

News Briefs

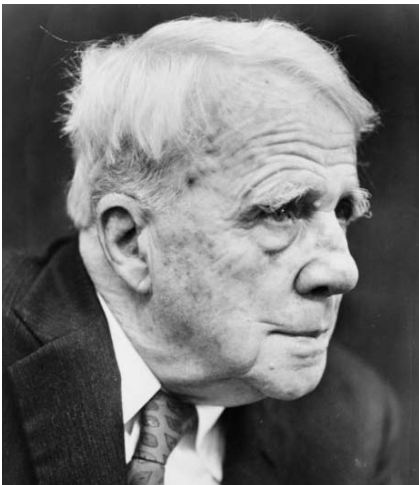
Continued from page 3

The new rules must be in effect by Dec. 15 for the state's 2,300 juvenile parolees.

— Nancy Lewis

Poetic Justice for Vermont Vandals

Youths who think reading poetry is a form of punishment might feel vindicated by a sentence handed out in Vermont last month.



U.S. Library of Congress

Frost: Get “out, out” of his house.

A judge there sentenced more than two dozen teens to attend poetry classes as punishment for breaking into the former dwelling of poet Robert Frost and trashing it during a beer party in December.

The incident occurred at the Homer Noble Farm in Ripton, where Frost stayed for more than 20 summers before his death in 1963. Middlebury College now owns the building.

The party began when about 50 people turned up to drink \$100 worth of beer paid for by a 17-year-old former Middlebury College employee who knew how to gain access to the building, according to police reports. The participants did an estimated \$10,600 in damage to Frost's furnishings and fixtures, and left empty beer cans and

drug paraphernalia amidst the rubble.

According to The Associated Press, police charged most of the 26 juveniles and two adults whom they arrested with trespassing. Nearly all entered guilty pleas. The juveniles' records will be wiped clean upon their completion of the poetry classes.

Restitution and community service were also ordered in some of the cases. The adult who purchased the beer received a three-day jail term.

Frost biographer Jay Parini, 60, a Middlebury College professor, agreed to teach two classes to the vandals, using Frost's poems, “The Road Not Taken” and “Out, Out-” as starting points and focusing on passages with particular relevance to the offenses. Eleven youths attended the first class, on June 2.

Although the sentence falls into the realm of “restorative justice,” which often includes readings and other efforts to help violators contemplate the effects of their crimes on their communities, don't expect any longitudinal studies to determine whether studying poetry reduces recidivism.

In describing the thinking behind the sentencing, Prosecutor John Quinn told The AP, “I guess I was thinking that if these teens had a better understanding of who Robert Frost was, and his contribution to society, that they would be more respectful of other people's property in the future and would also learn something from the experience.”

To read more, go to www.washingtonpost.com. Click on archives and enter Parini.

— Grace Lavigne

Ohio Commits to Change

A court-mandated reform plan for Ohio should mean more use of small, community-based programs for youth and the hiring of more staff at detention facilities.

“I think it's going to make an enormous difference for kids,” Amy N. Swanson, executive director of Voices for Ohio's Children, said of the class-

action settlement on behalf of the 1,700 kids incarcerated statewide.

The language of the settlement – which calls for evidence-based reforms, among other system-wide changes – “is unprecedented,” said Swanson, who will serve on a team that will monitor how the agreement is carried out.

State Department of Youth Services (DYS) Director Tom Stickrath issued a statement saying the agreement “turns a new corner in DYS history.”

That history, the settlement says, includes “use of force by staff, isolation practices, the absence of acceptable mental health care and other appropriate programming, overcrowding, and ... deficiencies in education” that put youth “at risk physically, psychologically, and educationally.”

The suit was filed in December 2004 by the Children's Law Center, the Youth Law Center and the Ohio Justice and Policy Center.

“Now the work really begins” to “revolutionize” the system, said Janet Moore, staff attorney for the policy center. She praised Gov. Ted Strickland (D) for his commitment to reforming DYS, noting that such a high level of support will drive the “culture change” that's needed at the agency.

The agreement, estimated to cost between \$20 million and \$30 million to implement fully, calls for an infusion of new funding for DYS operations, reforms in the process through which youth are released from custody, and support for evidence-based community programs for low-risk offenders. It emphasizes the use of small (12- to 48-bed) community-based facilities that “keep appropriate juveniles as close to home as possible” and near community services.

It also says DYS must hire 115 juvenile correctional officers for eight correctional and rehabilitation facilities.

Although Swanson said the state budget is “really pinched,” she said the governor appears committed to funding DYS so that it can adhere to the settlement.

Shay Bilchik, director of Georgetown University's Center for Juvenile

Justice Reform and Systems Integration, will also serve on the monitoring team, which will also include mental health and youth advocates.

“We are going to be monitoring and tracking the progress from an advocacy lens,” Swanson said.

See the Voices statement and get links to the settlement agreement at www.vfc-oh.org. See the settlement and the fact-finder's report at www.dys.ohio.gov/dysweb/PressReleases.aspx.

— Erika Fitzpatrick

MANAGEMENT

Staffers Dismissed for Blistering Punishment

So you think your staff orientation covers everything?

Two counselors at a city-run day camp in Coppell, Texas, were dismissed last month after they allegedly forced their middle school-aged campers to crawl or crab walk across a hot asphalt track in 98-degree weather as punishment for being loud during a movie.

The fired counselors at Coppell's Camp Do-It-All, which operates during school breaks, are recent college graduates in their 20s who, according to the camp, went through employee training about working with youth.

Police officials said no decision has been made on whether to file criminal charges.

“This is not the Bear Bryant football camp,” Jim Witt, Coppell's city manager, told *The Dallas Morning News*. “This is not a penal institution. This type of punishment is totally unacceptable.”

About 20 children, ages 12 to 14, were involved in the incident. Several suffered blisters or burns on their hands, according to police. Parents of the children learned of the matter in telephone calls from the youngsters.

Coppell is about 18 miles north of Dallas.

— Grace Lavigne

Increasing Youth Participation in Out-of-School Time Programs



Child Trends recently released two briefs that offer ways to increase youth participation in out-of-school time programs, advice from experienced program providers, and guides to additional print and online resources:

- *Youth Governance: How and Why It Can Help Out-of-School Time Programs Involve At-Risk Youth*
- *Using Incentives to Increase Participation in Out-of-School Time Programs*

www.childtrends.org/youthdevelopment