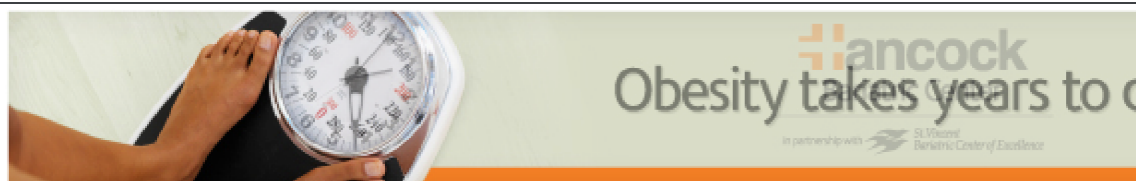


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3 former Idaho prison guards say inmate beatings encouraged by staff, culture of violence

TODD DVORAK Associated Press

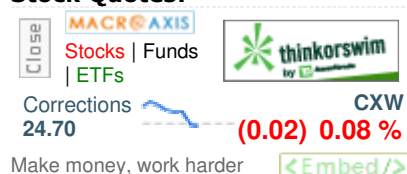
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BOISE, Idaho — Staff at Idaho's only private prison, from the warden on down to the guards, routinely failed to protect inmates and in some instances put prisoners in situations knowing they'd be victims of the prison's gangs and violent culture, according to three

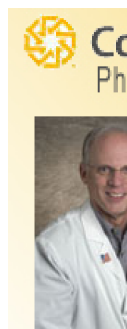
former staffers at the prison.

The statements from the former Idaho Correctional Center guards are outlined in affidavits filed in a federal lawsuit against the prison's for-profit operator, Corrections Corporation of America, or CCA.

The civil case was filed against CCA last year by inmate Marlin Riggs, who several years ago was badly beaten in his cell and suffered permanent facial deformities.

The affidavits support many of the allegations aimed at CCA and the way it runs the Idaho Correctional Center, or ICC.

All three former guards agreed the prison — commonly referred to as "Gladiator School" — is understaffed and excessively violent. They say the staff lacked adequate training and equipment, was overworked and encouraged by administrators to disregard and



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undermine the safety of inmates and underreported the number of assaults between prisoners.

For example, guards would assign inmates they knew or suspected of being assault targets in cells or housing units populated by potential assailants, or put sex offenders or homosexual inmates in pods controlled by gangs whose members preyed on those inmates, according to the former employees. Guards also allegedly laughed about sex offenders and gay prisoners getting beaten and suggested they deserved the abuse.

"I am aware of numerous instances when staff at ICC failed to protect prisoners from an assault they knew was likely to occur, and these assaults could have and should have been prevented," Sheri Hunsaker, an employee at ICC from 2003-2009, said in her affidavit. "Some of the main causes of prisoner violence at ICC are understaffing ... and a culture of laziness and lack of concern by staff for prisoner safety."

Hunsaker, 44, was initially hired as a guard, but was later promoted to case manager before being fired in May 2009. Sworn affidavits were also provided by Tammy McCall, 45, who worked at ICC for two years and was fired in 2008, and Todd Goertzen, 43, a guard at the prison south of Boise from 2007 to 2009.

Hunsaker and McCall told The Associated Press they are cooperating with Riggs and his lawyers from the American Civil Liberties Union out of concern for colleagues who still work at the prison and are subject almost daily to violent inmate-on-inmate assaults.

"I'm worried about them getting hurt," Hunsaker said. "It's not fair what they're being asked to do out there."

Nashville, Tenn.,-based CCA is defending itself in several lawsuits filed by inmates who were severely beaten in violence at its Idaho prison. Riggs and the ACLU are suing for \$155 million in damages — CCA's entire net profit for 2009.

This week, inmate Brian Robert Spaude filed a lawsuit accusing ICC prison staff of his November 2009 assault in the prison's dining hall.

In another federal case, attorneys of former inmate Hanni Elabed are in talks to sue CCA after he suffered brain damage after he was beaten by another inmate for several minutes while he was in the prison's dining hall. Elabed watched and failed to intervene.

The company, which manages about 75,000 inmates in 64 facilities in 19 states and the District of Columbia, contends prisoner safety is its top priority and works closely with Idaho officials to

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Spokesman Steven Owen declined to comment specifically on the affidavits from employees, saying lawyers would respond in court.



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