

Gaines aides concerned with security

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SALEM -- The numbers are 10 to 1 but the odds of a "blow up" or severe injury rise with the temperature in Gaines Cottage at Fairview Hospital and Training Center.

There are 50 to 60 residents in Fairview's security cottage. The residents got there because they are rapists, arsonists, murderers, self-abusers or disruptive in addition to being mentally retarded, the reason they are in Fairview in the first place. Work at Gaines is every bit as dangerous as at a correctional facility or in a security ward at Oregon State Hospital. Most, if not all, of the psychiatric aides at Gaines have been off work for some time because of a resident-inflicted injury.

To protect the residents from themselves; to protect residents from one another and to provide some sort of training program are the psychiatric aides, who numbered as few as three one day while a small group of residents and aides were at the coast on a field trip.

The residents and some of the staff came to Gaines Cottage from Prigg about three years ago when it was turned over to the Correctional Institution.

Security is what Gaines Cottage is all about. Yet a reclassification to psychiatric security aide for the psych aides who work there has been held up for years. The Executive Department Personnel Division agrees that the workers ought to be security aides, but the matter has not yet been brought by the Mental Health Division to the Legislative Emergency Board. The current reclassification request, which has been in the works since September, is on the July E-Board agenda.

There's more involved here than just danger, though there's danger aplenty. It's more than a matter of justice in terms of pay and classification, but that's part of it. The psych aides were not blind when they took the job; all said they

found the work interesting when they talked with The OSEA News.

There's really a broader concern whether Gaines Cottage, the building itself, is prepared for the job that is expected of it. "This cottage wasn't intended for security," said Jon Carter, who started at Prigg and who has been with Fairview for nearly three and a half years. In the dormitories on the second floor, the high risk residents are just a few feet away from the lowest functioning residents. Somewhere in those dorms on a recent night, a six-foot, 180-pound resident raped a 16-year old resident. "You're doing damn good if you can just keep track of all you're required to keep track of," said Carter.

With the possibility of a patient "blow up" ever-present, the psych aides "ears are open for anything," said Jerry Poe. Carter describes it differently: "Fearful's a good word." Psych aide Richard Ross wants a better definition of aides' rights. While he considers Fairview superintendent Jerry McGee a good administrator, he's concerned about the legal implications of the work he does. The impression one gets from talking with a number of aides working in Gaines, is that they feel very vulnerable. They are in a dangerous occupation but the law appears to be against them even if they are trying to protect themselves from harm.

These aides, as perhaps aides everywhere, are exhausted at the end of the day. "It's half physical and half mental strain," says Richard Ross. "You have to deal physically with the residents," he says, "and the manipulation factor is incredible."

But the manipulation a veteran aide like Poe might feel is nothing compared with what befalls the new employees. Carter explains: "The new staff are more of a target. The residents practice working on their 'shams'. It'll work once so they wait for the new staff."

Lately some of the new staff at Fairview are in CETA positions. About the

time the CETAs are familiar with the operation of the cottage, you lose them," Carter said. But even for the rest of the staff, their training for their job that they have received in state service has been little more than their orientation.

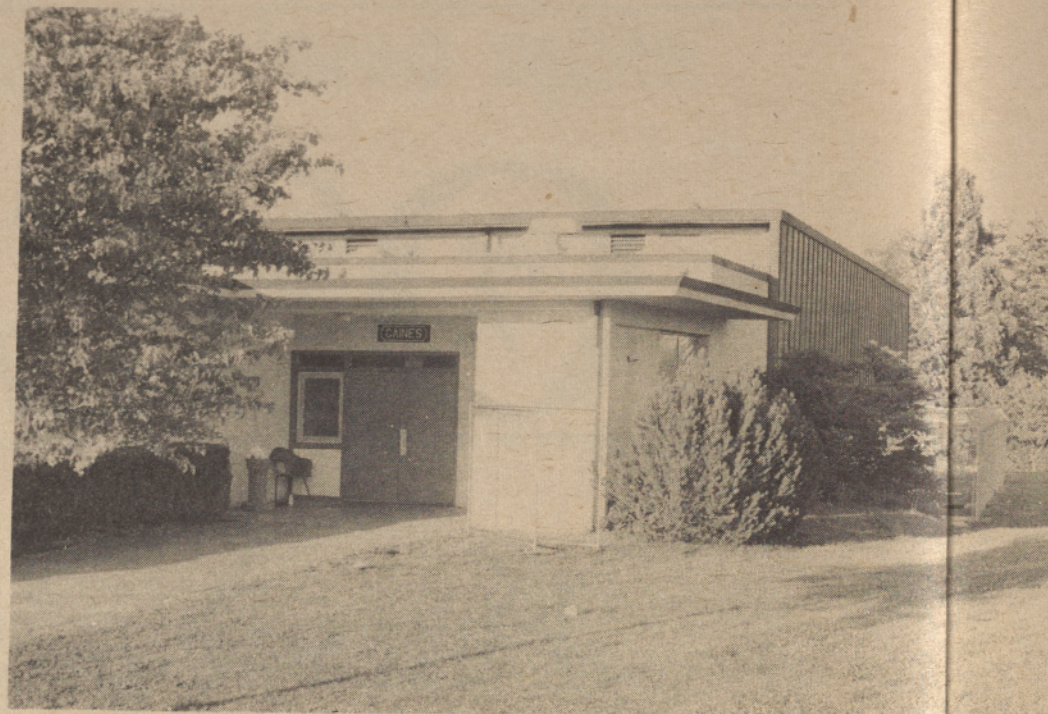
Carter received most of his counseling training, for example, in the military.

"Residents can't be helped at present staffing ratios," Carter believes. At Oregon State Hospital, the patients are in groups of three or four, he said. And there's not much help from the Fairview psychology department. "We share a psychiatrist four hours a week with two other cottages," he said.

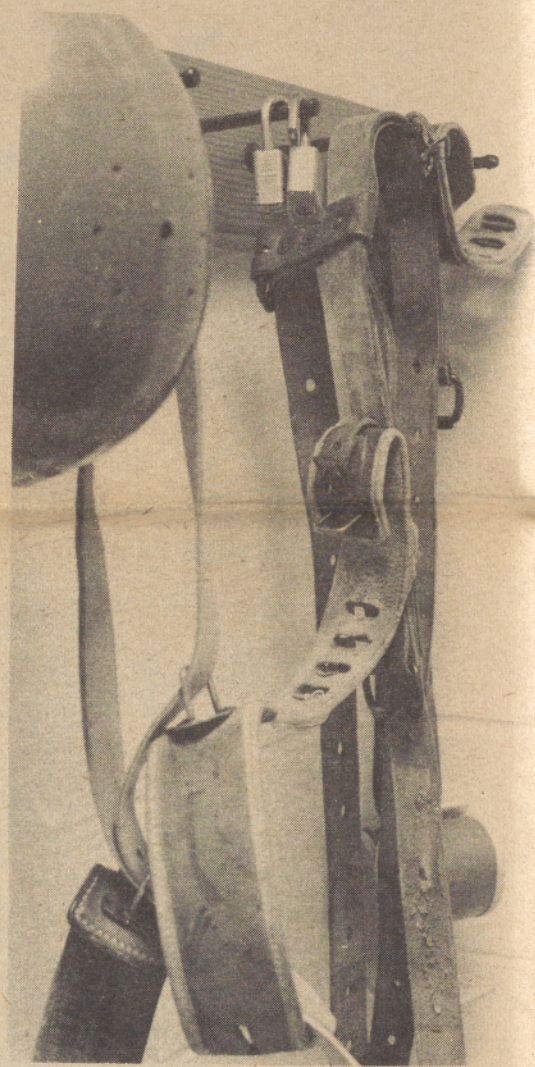
Still, every aide who spoke recently with The OSEA News found his job interesting and considered the time he spent directly with the residents to be the most important. Ross said the job is "very rewarding." Also in each case, the aides preferred working at a security cottage to one of the others at Fairview. Again Ross: "There are twice as many things to know and learn. It's more professional." Carter says it's "interesting. Working with the residents themselves is enjoyable."

But they keep coming back to a concern for security. Poe believes a beeper system is necessary to call another aide in case of a "blow up." "Even more staffing would not change our mind about security," he said. "We need more training." Poe also would like to see cameras in the cottage so that the charge aide could know what is happening everywhere in the cottage from the office.

With the reclassification to psychiatric security aide will come more pay. That's always a consideration. Carter who says he's going to "retire" in a few months to try his hand at woodworking, would only make \$70 less on unemployment than he is taking home now.



Gaines is Fairview's security cottage



Restraints such as these are used less at Gaines

Gaines Cottage seethes with nervous energy

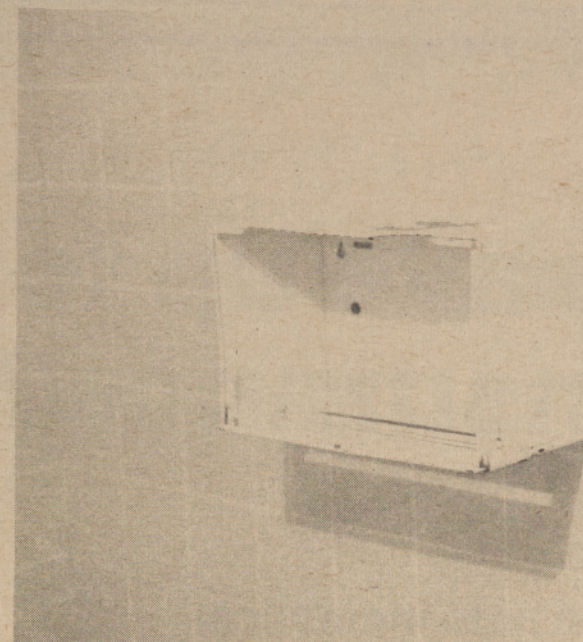
(Because of the mental condition of Fairview residents, the word "crime" and any crimes mentioned by name must be regarded as alleged crime. More importantly, however, it must not be inferred that all mentally retarded people, or even all Gaines residents, are inclined toward "criminal" activity.)

SALEM -- The self-abusers are fairly easy to tell -- they either are wearing a football helmet or their forehead and the bridge of their nose is a mass of scar tissue, like a punched-out boxer.

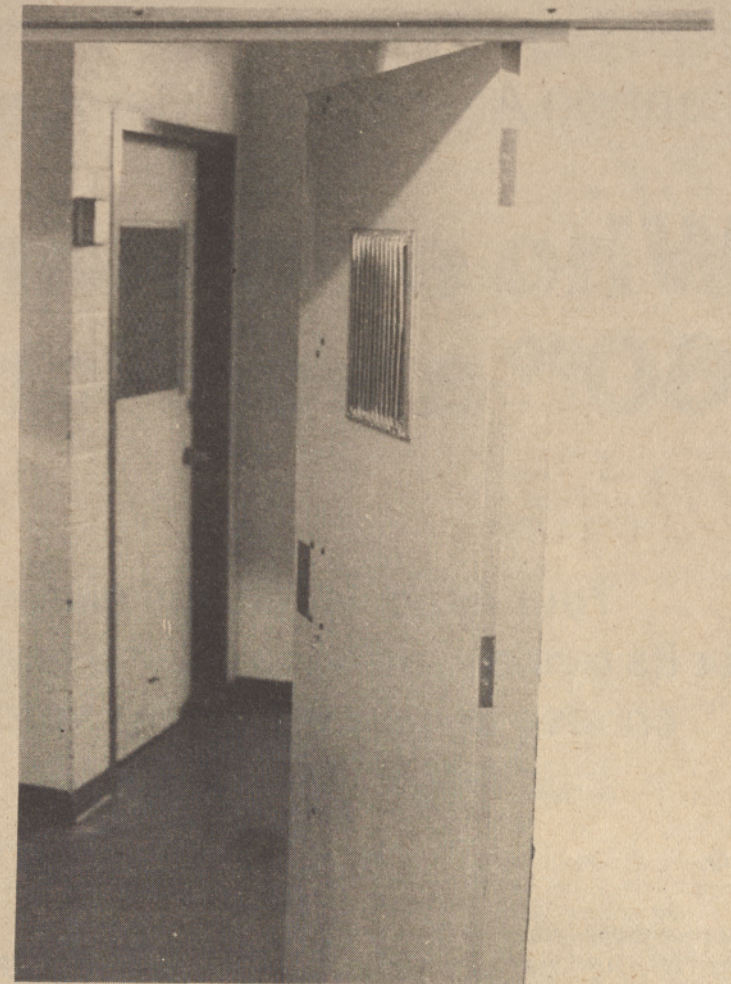
It's a little hard to make any other general statement about Fairview residents from only two hours with the group at Gaines Cottage. The impression the lay person gets from his first exposure to Gaines is the high level of nervous energy. Many of the residents

appear to be continually chattering. A stranger in their midst provides a new person to tell their story to. The arsonists want to ask you if you heard about the fires they started, etc. There is a considerable pride in self. One also will hear residents muttering "I wish I were dead."

The outsider must also admire the psychiatric aides for the amount of badgering they take in a day. Residents continually are insisting on attention: Do this; look at that; help me here; talk to me now. A recent visitor to Gaines didn't see any of the outbursts the residents are capable of and their reason for being in Gaines. With that in mind, one was struck by the difference between inquiring and seemingly benign people all around and the locks, thick leather straps and the football helmet in the restraining room.



A broken paper towel dispenser can be a danger



This is the "quiet room" from the inside looking out

McGee: Reclass impact will help campus-wide

Fairview superintendent Jerry McGee makes two distinctions between himself and his predecessor: First, he realizes that Gaines Cottage aides think he has come down especially hard on the resident abuse problem, and, secondly, he favors the reclassification to security aide that the workers are seeking.

"The Personnel Division study clearly reported that they are working out of class," McGee recently told The OSEA News, "and on numerous occasions I have personally verified it."

"The administration in the past has resisted the reclassification," McGee said, "but that has not been the case since I have been here. The question I have is how are we going to pay for it? The aides have been due the money since last October. It would be extremely, extremely difficult to take it out of our budgetary hide."

If the reclass is approved, however, "it

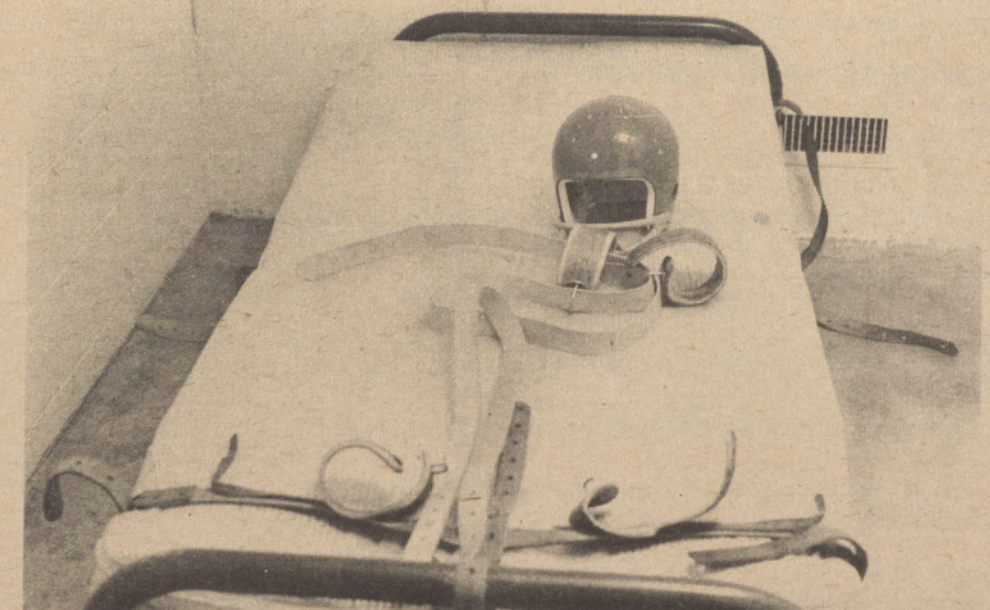
clearly will make an impact across the campus. Without any facts, I would say it would reduce turnover. That would allow added training. We would be able to keep staff, train them better and recruit more selectively. From a management standpoint, this will be important."

McGee mentioned such subjects as advanced behavior modification and reinforcement theory as subjects for additional training.

He also acknowledged the aides' concern about their own protection. He would like to improve the aides' breakaway and self-defense skills. "They're in a double-whammy of trying to protect themselves without getting into an abuse situation," McGee said. "Originally the staff on Gaines was concerned I was coming down real hard on the abuse problem. I wanted to tell the Gaines aides 'I'm not coming down on you. I'm constant about abuse wherever I find it.'"



Gaines residents sleep in dorms like this



A bunks, straps and helmet are needed during some "blow ups"