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TCCY has advanced long way

By [JAMES MINTON](#)

Baker-Zachary bureau

TALLULAH -- The last time the owners of Tallulah Correctional Center for Youth invited reporters to visit the private juvenile prison, a group of teen-agers broke out of line, climbed to the roofs and shouted complaints of alleged abuse.

The company that took over the correctional center's management in December invited reporters back Friday to tour parts of the prison, this time to watch more than 100 well-behaved youths count cadence and perform precision marching drills to honor 12 of their peers for completing a 90-day "boot camp" and earning bus tickets home.

"Keep your mind focused on going home, and you won't have any problems. You have many choices to make, but they all come down to right or wrong," graduating Cadet Tommy Malveaux said in a valedictory speech to the youths working toward an early release.

"We've come a long way in six months," said James F. Slattery, president of Correctional Service Corp. of Sarasota, Fla.

Correctional Service Corp. took over management from Trans-American Development Associates Inc., which built the prison in 1994 through an arrangement with the Department of Public Safety and Corrections and the town of Tallulah.

The center and Louisiana's other juvenile lockups remain under a federal judge's supervision as part of a long-running lawsuit over prison conditions in the state, while the U.S. Department of Justice filed suit against the Tallulah facility and other juvenile institutions last year.

A group of youths confined to the Tallulah center also filed a class-action lawsuit alleging abuse and inadequate health care, education and treatment programs.

 [Photo For: TCCY has advanced long way.](#)

Advocate staff photo by Travis Spradling
From left, Warden Dalton Sherrill, Lt. Col. Irwin McCall and Capt. Dillard Sims congratulate Tommy Malveaux, a graduate in the TCCY center's Bootcamp Graduation, on Friday.

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Slattery said he understood going into the arrangement with Trans-American that his company would have to show some improvements at Tallulah to help the state demonstrate it is willing to address the issues raised in the lawsuits.

Slattery said he believes the opposing lawyers and others involved in the litigation will be pleased with the progress made this year.

"I think they'll be happy with our progress, but I'm not suggesting that they think we're where we should be. We have a long way to go," he said.

"There have been many horror stories," Tallulah Mayor Theodore Lindsey acknowledged during his graduation remarks.

"But I believe they were growing pains, and I can feel that the environment and atmosphere have changed in this facility," the mayor said.

Although the facility, built on the grounds of a once-bustling lumber mill, can house about 700 youths, the state has set a population cap of 536.

Slattery said the arrangement between Trans-American and his company is like that of landlord and tenant. Although the state pays Trans-American, through the town, an average of \$72 per day per inmate, Slattery said CSC isn't making a profit yet from its subcontract.

"We've had to make some investments here. It's a long-term commitment, but it hasn't been profitable yet," he said.

The company's effort to showcase its progress at Tallulah followed published reports that it agreed to throw in the towel at an embattled juvenile prison in Florida, Pahokee Youth Development Center.

The company announced Aug. 23 that it would not renew its \$8.7 million contract to run the facility, and Florida Juvenile Justice Secretary Bill Bankhead asked CSC to make the separation sooner, rather than later.

Pahokee and CSC have been under fire for many of the same type of complaints lodged against Trans-American for its operation of Tallulah.

Slattery, however, claimed the agreement to cease operations eight months before its contract expires was purely a business decision.

"We made the determination that the program in Pahokee was not going to have the programmatic design we wanted. With the challenges in Pahokee, we couldn't achieve our goals with the resources and strategic plan that was put in place," he said.

As in any business, "there are going to be places where things don't work out," he said.

CSC merged with Youth Services International on April 30, and placed all of its juvenile facilities under the new subsidiary. Currently the two

manage 42 facilities for juveniles and 20 adult prisons in 22 states and Puerto Rico.

The company hired three retired Texas juvenile correctional officials to head Tallulah: Warden Dalton Sherrill and Assistant Wardens Anthony King and Ronald Harrell.

King heads the "Phase I" unit that houses the boot camp programs, including the one from which 12 teen-agers graduated Friday. Harrell runs a separate "Phase II" unit for maximum security offenders.

Slattery said he believes TCCY's "resocialization" program will be copied by the other state juvenile institutions over time. Sherrill said the program includes holding offenders accountable for their behavior, measuring their success or lack of it, and rewarding them for progress.

"The kids know where they're at in terms of progress at all times and what they've got to do to get out of here," Sherrill said.

Sherrill said his first priority in taking over earlier this year was to establish the safety of both employees and offenders. He said the staff's morale has improved to the point that "they see the programs and they're buying into them."

King said TCCY was set up like an adult prison when he arrived.

"Everything was negative-based. We're trying to bring in the positive. Kids like rewards," he said.

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