

# A decade of custodial care

The past 10 years has been a period of transition and then outstanding consolidation for the Melbourne Custody Centre.

In that period we have managed more than 20,000 prisoner movements each year and developed a national — and international — reputation for custodial care.

In 1999, when the Victorian Government outsourced the management of the centre, we were fortunate enough to have Victoria Police remain involved for many months.

It eased the transition for all concerned and allowed The GEO Group Australia to gradually implement its cultural changes and introduce our management philosophy to the centre.

The introduction of the Charter of Human Rights and the resultant closer scrutiny of our activities has been welcomed by GEO and has assisted us in introducing a wide range of improved procedures and protocols.

Certainly demands on the facility have altered dramatically.

In 2005 we managed 1050 alcohol and drug affected people. Last year it was 4607. This time last year the centre was a 30-day facility with the record maximum stay 56 days. Today it is a 14-day facility. The average stay is four days.

Operating 24-hours seven days a week, the Melbourne Custody Centre is run by 65 multi-skilled staff who are required to handle a multitude of tasks.

The majority of people arrested for a criminal offence in the Melbourne metropolitan area come through the centre — whether the charge is drunkenness, murder or terrorism.

Custody and nursing staff work seven 12-hour shifts a fortnight, while court staff begin in the early morning and escort prisoners to 14 secure courts in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court where they remain with them during their hearings.

Following induction training, officers undertake four days of training in the first six months of each year and further refresher training in the second half of the year. We have recently adopted a site specific version of the Victoria Police 'Operational



> John Nicoll — proud of Melbourne Custody Centre's reputation for delivering quality custodial care.

Safety and Tactics Training Manual' as we continue to work closely with Victoria Police.

A major milestone occurred in August last year when GEO, in addition to the Melbourne Custody Centre, began managing the Moorabbin Justice Centre custody and court escort service on behalf of the Victorian Government.

The contract will run on a trial basis until March next year and the new service means police are released for operational requirements rather than escort duties.

In celebrating this 10-year anniversary, I extend the thanks of GEO to our hard-working employees — both past and present — for their outstanding contribution to the Melbourne Custody Centre and the role it plays in the community.

With your continued support, the Melbourne Custody Centre will continue to work closely with Victoria Police to supply an outstanding service that is the benchmark of the industry.

*John Nicoll*  
Manager, Melbourne Custody Centre.



> Police Hummer vehicles are being used as part of Operation Safe Streets. Photo courtesy of Police Life magazine.

# Making Melbourne safe

The Melbourne Custody Centre is playing a crucial role in the city's 'Safe Streets' campaign.

Victoria Police recently vowed a return to "old-fashioned policing" in a major crackdown on city violence.

As a result an extra 150 officers have been patrolling Melbourne as part of Operation Safe Streets, boosting total police numbers in the citywide blitz to more than 300.

Assistant commissioner Gary Jamieson, the officer in charge of central Melbourne, told the *Herald Sun* at the beginning of the campaign: "Our discretion tolerance will be low.

"Step out of line and someone will be here to grab you, which is what the public are asking us to do."

As a result the Melbourne Custody Centre immediately began handling more than twice its normal weekend number of intoxicated people.

Each weekend the centre is now receiving well over 100 intoxicated people and last year's record of 4607 is certain to be shattered in 2009.

It was only a few years ago that the centre was handling only 1500 intoxicated people a year — around 30 a week!

The Melbourne Custody Centre has rostered extra staff each weekend to handle the influx in its numbers.

The campaign includes two high-profile police Hummer H3 vehicles touring the streets and a specialised closed-circuit television van positioned at potential trouble spots.

Mr Jamieson said there had been huge changes since he took over managing the police presence in the city three years ago.

Then, there were 55 venues trading after 3am but the number has jumped to 174, leading to a huge upsurge in work for the police and the Melbourne Custody Centre.



> Busy times — Sharyn Keogh-Davies and Terence Lowthorpe at the Melbourne Custody Centre reception desk.



# Nursing a commitment

All nurses are committed to their extremely demanding role in the community.

But nursing at the Melbourne Custody Centre seems to attract some very special people.

Steve Littlechild has just passed his 10-year milestone at the centre and Lorrie Lee has been handling the tough Friday and Saturday evening shifts for five years.

Latest to join the team is Morag Bell who is “absolutely loving” her 12-hour shift looking after up to 100 people who are often suffering the affects of physical, drug or alcohol abuse.

The English born (“just near the Scottish border”) Morag spent a number of years in Australia before moving to Mexico and then three years as one of four nurses working on P&O cruise ships.

“Not the little boats you get here but gigantic liners like the Diamond Princess with 5000 passengers,” she said.

It’s a long way from cruising the Mediterranean to the Melbourne Custody Centre but Morag is enjoying the innumerable challenges.

“It’s much more than just a first aid station. It is a massive responsibility to undertake,” she said.



> *Cruising to custody — nurse Morag Bell loves the role she plays at the Melbourne Custody Centre.*

It is the nurse's call whether a person is sent to hospital or held in a cell.

“The government’s campaign to clean up the streets has dramatically increased the number of people the centre is handling and therefore the workload,” Morag said.

Morag spent last year as a training manager

with Pacific Shores Healthcare and is now extremely grateful for the support of this GEO business unit.

“They are supplying us with a range of diagnostic equipment, which will be of tremendous benefit in assisting people being held in the centre,” she said.

## Gold nugget

Retired NSW police superintendent Reg Hinchey, who is also a former acting manager of the Melbourne Custody Centre, was at home in Newcastle watching the devastation caused by the recent Victorian bushfires when he recognised a familiar face.

It was Andrew Miskowiec, an officer with eight years experience at the centre. He was standing among the ruins of his Narre Warren home — one of the first victims of the fires that ravaged the outskirts of Melbourne.

Reg, a prospector in his spare time, immediately donated a gold nugget to the fund-raising effort for Andrew and his family.

Andrew has been well supported by GEO and his workmates. However he was extremely upset that he had lost the watch presented to him for five years service at the centre. He will be presented with a replacement at the 10th anniversary function.



> *Andrew Miskowiec has been well supported by GEO and his workmates including (from left) Ken Spillard, Joe Lucisano, David Yeo and Tim Luckman.*

# Major support

Ever since The GEO Group Australia first became involved at the Melbourne Custody Centre one element of the daily management duties has remained the same — Major Dennis McMillan of the Salvation Army.

“I started as chaplain in the magistrates’ court a couple of months before GEO took over management of the centre and we have worked together ever since,” he said.

Each day that the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court is sitting Major McMillan talks to every prisoner in the custody centre.

“Terrorists, murderers, drunks, drug addicts and white collar criminals. Everyone the centre handles I try and meet to see if I can assist them,” he said.

Major McMillan spends his day locating prisoners on behalf of worried family, alerting families that a relative is at the centre, locating solicitors and introducing them to their clients, alerting employers of what is happening, writing letters for prisoners, arranging changes of clothes and organising rent, food and travel vouchers.

“Some prisoners just want guidance,” he said.

Major McMillan became a full-time Salvation Army officer in 1986 after 24 years with the State Electricity Commission.



> Major Dennis McMillan of the Salvation Army — providing guidance and support.

He finds the challenges at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court the most demanding of his career and his work has been highly praised by authorities and prison welfare groups.

“I would achieve a lot less without the support of the management and staff at the Melbourne Custody Centre and the access they give me to prisoners,” he said.

“They were obviously nervous about me initially but over 10 years there has developed a high

degree of trust. In fact the centre goes out of its way to help me connect with prisoners and to assist them.

“It doesn’t happen at every other court and usually not to the same extent.”

Major McMillan and former defence lawyer and now magistrate Stephen Myall were instrumental in establishing the Victorian Custody Reference Group in 2002.

Established to identify and solve systemic problems in the management of remandees while in custody, the Melbourne Custody Centre is a foundation member and supports the work of the group as it assists prisoners moving towards release.

A total of 51 meetings have been held by the group — which includes representatives of Victoria Police, defence lawyers, prosecutors, the criminal law section of the Law Institute and other interested parties as well as GEO management — at the custody centre.

Stephen Myall says the custody centre is carrying out roles which were never planned for it to undertake.

“It was to be a transit centre before prisoners were moved to a dedicated remand or long term facility,” he said.

“The Melbourne Custody Centre has faced acute front-end demand in housing prisoners awaiting trial and other major challenges about accommodation and supplying services to prisoners.

“The Melbourne Custody Centre is a difficult, high pressure workplace and management and staff are very good at what they do.

“Their input and support of the reference group and its recommendations has been outstanding.”

Major McMillan endorses Stephen Myall’s comments.

“An extremely tough job under very difficult circumstances but their support for prisoners is outstanding,” he said

Working beside Major McMillan at the magistrates’ court as director of volunteers and supporting him with his workload is Major Thelma McMillan. Yes it’s his wife and mother to their four children.

“She has been amazing in her support for me and this job,” he said.



> GEO personnel Debbie Cumes and Greg Swan.

## May we quote you?

“Melbourne Custody Centre is most professional, knowledgeable and efficient in carrying out its duties.”

*Senior Sergeant Glen Jackson, No 1 Division (after accompanying Premier John Brumby on a visit of the centre)*

“The professional way in which prisoners are escorted into court is to be commended.”

*Ian Gray, Chief Magistrate*

“Thank you for being able to conduct our Jewish ceremony.”

*Max Kaltmann, Jewish Chaplain*

“Impressed with professionalism of staff.”

*Brian Lawrence, Manager, Acacia Prison*

“Very understanding of my needs in relation to dietary requirements and prayer time.”

*Prisoner (name withheld)*

“We are full of praise for your staff.”

*Sharon Dwyer, Registrar of Magistrates’ Court.*

“Thank you for your compassion and understanding with our patient. Without your help our patient would have been more distressed.”

*Cate Salmon, Social Worker, Thomas Embling House*

“Very professional operation.”

*Sue Ritchie, Corrections Victoria Offenders Management Efficiency Program*

“Terrific job in difficult circumstances.”

*Lisa Hannah, Judge, County Court (former magistrate)*

“We came away informed. There was obvious compassion and expertise in managing people in custody with patience and good humour. In our perspective the facility is in good hands.”

*Heather Simmonds, Honorary Justices Association*

“I would like to thank you and your team for assisting me to do my job properly. Congratulations to you all for defusing a potentially volatile situation.”

*Clency Bernard, Psychiatric Nurse, Mental Health Court Liaison.*

“At the end of the day we are all humans and it was a great feeling to walk away from the custody centre feeling like one.”

*Sandra after visiting her son*

“Clearly demonstrated how cooperation between people can achieve positive results very quickly.”

*Inspector Myles King, former Contract Monitor, Victoria Police*