

The Sentinel



Sentinel recognizes outstanding young athletes

Final Edition

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...le, Pa.—38 pages

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35 ce

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National Magic Week
week for magicians to promote
will through performances at
itals and nursing homes.

**5 freed hostages
back in US**

NEW YORK (AP) — Five American
ed by Iraq for medical reasons are
the United States, where one of
aised a toast to President Bush to
up the good work."
were among 14 U.S. hostages and
ish captives freed by Iraq.
of the Americans arrived at
ly Airport aboard a Royal Jordani-
ines flight Wednesday night. The

Riot trials shortcut justice system

By Carman Amerson
Sentinel Reporter

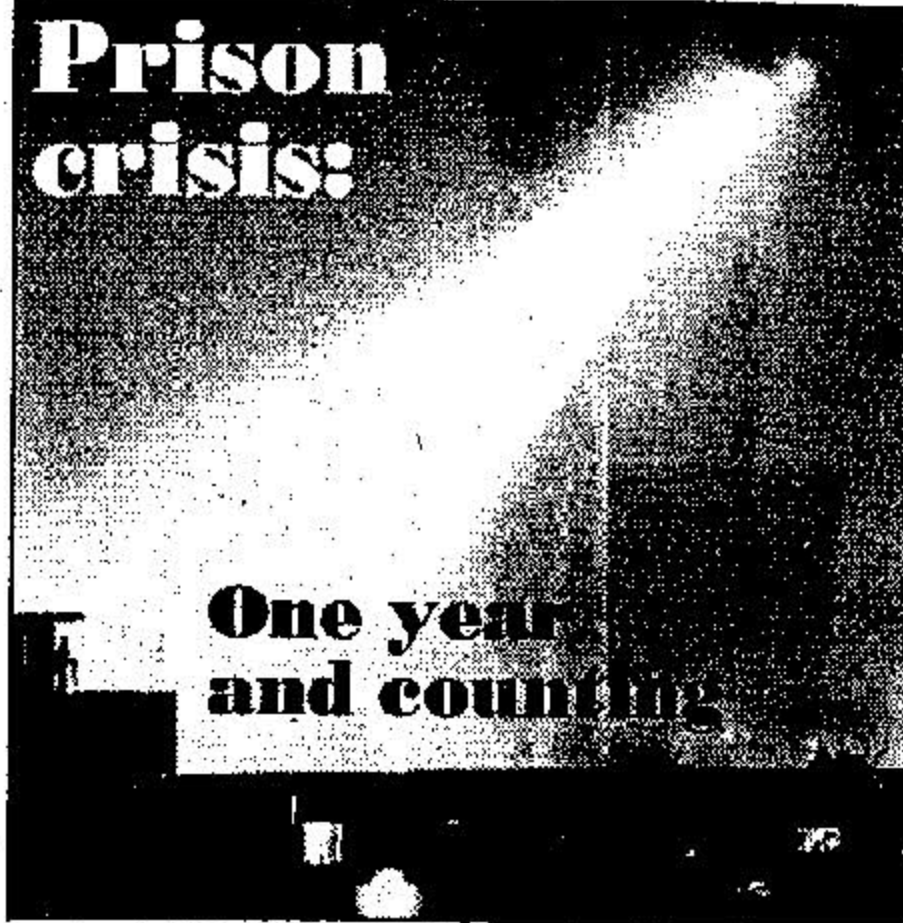
A lawyer once told a Sentinel reporter that "justice doesn't exist until the last gavel falls."

Some defense lawyers representing clients charged with offenses stemming from riots at State Correctional Institution in Camp Hill last year are wondering if it exists even then.

Patrick Lauer Jr. of Camp Hill has represented several inmates charged with riot- or post-riot-related offenses. He has handled five trials involving four inmates; all were acquitted or had the charges dismissed, with the exception of one charge.

Lauer calls the district attorney's office's handling of some riot cases "unprofessional" and sometimes overly "aggressive." He believes many cases are "really weak" and should never have been prosecuted.

Lauer, a graduate of San Diego Universi-



ty and Dickinson School of Law, was a Cumberland County public defender for about 18 months before opening his own practice in 1986.

He says he had several conversations with

Assistant District Attorney Shawn Wagner prior to the trial of inmate Paul Green and asked if there was any exculpatory evidence — evidence or statements that tend to clear or excuse a defendant from alleged guilt or fault.

The Pennsylvania Rules of Criminal Procedure require the district attorney's office to turn over such evidence to the defense.

Lauer says Wagner claimed there was no such evidence.

About a month before the trial, Lauer sent Wagner a letter again asking if there were any exculpatory evidence.

Lauer says he never received a reply.

As it turned out, the DA's office failed to turn over information about a plea made by another inmate who admitted to having set fires in the same building in which Green was charged with setting fires. Lauer says that qualified as exculpatory evidence.

Through a private investigator, Lauer

**Special 4-page update
on Camp Hill State
Prison — See B8-1**

learned the inmate, Patrick Todd Donelson, had pleaded guilty to arson. Donelson has no prior record of arson.

Lauer says the district attorney's office has records of that, too.

Eventually, Lauer subpoenaed the records and the plea.

Green was acquitted in a jury trial. If he had been convicted, Green could have been sentenced to at least another six years in prison, Lauer says.

"I don't care who you are, the color of your skin or what your job is, you deserve justice."

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