

Attorney: Lethal needle immoral

By Marcia Moore
The Daily Item

SELINGROVE — William-sport defense attorney Ronald Travis takes every opportunity to speak out against capital punishment, or what he calls “a moral affront.”

In the United States, a defendant is eligible for the death penalty if it is proven he planned the murder.

Yet, Travis said, methodical planning and premeditation is legally undertaken through the

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judicial system to carry out an execution.

He spoke on the subject Sat-

urday night to a group of about 50 who attended an exhibition, at the Lore Degenstein Gallery at Susquehanna University, of 550 plates — those illustrating the last meals of U.S. death-row inmates created by Oregon artist Julie Green.

“I want people to know and understand the fallacies of the death penalty,” he said.

Educating the public is one step in highlighting the issue, and Tra-

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Dennis McGuire

Execution last week in Ohio lasted 26 minutes

Lethal needle immoral, defense attorney says

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vis wants people to know that inmates sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole will remain behind bars until they die, and the reality of how much it costs to put a condemned defendant to death.

"It's costlier to kill someone," he simply said.

Statistics show that it costs taxpayers 10 times more to execute an inmate than confine him for life. Thirty-five states support capital punishment and the average cost of an execution, including years of appeals that are automatically allowed, is \$2.4 million.

Despite strides being made on the issue, including the decision to ban minors and the mentally challenged from being eligible for the death penalty, Travis doesn't expect the law to be repealed anytime soon.

"I don't see (the U.S.) Supreme Court ever finding it cruel or unusual punishment," he said.

That's even despite the controversial execution Thursday in Ohio of Dennis McGuire involving an untested combination of drugs. After the lethal injection was given, it took 26 minutes before McGuire was pronounced dead and witnesses described seeing him appear to gasp and convulse for about 10 minutes.

"It sickens me," said Karen Morin, president of the inmate advocacy group, Lewisburg Prison Project, who attended the exhibit. "But whenever this happens, it opens up a discussion about

Valley advocate: Inmate access to journalists can reveal abuse complaints

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LEWISBURG — Allowing inmates access to journalists is an important public service, a member of Lewisburg Prison Project says.

Dave Sprout, a paralegal with the inmate advocacy group, said visitation by media representatives in jails is not a major complaint among prisoners mainly "because most prisons — both county and state — allow it."

Northumberland County Prison administrators earlier this month denied a reporter from entering the Sunbury jail to speak with murder suspect Miranda Barbour, who had asked for an interview and placed the reporter's name on her visitation list.

Prison staff initially denied the reporter was on a list of accepted visitors, but that turned out to be untrue. It later emerged the prison doesn't have a

written policy regarding visitation.

Sprout declined to comment on the Northumberland County Prison case specifically, but said he views the freedom of the press particularly important for inmates who otherwise may have no way of reporting grievances.

"That's what motivates public pressure, when the public is aware of allegations of abuse or mistreatment," he said. "Whether (an inmate) is believable is another story, but if you don't have access how do you know whether taxpayer money is being used to mistreat inmates."

Though security is the priority of jailers and reporters shouldn't receive special treatment, Sprout said, if an inmate is following the rules he should have access to the press to either report grievances or tell his story.

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the issue. Some feel that (McGuire) is getting what he deserved. It's the same thing they feel about inmates. But reproducing violence isn't going to reduce violence."

The exhibition of Green's work will be at the gallery

through March 1.

For more information, visit www.susque.edu/art_gallery.

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