

Throughout the United States, the name "Huntsville" is most often equated with **executions**.

Visions of Death Row and **Old Sparky** (the electric chair in use until 1964) abound in conjunction with the mention of Huntsville prisons.

But while the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (**TDCJ**) does carry out its inmate death sentences in Huntsville, the executions are just a small part of the function it performs for the state of Texas.

"We take the **inmates**, educate them and provide them with vocational skills so that when they're released back into the community they won't re-offend," said Michelle Lyons, TDCJ public information officer.

There are seven **prison units** in Huntsville and the surrounding areas-- Wynne, Byrd, Huntsville (Walls), Holliday, Goree, Ellis and Estelle. Together, these units house approximately 13,416 male inmates.

The Holliday and Byrd units also serve other purposes than just housing inmates. Holliday is a transfer unit. Byrd is

a diagnostic center. Officials take the new inmates and look at their **education**, background, family history and medical concerns to determine which unit will best fit them, Lyons said.

Once assigned to a unit, inmates provide services for the community such as trash pick-up and site **construction**. They will also be helping to prepare the site for the new Huntsville aquatic center, Lyons said.

"In all communities where we have units, we try to be good **neighbors**," she said.

In addition to helping better the community, inmates are given opportunities to further their educations and gain vocational experience. **Windham** is the prison school district. It employs about 188 educators.

"Education is such an integral part of releasing the prisoners," Lyons said. "They can get a job, **earn money** and not go back to a life of crime."

A **typical day** for an inmate begins around 3:30 or 4 in the morning, when breakfast is served. **Work or school** begins for them around 5 a.m.

"Inmates who are able to work are **expected to work**," Lyons said. The inmates can perform various jobs such as working the fields, laundry department or kitchens. Some inmates also perform **custodial duties** and work in offices.

Lunch is served around 10:30 a.m., with a return to work or school until **dinner** at 4 p.m.

Time in the evening is usually reserved for inmates to be able to take part in **recreational activities**. "Allowing inmates to participate in sports not only keeps them fit (cutting down on medical costs), but also gives them an incentive to follow **prison rules**," Lyons said.

"Lights out" time varies, depending on the specific unit's policy.

Death row is actually located at the **Polunsky Unit** in Livingston. Inmates are housed in individual cells measuring 60 square feet. Death row inmates are allowed to perform **recreational activities** alone. They also have access to reading, writing and legal materials.

In 1977, **lethal injection** was

adopted as the Texas method of execution. The injections consist of three drugs which work together to kill the offender. The cost per execution is **\$86.08**.

Crimes eligible for a death sentence are murders committed in conjunction with another felony such as kidnapping, burglary or sexual assault. The murders of a public safety officer or an individual under six years old are also **grounds for execution**.

If a death sentence is to be carried out, the inmate is transported on the day of execution from the Polunsky Unit to the Huntsville (**Walls**) Unit.

Last year, Huntsville had about 23 executions, Lyons said.

Execution dates are set by the individual courts, so the Huntsville units have no say in when death sentences are going to be **carried out**. "That's why we can have two executions on one night," she said.

Currently, TDCJ employs about **3,364 workers** in the Huntsville area, helping to contribute to Walker County's low unemployment rate, Lyons said.

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