

# Detention center focuses on education

▼ **SAFETY:** Program tries to get youths to find paths other than criminal activity

By Lindsay Redifer  
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CALDWELL — The Southwest Idaho Juvenile Detention Center is more than a place to house young offenders. It provides a chance for them to turn their lives around.

Director Steven Jett said education programs aim to move young people into path toward success. As a result, the center reports that six of 10 offenders housed there do not fall back to criminal activity after they're released.

The average daily population at the center has held steady. For 2002, it was 45.023, about the same as 2001's 45.043.

Jett thinks a climate of respect is essential when dealing with young people.

"Our whole program is based on respect," he said, "and we demand respect back."

The detention center director shared an anecdote to illustrate his point.

"I asked one kid, 'What would you do if I came in your house and spit on the floor?' And he said, 'I'd shoot you,'" Jett recalled. "And I said, 'That's fine. It's your house. But now we're in my house, and this is how we play.'"

**"I never have anyone say to me that it really helped them when we punished them or restrained them, but almost all of them say that the school here was the reason they got out."**

— **Steven Jett,**

director of the Southwest Idaho Juvenile Detention Center

Students who think their classes at traditional high school are strict would find even tougher rules at the juvenile detention center.

No talking or eye-contact is allowed and the punishment for any broken rule is removal from class and time spent in "lock-down" or in their cell.

Last week, students in one classroom silently read newspapers, the only noise being the occasional deep breath. One young woman turned and peeked at Jett while he stood behind the group, then quickly went back to her paper.

But the environment works to get some troubled kids to focus on their studies. And education is a ticket to a different life.

"Once they get a taste of success," Jett said, "then they get hun-

gry for it."

Jett said one inmate has advanced through several grade levels during his sentence.

The center has enough room to house all the juvenile offenders sent there, credited in part to an expansion. "Now I don't have to kick anybody out or just let them go," Jett said.

Jett said he occasionally sees kids he has worked with in the center after they have been released and returned to public school. He said they are normally happy to see him and want to tell him about what's going on in their lives.

"I never have anyone say to me that it really helped them when we punished them or restrained them," Jett said, "but almost all of them say that the school here was the reason they got out."