

Doyle touts business approach to jail

By Randy Patrick
WinCity Voices

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Frank Doyle already had retired after 32 years as a police officer and managed his own landscaping business before he was elected Clark County jailer in 2014. Now he's seeking his fourth term against a challenger who is also a former police officer but has not worked in corrections. Chris Grant works for a company that provides equipment and software for regional offices of the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Doyle believes he's the better candidate because he won't need any on-the-job training. He's been managing the detention center effectively, he says, and was chosen by his peers to serve on the board of directors of the Kentucky Jailers Association for the past decade.

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Frank "Squatty" Doyle, Clark County jailer, is seeking another term in that position.

(Submitted) Doyle has tried to operate the Clark County Detention Center like a business. He has created income by bringing in prisoners from other counties, as well as state and federal inmates.

He has also saved the county a great deal of money by having prisoners take care of county property — mowing lawns, removing snow, salting sidewalks, and cleaning up the fairgrounds and

animal shelter — as well as doing the jail's own laundry and food preparation.

"Since I've been in office . . . it's a little over \$26 million that we've generated, and we're getting better at it every year," Doyle said.

The inmate work-release program is good for the county because it saves money, but it's also good for the inmates because they learn job skills and responsibility, Doyle says.

"They get in here and get [themselves] straightened out," he said.

Doyle believes that rehabilitation works because he's seen people leave better than when they came in. For some, it's the first time they've been free of drugs or alcohol. They get GED classes, Moral Reconation Therapy (MRT) training. MRT is a cognitive-behavioral treatment system developed in the 1980s by Dr. Gregory Little and Dr. Kenneth Robinson, for prison populations resistant to standard counseling.

The facility also makes voluntary religious services available to inmates who desire it, offered by outside organizations.

"It's changed some lives," said Deputy Ernie Sammons, who was with Doyle when he sat for this interview.

That day, they had inmates weeding and mulching plant beds at the World War II and Korean Veterans Memorial.

Doyle, 69, who goes by the nickname "Squatty," came here from Lexington in 1979 to work for the Winchester Police Department and bought a house in Verna Hills. He worked nights, took classes during the day, and graduated from the Department of Criminal Justice Training at Eastern Kentucky University.

At one time, he considered going to the Kentucky State Police to be a dog handler, but by that time, he no longer qualified for the KSP academy because he was older than 35.

After he retired from the city police force, Doyle got his first experience in corrections work as a deputy for Jailer Ray Sabbatine at the Fayette County Detention Center in Lexington. He worked there for three years, eventually training other deputies.

"It's a day-and-night difference" between being a police officer and a jailer, he remarked.

Doyle also owned his own business for about 15 years, doing

landscaping, lawn care, excavation, and demolition. After he sold it, he stayed on for another year to ensure a smooth transition. Then before the 2014 election, he learned that Clark County Jailer Bobby Stone wasn't going to run again, so he decided to seek the position.

He had never been involved in politics before, he said, but he would give it a try. "I jumped in and got my feet wet, and they're still wet," he said with a grin.

Doyle is one of the few Democrats still in office in Clark County. Grant is a Republican. Doyle said he has enjoyed the political life, including attending local events.

"It's something or other that just kind of grows on you," he said. "It's giving back to the community."

Running the jail, however, is a "big operation," he said.

Currently, there are about 260 inmates incarcerated in the Clark County lockup. That means 700 to 800 meals per day and plenty of laundry.

Finding the right balance between local and non-local prisoners isn't easy.

The county is fully responsible for paying to house and care for county inmates. The county gets a per diem rate for state and federal inmates, but unless they're transferred to the county jail from somewhere else, the county gets no state or federal funding until they are sentenced.

And to bring in more money, the jailer will also accept inmates from other counties if there is room enough for them.

"I've had as many as 300 in here, but it gets a little tight," Doyle said.

What many people don't understand, the jailer explained, is that having more inmates from other places doesn't cost the county money; rather, it saves money.

What's hard to predict is what medical costs will be. Sammons said that for three years the county had an inmate from Mexico who was in the country illegally and was on dialysis. He cost the county up to \$140,000 a year. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) wouldn't accept him because he had county charges.

Food is also a huge expense, and the jail is required to provide a certain caloric intake per prisoner and three meals per day.

"We couldn't raise our own garden and serve the food as cheap as they're doing it because of the

amount of food that they buy," Doyle said, referring to the suppliers.

And mechanical malfunctions, such as the central air conditioning unit he had to replace not long ago, can blow a big hole in the budget.

According to the County Judge-Executive's Office, the Fiscal Court provides about \$2 million toward the jail's current budget of \$4.5 million. That's down some from the last fiscal year.

That isn't unusual. Although local jails bring in some money, nearly all of them have to be subsidized by their county governments.

Doyle said that of 73 jails in Kentucky, only three of them operate "in the black" because of special circumstances. Oldham County's jail, for example, depends heavily on federal inmates from the Louisville metropolitan area.

In recent years, there have been disagreements between the jailer and county officials over what the county's contribution should be. Doyle and Sammons, the finance director, recall that there was even talk of

closing the jail. But even if it were shut down, state requirements would still have to be met. There has to be a booking operation for inmates. The county must pay to transport them to other jails. They are still responsible for their medical bills and other costs.

They've run the numbers and learned that it can be more expensive to not have a jail than to have one.

And cutting funding sharply can have consequences as well, Doyle said. If a detention center doesn't have adequate personnel, the state and federal governments will remove their inmates from the facility, and then the jail has no income, only expenses.

Doyle is not alone in his frustration about state funding for state inmates. As a member of the Kentucky Jailers Association, he pushed for legislation earlier this year that would have increased the per diem rate the state pays to house its inmates. The bill also would have compensated county jails retroactively when state inmates are given credit for time served. But that legislation died in



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committee.

Doyle said he currently gets only \$35 per day for each state inmate, whereas inmates are housed in state facilities for \$125 per day. The jailer said the state saves more than \$200 million by letting counties keep its inmates.

"They're putting the cost back on these small counties, which is not right," he said.

Doyle said he hopes the proposal will be back on the agenda when the legislature meets again to consider its budget. He hopes the county judge-executives' and magistrates' associations join the jailers in pushing for its passage.

Doyle and his wife, the former Sheila Meadows, have one adult daughter, Chelsea Beard.

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