

Sheriff Mike Ashe Speaks Out On Being Tough:

Excerpt From His National Correctional Officers Week Address

"A few months back, the Springfield newspapers featured a story about an Arizona Sheriff's Department where some of the prisoners live in tents. I don't know much about that department, but I do know that, in these times when too many people look to bumper stickers for their answers to the crime problem, in some people's minds tents equal 'tough.' To me tough is not about whether an inmate lives in a tent or in a hard cell like they do here at Stony Brook. To me tough is about making demands on people, instead of catering to them.

"Sometimes I think that because we at the Hampden County Sheriff's Department believe in inmates answering the bell each morning for productive activities, people confuse us with being soft. Quite the opposite - allowing inmates to hang around all day with nothing to do is my idea of being soft. In Hampden County we're not about inmates doing 'dead time,' we're about their doing 'real time.' "

"At Hampden County , inmates know that doing time does not mean having plenty of time on their hands; it means having plenty of demands on their time."

"The other night on television I saw a news clip about another state re-instituting the so-called 'chain gang.' I saw two officers with shotguns overseeing a crew of inmates. The inmates had uniforms on saying "chain gang," in case anyone missed the point. The inmates were working in a half-hearted, listless, sluggish manner. They were surrounded by media.

"But at Hampden County we're not about 'show time,' we're about 'real time.'"

"We don't have 'chain gangs,' we have restitution crews. Instead of Cool Hand Luke 'guards' with shotguns, we have correctional officers who work right with the inmates, to inspire them and lead by example. And instead of a lot of fanfare and little productivity or enthusiasm, we have 80,000 hours of worthwhile projects completed in our cities and towns every year.

"In Hampden County we don't pander to the prevailing bumper stickers of the times. We incarcerate tough, but we incarcerate smart."

Nothing made me prouder than when some of our officers were visiting another correctional institution and were greeted by inmates with the 'thumbs down' sign when the inmates learned that our officers were from Hampden County . Hampden County, it turned out, is known on the 'inmate grapevine' around the state as a place that is too strict, too disciplined, too structured, too demanding for inmates who want to do what they want to do, not what needs to be done."

"Well, I say congratulations to all of us for a job well done. We're not looking for 'guests' who are happy to be here or comfortable. We're looking for inmates to be about the same thing that we're about - being productive and positive."

