

Officer Offers Hope Through Art

By SHERIDAN HILL
Chronicle Assistant Editor

Leon V. McCullough may not look like a gardener, but he is cultivating seeds of a new life in inmates at the Forsyth County Jail. As a detention officer for the sheriff's department, his job is to "detain" the prisoners and shuffle them from one appointed stop to the other, and to assist with their needs at mealtime. But the time he enjoys most is when the time clock has stopped for the day and he returns to the jail as a volunteer, bringing art supplies and words of encouragement to the inmates.

McCullough, who has a BS in art education from A&T University, has been unable to find a job with the city/county schools, and began working as a detention officer about two years ago. The idea to get inmates involved in art came to him after he observed the amount of idle time they had on their hands, and

the intricate drawings and doodlings they made on letters they mailed out. That, and his own love of art, convinced him to get started on the project he named "Plant A Seed."

"When you plant a seed, if it hits on good soil, you have a little plant coming up, growing in a new direction," says McCullough. "I want the inmates realize they can do something with the gifts they've got."

Several times a week, McCullough makes rounds through the jail, bringing drawing paper and colored pencils to anyone who is interested.

So far, he has worked with about 65 inmates in the last few months, since the project got started.

"I sometimes talk to them about composition, but I leave it open to them to express themselves. I tell them, 'Go into your inner self and put it on paper, whatever you

feel inside.'" For the most part, the prisoners are left to express themselves as they please, but interests vary, and he says he asks them to stay away from creating art that is sexually explicit.

"I tell them I don't want anything out of Playboy, but to come out with something they want to express." Supplies are donated by local companies.

The inmates art received its first public debut last week in a show in the Arts Council boardroom.

"It really motivated them when I said I was going to have an art exhibit," said McCullough.

"It puts something else on their mind. It leans them in a positive direction. You can see the sparkle in their eyes when I tell them their work is good. I want them to realize they are still somebody with something to give the community."



David Holley proudly displays a drawing he made in jail.

They're still connected, good or bad, and it might as well be in a good way."



Long-time postal worker Eddie Coker was surrounded by friends and co-workers at his retirement party last week. 68 year-old Coker started work with the post office in 1964 after serving in the military. "We will miss him," said his friends

Meredith Remembers Integration

By JACK ELLIOTT JR

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Thirty years later, James Meredith says the integration he spearheaded at the University of Mississippi has been a mixed blessing and meant little to him financially.

On Sept. 30, 1962, Meredith was the first black to enroll at Ole Miss. Riots erupted on the campus and in Oxford, the quiet north Mississippi hamlet that had been home to the university for over a century.

Two men were killed — one a French journalist and the other a local man — and federal troops and state guardsmen were called in to keep order. The turmoil thrust Ole Miss, Meredith and the South in the national spotlight, and for many it became an indelible memory of the racial turmoil of the 1960's.

"You know how much money I've made since Ole Miss? In whole, \$81,000. I'm eligible to retire with \$240 a month. Now, that's my reality from Ole Miss," Meredith said Wednesday as he campaigned in Mississippi's 4th congressional district.

"Everybody tells me all my life how brave I was and how proud they are of me. (U.S. Sen.) Jesse Helms was the only man to give me a job in 30 years," Meredith said.

Meredith, who has a law degree from Columbia University, worked as a special assistant to Helms, R-N.C., for nearly two years.

Bishop Duncan Gray of the Episcopal church was a preacher at the First Episcopal Church in Oxford when Meredith integrated the school.

The night of the integration, after hearing President John F. Kennedy's address on television, Gray and a friend traveled to the university to do what they could to thwart the violence.

Many of the rioters were "thugs" from out of town, Gray said, and many more were from out of state.

"The real dregs of society

were showing up — bus-loads of them," he said.

There was talk in February 1962 that Meredith would enroll in the spring semester and Gray said he started preaching on nonviolence and restraint, as well as acceptance.

Meredith, now 59, doesn't see himself as the darling of the liberal politicians and organizations who labeled him a hero for breaking the color barrier in Mississippi and kicking the civil rights struggle into high gear.

In addition to working for Helms in 1990 and part of 1991, Meredith endorsed former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke for governor of Louisiana and president.

"In 1960, my enemy was the white supremacists. I joined forces with these liberals (the NAACP, politicians and others)," Meredith

said Wednesday. "Now my enemies are the liberal elite, who have made Mississippi a whipping boy for decades."

Gerald Walton, associate vice chancellor for academic affairs, was starting his first year as an English professor when Meredith entered Ole Miss.

Walton said the sentiments among almost all the faculty at the school were strongly in favor of the integration, though there were a few holdouts determined to preserve the school's segregationist history.

"My view was that many of my fellow Southerners were still wrongheaded about the issue of equality of the races," he said.

It took 20,000 federal troops to help Meredith enter Ole Miss.

"I never felt bitter about anything. I don't know anyone who has had the life that I have

had. No one," Meredith said. "I have had all my life (to do) all that I wanted to do. I don't know of anybody else who has had that."

Meredith appears to be throwing everything into the 1992 political campaign, running as an independent in a four-candidate field that includes incumbent Democratic U.S. Rep. Mike Parker. Mississippi has one black congressman, Democrat Mike Espy in the 2nd district.

"In 1960, when I came home to visit from the Army, the bus there was a curtain drawn and I had to stand behind the curtain," he said. "That's gone now and that makes living so much better. You got the friendliest people ... they get along better than anywhere in the world. You go to shopping centers and in the stores you don't see that animosity (like before)."

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