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WANTED

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HELP WANTED

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Private prisons to be established

MIDLAND (AP) — Stories of violent crimes seem to dominate the news lately — tales of drive-by shootings in Los Angeles, children being killed by stray bullets in New York, and major drug arrests daily.

There also are a number of stories about prison overcrowding and how states such as Texas are struggling to increase prison space to handle the growing number of prisoners.

As a result, a number of companies have been formed to establish private prisons and help state, county and city governments cope with this problem. One such company is Private Prisons of America Ltd., based in Midland.

It was founded by oilman and rancher Frank Powell, who serves as president and chief executive officer. The company recently signed a contract with the city of Richwood, W. Va., and is attempting to get state permits to build the 1,500-bed prison. Powell predicts construction will begin shortly after the first of the year and would take approximately eight months.

He stresses that his company still is in the start-up stage and is bidding and negotiating with different states to build new prisons. He has submitted bids to the state of Texas, but also is concentrating on the East because of that area's population density.

Once the company begins setting up prisons, Powell expects to have an office staff of around 15.

Prisons, while causing some concern among those living near them, can be a boost to a city's economy, bringing large amounts of money in the form of payroll and jobs — both construction and prison staff.

The Big Spring prison that recently was upgraded from a minimum security to a low security fa-

ility at a cost of \$10 million will bring 100 additional jobs to Big Spring.

Private prisons will cost the same as those built by the state. The advantage of a private prison, according to Powell, is that private companies can build them faster. His company estimates that the cost of building a 2,280-bed prison would be \$60 million for either the state or a private company. The cost of running one, however, is less for a private prison — \$46.50 per day as opposed to \$52 for a federal prison.

Private prisons would be funded by private investors and the debt funded by the inmates from wages paid while they are incarcerated.

Powell is in the process of raising funds to build a private prison on part of his ranch in Colorado City. He has offered 100 acres to the state of New Mexico for a \$25 million, 500-bed facility that would be funded through tax-exempt certificates of participation.

It is through his interest in building a private prison on his Colorado City ranch that Powell met Sonny Emerson, who has built and managed prisons in Colorado, holds a bachelor's degree in criminal psychology and plans to complete work on a master's degree and doctorate in criminal justice.

Emerson has helped devise a work program for Private Prisons that, he hopes, will cut down on repeat offenses by teaching the inmates a marketable skill and building their self-esteem.

The inmates will be paid a "free-world" wage during their sentence. The wages will be divided several ways: for victim restitution, rent contribution, supporting the inmate's family, and for when the inmate is released from prison.

Texas Legislature faces 'staggering' problems

AUSTIN (AP) — The more things change in the halls of the Texas Legislature, the more they stay the same.

State District Judge Scott McCown's decision to send the school finance issue back to lawmakers added yet another "old" topic to an already crowded — and familiar — agenda for the 1991 Legislature.

The cast of characters will change. There will be a new governor, a new lieutenant governor and several new House and Senate members after the November election.

But the long list of problems they face, described by one legislator as "staggering," is well-known. Lawmakers have seen them all before; many, more than once. House Speaker Gib Lewis, D-Fort

Worth, is running hard against a tough Republican opponent so he can come back to the Capitol next year. But the veteran leader admits the 1991 session will be "as tough as anyone of us can ever experience in modern times."

The gloomy catalog includes: — A budding budget crisis. Already, lawmakers are being told they will face a \$3 billion to \$4 billion deficit just to maintain current services in 1992-93.

Sound familiar? This one comes on the heels of a \$6 billion deficit lawmakers faced in 1987.

— A budget shortage means talk again will turn to ... taxes. And no politician likes tax talk.

When oil prices collapsed, law-

Academic pursuit



Photo by Robert Hall

Sophomore David Witwer, an aerospace engineering major, takes a break from classes Wednesday afternoon to read The Battalion on the steps of the Academic Building.

Environmental Protection Agency files charges

HOUSTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency has charged a General Electric service and repair center in Houston with multiple violations involving the firm's handling of toxic PCBs.

GE, which denies the complaint, faces a \$185,000 fine if the charges are proved by federal authorities.

EPA officials said Tuesday that the GE center improperly used a Freon solvent in 1987 to flush PCBs from electrical equipment.

The service center then distilled the PCBs out of the Freon and reused it repeatedly, when federal regulations suggest the solvent be burned, EPA said.

GE spokesman Len Doviak said the company differs with EPA on the Freon flushing system. He said GE believes it is in total compliance with environmental standards.

"The Freon flushing is a totally closed system and there is no release to the environment," Doviak said.

EPA also has accused GE of failing to register four PCB transformers and capacitors it received in 1987 or the 2,304 PCB capacitors and transformers the center received in 1988.

Doviak said GE disagrees with the charge and is continuing discussions with EPA about the proposed penalty.

CONROE (AP) — Joel Buckner might not sell his house, but his for sale sign is attracting attention.

It says his home is close to "schools, churches, drug dealers, prostitutes and banks."

The sign, which sits across the street from Sam Houston Elementary School, spells out in tall letters the problems Buckner said he has had in selling the home.

Motorists spot it and typically circle the block to read it again, as if they're not sure they believe their eyes. Some in the neighborhood aren't pleased.

"We don't like to see it," Sam Houston Principal Walter Jett said. "The kids may not know what it means, but the adults don't like to see that sort of thing. The teachers, especially, are disturbed that somebody can put up something like that and get away with it."

One Sam Houston teacher has written Buckner to say she's having a hard time explaining his "sense of humor" to students.

Buckner said he is attempting to call attention to the undesirable who mill around Robertson Street, which runs alongside his property and dead-ends at the schoolyard.

For sale sign spells out problems in Conroe

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