

Monroe, LA – News Star Correctional staff steps up Editorial

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It does not seem too long ago that serious issues related to appropriate treatment of juveniles in correctional custody at Monroe's Swanson Center for Youth made national news.

The facility was overcrowded and known for violence. The state Office of Juvenile Justice made changes at the top that charted a new course for the institution.

Now, the center is being recommended for accreditation after receiving high marks in a recent audit by the American Correctional Association.

The ACA auditors found the center was in 100 percent compliance on 38 mandatory standards and 97.45 percent compliant on 329 non-mandatory standards. Both sets of standards encompass all aspects of the facility, including treatment, safety, environmental factors and medical and mental health care.

"I am not surprised by the auditors' findings at Swanson Center for Youth, because I know how hard Director Carolyn Atkins and the entire Swanson team have worked to achieve this important milestone," said Mary L. Livers, Deputy Secretary of the Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice.

But this isn't just a gimmie. The standards for accreditation are tough. In fact, the last time Swanson was accredited was in 2000.

But the staff at Swanson had a mission, and that mission was to transition the facility from a juvenile jail to an environment that cares for the child. That transition required the active, positive involvement of every staff member at Swanson.

An auditor who participated in both the 2000 ACA audit and the most recent one said, "The transition from a correctional model to a therapeutic environment was very apparent." Director Atkins and the staff are to be congratulated for their work. This turnaround is nothing short of extraordinary.

The editorials in this column represent the opinions of The News-Star's editorial board, composed of President and Publisher David B. Petty, Executive Editor Kathy Spurlock, and community representatives William Harrison, Stephanie Smith and Chris Mapp.