

Stars: Williams needs clemency

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Jamie Foxx stepped into the spotlight at his latest movie premiere with more than the usual publicity drill in mind.

Don't let it happen, the actor urged — don't let the state of California execute Stanley Tookie Williams, the convicted murderer and Crips gang co-founder who's been recast behind bars in the role of peacemaker.

Foxx is not alone. An unusually varied collection of Hollywood stars and other famous names is trying to persuade Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger that Williams — who has become a celebrity in his own right — can do more for society alive than dead.

Williams' supporters range from the holy (Archbishop Desmond Tutu) to the street-wise (rapper Snoop Dogg, himself once a Crip).

Whether a movie star governor is more inclined to consider their pleas for clemency is debatable. But the chorus is only growing louder as Williams' Dec. 13 execution by lethal injection approaches.

His supporters cite Williams' efforts to curb youth gang violence, including nine children's books and an online project linking teenagers in America and abroad. A Swiss legislator, college professors and others repeatedly have submitted his name for Nobel peace and literature prizes.

Last weekend, Snoop Dogg told about 1,000 people rallying outside San Quentin State Prison that Williams' activism has touched him.

"His voice needs to be heard," said the musician, whose new song, "Real Soon," touts Williams' anti-gang efforts.

Last week, the Rev. Jesse Jackson and Bianca Jagger, a death penalty opponent and former wife of rocker Mick Jagger, visited San Quentin. Jackson said he prayed with Williams, promising, "We are going to fight for you, and we are going to win."

Foxx, who played Williams in "Redemption," a 2004 movie which brought the death row inmate's story to a wider audience, used the New York premiere of "Jarhead" to issue his plea.

In a jailhouse interview last week, Williams said he is unimpressed by his prominent supporters ("I'm blasé about everything") and relies on his attorneys to evaluate the benefit of efforts on his behalf.

Hollywood's political and social activism has been known to provoke criticism. But Williams said he is unconcerned his famous boosters could create a backlash that might sway Schwarzenegger against him.

"In the position I'm in, I don't see how anybody can hurt," he said. "The truth is the truth, no matter where it comes from."

Williams, 51, who saw the notorious gang he co-founded with a childhood friend spawn copycats worldwide, denies committing the 1979 murders that put him on death row. He was convicted of killing a convenience store worker and, days later, killing two motel owners and their daughter during a robbery.

The crimes Williams was accused of were "heinous," said former "M-A-S-H" star Mike Farrell, a longtime death penalty opponent. But Williams has made "an extraordinary transformation," said Farrell, who's lobbied for him for several years.

In apparent recognition of the power of the pro-Williams movement, the state Department of Corrections launched an unusual counterattack questioning the sincerity of his anti-gang conversion and alleging he remains involved with the Crips.

Lora Owens, stepmother of victim Albert Owens, opposes clemency and resents the celebrity involvement.

"I think most of them are abusing their popularity and their access to the media," she said. "It's an agenda. If they looked at the facts, then they'd realize Williams has not done anything to deserve clemency."

Williams' link to the entertainment world was cemented with the biographical movie shown on TV and at film festivals, including Robert Redford's Sundance. Several of those involved in "Redemption," including Foxx (See Clemency, Page 15)

Gov. saves Virginia inmate's life

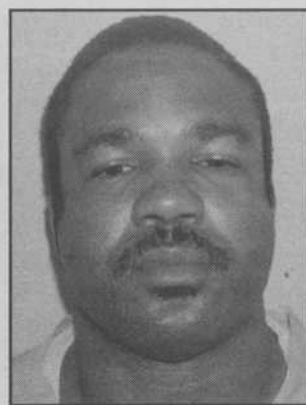
RICHMOND, Va.-(AP) Virginia's governor on Tuesday spared the life of a convicted killer who would have been the 1,000th person executed in the United States since the Supreme Court allowed capital punishment to resume in 1976.

Robin Lovitt's death sentence was commuted to life in prison without parole a little more than 24 hours before he was to be executed by injection Wednesday night for stabbing a man to death with a pair of scissors during a 1998 pool-hall robbery.

In granting clemency, Gov. Mark R. Warner noted that evidence from the trial had been improperly destroyed, depriving the defense of the opportunity to subject the material to the latest in DNA testing.

"The commonwealth must ensure that every time this ultimate sanction is carried out, it is done fairly," Warner said in a statement.

Warner, a Democrat, had never before granted clemency to a death row inmate during his four years in of-



ROBIN LOVITT

fice. During that time, 11 men have been executed. Virginia is one of the most active death-penalty states, having executed 94 people since 1976.

The 1,000th execution is now scheduled for Friday in North Carolina, where Kenneth Lee Boyd is slated to die for killing his estranged wife and her father.

The 999th execution since capital punishment resumed a generation ago took place Tuesday morning, when Ohio put to death John Hicks, who strangled his mother-in-law and suffocated his 5-year-old stepdaughter to cover up the crime.

Lovitt's lawyers, who include former independent counsel Kenneth Starr, and anti-death penalty advocates had argued that his life should be spared because a court clerk illegally destroyed the bloody scissors and other evidence, preventing DNA testing that they said could exonerate him.

Ashley Parrish, another of Lovitt's attorneys, called Warner's decision "entirely proper, given the extraordinary circumstances of Mr. Lovitt's case."

Lovitt was convicted in 1999 of murdering Clayton Dicks at an Arlington pool hall.

Prosecutors said Dicks caught Lovitt prying open a cash register with the scissors, which police found in the woods between the pool hall and the home of Lovitt's cousin.

Lovitt admitted grabbing the cash box but insisted someone else killed Dicks. DNA tests on the scissors at the time of the trial were inconclusive. But more sophisticated DNA techniques are

now available.

The governor, who is considered a possible Democratic presidential contender in 2008, said he was "acutely aware of the tragic loss experienced by the Dicks family."

"However, evidence in Mr. Lovitt's trial was destroyed by a court employee" before post-conviction DNA tests could be done, he said. "The actions of an agent of the commonwealth, in a manner contrary to the express direction of the law, comes at the expense of a defendant facing society's most severe and final sanction."

The state attorney general's office released a statement acknowledging the governor's authority to grant clemency and adding, "Our thoughts and prayers are with the victim's family."

In addition to Starr, Republicans such as Mark Earley, Warner's GOP opponent in the 2001 gubernatorial election, had also denounced the planned execution.

Ex-offenders seek second chance

By T. Kevin Walker
Special to Sentinel-Voice
WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. (NNPA) - It was called the Restoration Cafe, but it wasn't serving burgers Friday, fries either.

The Faith Seeds Community Re-Entry Coalition themed its morning-long community discussion around a diner concept. The agendas were designed to look like menus, and discussion leaders wore aprons and jotted down notes on paper tablecloths as if they were taking orders.

Despite the lighthearted atmosphere, the topics were serious. Faith Seeds started about two years ago to support "the restoration" of ex-offenders back into the society. Members of the coalition include officials from churches, social service and housing agencies — entities that can provide much needed transitional help for a person coming out of prison.

Friday's event, which drew more than four dozen people to Goler Community Development Corporation Building, was designed to spread Faith Seeds' mission to the broader community. Guests included community leaders like NAACP President Stephen Hairston and

State Rep. Earline Parmon; Assistant Police Chief Louis Saunders was there, too. They and other attendees rotated from table to table where various topics related to re-entry were discussed. Unknown to most of the guests was that many of those they sat beside at the tables were ex-offenders.

Sharon Glover, co-chair of the Faith Seeds Coalition and its executive council, said public disdain and prejudice are among the biggest obstacles that stand in between ex-offenders and a successful life on the outside. Glover said many are firm believers in the old adage, "Do the crime, do the time,"

but few truly ever forgive and forget ex-offenders.

"After folks have done their penance, why do we expect (them to) do their penance for all of their lives?" she asked. Many questions like that were asked and left for attendees to ponder. Bruce Ribeiro hopes that (See Offenders, Page 15)

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