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Fort Stanton to Aid Convicts in Rehab

By Brendan Smith
Journal Northern Bureau

SANTA FE — Fort Stanton, the 1860s U.S. Army headquarters for Kit Carson that later became a state hospital and a women's prison, soon will house ex-convicts in a six-month drug-and-alcohol treatment program.

The state Department of Corrections has approved a one-year, \$855,000 contract with Amity Foundation of California to open a 48-bed treatment center in mid-August at Fort Stanton, about 12 miles north of Ruidoso, said department spokesman Gerges Scott.

"This is a historic step in the rehabilitation efforts of the Department of Corrections," Scott said Tuesday. "It's an opportunity for (former inmates) to make that successful transition from prison to the outside world" and continue to get substance-abuse treatment.

Amity Foundation, the successful bidder, is a nonprofit organization that has reported success in reducing relapse rates among drug-addicted prisoners from a prison near San Diego. The Fort Stanton program is paid for in part with a federal grant.

New Mexico has about a 40 percent relapse rate for its more than 5,000 inmates held in four private and five state prisons.

Christopher "Kit" Carson — legendary scout, mountain man and colonel of the 1st New Mexico Volunteer Cavalry — used Fort Stanton in the early 1860s to crush resistance from the Mescalero Apaches before battling the Navajos in a bloody campaign along the New Mexico-Arizona border.

The fort later was used as a tuberculosis sanatorium, a state hospital for the developmentally disabled and a state women's prison from 1996-99.

The treatment center will be used on a volunteer basis by male inmates released or paroled from therapy in prisons across New Mexico. Addicted prisoners in therapy get substance-abuse counseling by voluntarily enrolling in 18-month programs.

Inmates in therapy are housed separately to keep participants away from a prison's general population where illicit drugs are available, Scott said.

"Somehow drugs get in, and when we find out, we try to put a stop to it," Scott said.

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The six-month program at Fort Stanton would follow an inmate's sentence but would become a parole requirement for those who signed up, so, if a participant fled, it would be considered a parole violation. The center will be staffed by Amity employees with no security from the prison system, Scott said.

"We don't typically have security for parolees," Scott said. "These people are basically on the honor system."

Rod Mullen, CEO of the Amity Foundation, said his organization has not had a violent incident during the seven-year history of its treatment center in California.

At Fort Stanton, a local selection panel made up of law enforcement and community leaders will review each applicant and decide who can enter the program, Mullen said.

Prison officials are hoping they can duplicate Amity Foundation's success with its program in California. A National Institute of Justice study found about 25 percent of the prisoners participating in the substance-abuse counseling programs there were reincarcerated after six months, down from about 60 percent for the rest of the prison population.

Amity Foundation's sister organization, Tucson-based Amity Inc., already provides outpatient drug-treatment services in northern New Mexico under a \$1 million contract with the state Health Department. Amity Inc. hopes to use some beds at Fort Stanton for treatment of noninmate drug addicts from northern New Mexico. Amity Inc. has struggled with a shortage of long-term treatment space in New Mexico.

Mullen said the program at Fort Stanton will include encounter and group counseling sessions but not those of a highly confrontational nature.

Participants also will receive family counseling, jobs-skills lessons and hands-on training in carpentry, food services or office skills.

"We don't think you have to break people down. They come to us pretty broken down," Mullen said. "They need to be built up."

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