

Inmates lack space, privacy for visitation

By Kirstin Swanson
Staff Reporter

In 1986, Marion Holmes, a 39-year-old maximum security prisoner, was married in the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

He has never spent a private moment with his wife since their marriage, and he is allowed only one short kiss and a hug at the beginning and end of each weekly visit.

The Prisoners' Rights Committee is trying to get private visitation approved. But Holmes said he doubts the committee will ever succeed.

Currently, Sen. Tim Hall of Omaha is in the process of appropriating \$250,000 from the state's General Fund to expand the visiting area.

Holmes said the 50-by-100-foot visiting lounge gets "pretty crowded" during evening visitation hours and often another room has to be opened.

At an October hearing, prisoners told a legislative committee that inadequate space for visitation resulted in overcrowding and a significant lack of privacy. The prisoners also said there is not

enough room for visiting children to play.

A sign on the door of the visiting area says that the capacity for the room is 335. However, Sonny Pittman, a prisoner since 1981, said the room is overcrowded with 100 people.

Pittman said the prisoners proposed private visitation in 1985 but were told by prison officials that it would "counter rehabilitative goals."

In 1986, the Wyoming State Penitentiary set up trailers in the prison yard that are used for up to 72 hours of private visitation. This is ultimately what the prisoners at the Nebraska State Penitentiary would like, Pittman said.

Pittman said the biggest problem with not having private visitation for married prisoners is that their marriages don't last, and when the prisoner is released he doesn't have a relationship to return to. This leads to the ex-convict's return to the prison, Pittman said.

Other stringent rules exist in the visitation room, Pittman said. Offenders must remain seated except to use the restroom or get a drink of water. Security guards are on hand



J.P. Caruso/Daily Nebraskan

The Holmes family (from left, Kizzie, Barb, Brandon and Marion) spend time together during visiting hours at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

to reprimand prisoners who don't follow these rules. A visit may be terminated if the prisoner refuses to abide by the rules set.

Holmes said his wife, Barb, and

two children visit him as often as they are allowed to, which is once a week. Holmes said he wishes they could visit more often.

The Prisoner's Rights Commit-

tee has been working for five years to improve visitation in the prison system.

"Although it's a start," Pittman said, "it's not all we hoped for."

Snowball fight prompts committee formation

By Mary Nell Westbrook
Senior Reporter

The "Great Snowball Fight" in November that caused about \$10,000 worth of damage spurred the creation of a new committee to establish better rapport between residence hall and Greek students.

James Griesen, vice chancellor for student affairs, said residence hall students need to get more involved on campus. "There's a conception that Greeks control everything," he said.

But, he said, the Greek students are the only ones who apply for student government and other board posi-

tions. "These are fine people," he said, "but we need more diversity."

John Bergmeyer, second vice president of the Association of Students of the University of Nebraska, said a similar committee was attempted a few years ago. But that committee didn't mention much about snowball fights or Greek/residence hall relationships, he said. It was concerned more with the Daily

Nebraskan "slamming the Greeks," he said.

This committee proposed that the two affiliations work on projects together such as Homecoming or other social functions.

Russ Johnson, president of the Residence Hall Association, said one problem is the "lack of opportunity to get to know each other."

Bart Vitek, representative of the

Abel/Sandoz Residence Association, suggested the two groups "work toward a common cause like more state aid."

John Smith, Interfraternity Council president, said the new committee has to be "very careful and realistic, because a hasty project may fail."

Griesen said freshmen need to get more involved.

"RHA should tap into the freshmen who they think would make good senators," he said.

Members of the new committee include representatives of ASUN, RHA, IFC, Panhellenic and ASRA.

Orr, senators among speakers

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Shawn Lohry, president of Women Exploited By Abortion, said women feel "no hope of forgiveness by friends and family after experiencing abortion — and the way of freedom is the way of the cross, by accepting God as your savior."

Orr read letters from Reagan, Vice President George Bush and Omaha Mayor Bernie Simon.

Other speakers at the rally were U.S. Sen. Dave Karnes and state Sens. Loran Schmit of Bellwood and Bernice Labeledz of Omaha.

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