

NYPD Confidential

An Inside Look at the New York Police Department



One Police Plaza

Down on the NYPD's Farm

November 6, 2006

It is known as the Farm — the place where cops in the New York City Police Department go to dry out.

Due in part to the hours, demands, tradition and stress of The Job, alcohol has long been an NYPD staple. Unlike drug use, which is not tolerated at any level of the department, drinking, even to excess, is yet another of the NYPD's dirty little secrets.

Remember the mayhem a decade ago when drunken NYPD cops, attending a police convention in Washington D.C, terrified guests at local hotels? One of them — the 103rd precinct's so-called "Naked Man" — supposedly slid down a hotel banister in the manner his name suggests.

More recently — and more seriously — there's the alcohol-related tragedy involving police officer Joseph Gray, who was convicted of mowing down a young family while driving after a night of drinking. Gray is now in jail.

Legend has it that the original Farm was the property of a cop who lived upstate. Today, there is no farm. It has been replaced by a couple of alcohol rehab and counseling centers, one on Long Island, another in Pennsylvania — where cops deemed unfit for duty must spend 28 days.

Most recently, eight police officers have filed suit in federal court charging the department with violating their civil rights by forcing them into these supposedly voluntary rehab programs.

The suit was filed by Jeffrey Goldberg, who serves as cops' attorney of last resort when the line organizations refuse to rock the department's boat of accepted practices.

As Phil Karasyk, the attorney for the Detective Endowment Association, puts it, "The Counseling Services Unit, which determines that police officers go for treatment, was put in place as an intermediate step for officers with alcohol problems so that the department wouldn't fire them for being unfit for duty. The vast majority of officers who

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go to these places are helped. From the members' standpoint, I think the counseling unit serves an important function."

Goldberg's suit, however, has raised questions about the practices of the counseling unit, which is under the office of the police commissioner, and of the conduct and qualifications of its officers who make the determinations.

The suit also questions whether the counseling unit may be colluding with the rehab centers to engage in fraudulent billing practices.

An apparently unrelated lawsuit Goldberg recently filed against an outside, non-profit, police-counseling agency has resulted in Police Commissioner Ray Kelly's announcing an audit into the program's expenditures.

Meanwhile, the department's counseling unit's former commanding officer, Lieu. Jacqueline McCarthy, pleaded guilty last year to being AWOL when she traveled to Florida with Det. Susan Gimblet, supposedly to inspect a new treatment facility, without the permission of her superior.

McCarthy was placed on dismissal probation and allowed to retire. She has not been replaced. The unit is now headed by a sergeant.

Gimblet, who recommends which officers are to be sent to the farm, has acknowledged in the lawsuit that she made recommendations while her state certification as an alcohol substance abuse counselor had lapsed between September 2003 and March 2005.

Both she and the city's corporation counsel declined comment, pending the current litigation.

Karasyk, who is also the attorney for the Lieutenants Benevolent Association and represented McCarthy at her departmental trial, said she was suffering from leukemia and was unavailable for comment.

Meanwhile, two of the cops who have filed suit, Donald Herlihy and Robert McNamara, contend in the lawsuit that not only were they forced to enter rehab programs to keep their jobs but that they are not alcoholics.

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McNamara testified his problems stemmed from a domestic dispute with his wife, which prompted her to call the Suffolk County police.

Herlihy maintained his only crime was that his radio patrol partner was discovered urinating on a street in Little Italy.

Both were found guilty of being unfit for duty at departmental trials...