he jokes.

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