



LIUANNE M. FERRIS/TIMES UNION

"SLIM" is at the left as Peter Laudicina, a corrections officer from the Eastern Correctional Facility in Ulster County, introduces him to Assemblyman Ronald Canestrari, D-Cohoes. To Canestrari's right is

a display of dangerous weapons that prison inmates make from spoons, toothbrushes and even soup can lids.

# PRISON: Students get an inside look at the inside

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 tion program founded by the New York State Correctional Officers & Police Benevolent Association and COPS-CARE.

"They didn't yell in the kids' faces like some "scared straight" programs. Teachers did tell kids to quiet down or doled out a stern stare after a barbed quip caused some girls to giggle.

"The officers tried to impress on the kids that prison is not only dangerous but belittling to the individual. They stressed that the students have choices not to drink and drive or do drugs now, or they can end up like Slim.

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MIKE COUNTRYMAN  
 corrections officer

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Officers showed kids a collection of dangerous weapons that inmates make from spoons, toothbrushes and even soup can lids. They showed them how officers lock up a prisoner with handcuffs and leg irons and displayed pictures of the standard 6-by-8-foot cells with two people and one stainless-steel toilet,

with no seat.

"You have to sit right on the bowl," one teenager yelled out in disgust.

"You bet, and you have no privacy from your bunkmate or anybody passing by your cell," Laudicina said.

Slowly, it sank in.

"Prison is not like what you may see on television or in the movies," Laudicina said.

The kids were also surprised to find out that of the 70,049 prisoners in state correctional facilities, 13,000 are between 16 and 24 years of age.

After the program, Countryman said the frustration of their job spurred him and Laudicina to start the traveling program four years ago.

"We are seeing kids in the prison population getting younger and younger, and we realized 'Hey, something's not working here,'" Countryman said.

Although the kids laughed at Slim, the officers said the mannequin works.

"We go back to a place, the kids always ask how Slim is doing, whether he's out yet," Countryman said. "Slim sticks in their minds."