



NICK ARROYO/Staff

J.D. Hudson, correctional services chief, can point to a list of firsts at the jail since he took over

# Jailhouse blues

## Atlanta's top jailer under fire

By Gregg Jones  
Staff Writer

J.D. Hudson, chief of Atlanta's Bureau of Correctional Services, enjoys relaxing in his plush office with the color television tuned to a video music channel. His days in that office, some city politicians say, are numbered.

Mayor Andrew Young, according to some City Council members, has decided to find a replacement for the controversial jailer. During Hudson's 12-year tenure, there have been complaints from employees and city politicians about his handling of the city jail, its employees and prisoners.

Hudson shrugs off the criticism. "I get bored when there aren't any problems. Serenity is not my thing," he explains.

Yet Hudson is not optimistic about keeping his job. "The mayor says I'm doing a good job. But I serve at his pleasure."

Young will announce his decision in the next few weeks, says Shirley Franklin, the mayor's spokeswoman. She wouldn't confirm or deny re-

ports that Young will replace Hudson.

"The mayor has felt that Mr. Hudson has brought the jail out of the Dark Ages into the 20th century," she says, "but nothing ensures that he will be reappointed. In anything, there are other people who can do a good job."

Councilman Buddy Fowlkes, a frequent critic of Hudson and chairman of the council's Public Safety Committee, says he has been contacted by other councilmen and judges on behalf of Hudson. "But I don't think Hudson can get the support of the mayor, and I don't think he can get my support," he says.

At 56, Hudson appears 10 years younger and athletically fit. His office in the new jail is furnished with a long cream-colored couch and matching armchair, a glass coffee table, a pair of potted trees and a gallery of plaques and awards.

Hudson took the initiative in a recent interview as he relaxed on the couch, lit up a long, slender cigar and began criticizing his critics while rock star Rick Springfield danced and sang his way across the

TV screen.

In the past seven years, Hudson has been the target of two city investigations. Allegations against him included harassment of female employees and using abusive language with employees. He points out that investigators cleared him.

He admits his aggressive management style has done little to soothe the ruffled feelings of antagonists. Typical were his comments about disgruntled jailers in 1976: "I'm not going to let a bunch of rookies tell me how to run this place. When they get a little experience on them, maybe then I'll listen to them."

There was the expectation by some that foul-ups would cease when a much-heralded new city jail opened in January.

But a month later, an Atlanta man arrested in a domestic dispute claimed he waited in jail 24 hours before he was released on bond. In a published article, the man said jail officials told him that his name had been entered incorrectly in computer files, and thus there was no record of his being jailed.

See JAIL, Page 9-E

# Jail

Continued From Page 1-E

Hudson says the incident never happened, or at least not the way the man described it.

Last month, the City Council approved a \$127,000 payment to the family of a man who was strangled to death by another inmate in 1981. The victim, a northeast Atlanta man who had been arrested for public drunkenness and disorderly conduct, was killed within an hour after he was jailed.

The victim's family filed a \$5 million lawsuit against the city, and a firestorm of criticism was directed at Hudson.

Earlier this year, when computer problems were plaguing the new jail, City Council President Marvin Arrington offered this criticism: "It's in horrible shape down there, and it's not getting any better. I've received several complaints from lawyers who had to wait seven hours before seeing their clients."

Hudson reached the position of director of correctional services by progressing through the law enforcement ranks. A native of Atlanta's Buttermilk Bottoms — now the Civic Center parking lot — he graduated from Clark College with a bachelor's degree in social sciences in 1949. He joined the city Police Department later that year and began a steady climb up the promotion ladder, reaching the rank of detective captain in 1971.

The competitive drive that is a Hudson trademark surfaced as a boy, when he would spend much of his time peering through the fence of a nearby tennis club, retrieving balls that sailed over the fence. Some of the club's members rewarded his dedication with encouragement and an occasional ball. Hudson did the rest.

In the early 1950s he found himself in the semifinals of the black national championships, needing one point to beat the tournament favorite. Hudson tried a risky drop shot, missed, and lost the match.

Burning with disappointment, he went to a golf practice range that same day, then practiced for a year without playing a round of golf. Today he is a tournament-savvy golfer who scores in the high 70s.

He was "a good cop, a trailblazer," Thomas Cuffie, a former police colleague and present council member, recalls, and Mayor Maynard Jackson thought Hudson was tough enough to shape up the Atlanta prison farm in 1971. Five years later Jackson gave Hudson control of the Atlanta city jail, "a rotten barrel of worms," Hudson recalls the mayor saying.

"Mayor Jackson felt that by assigning the jail to me, my management of it would turn the place around. And it did," Hudson says. He ticks off a list of firsts in the jail's history, including a state fire marshal's certificate of occupancy and innovative programs for prisoners.

It has not been enough for people like Fowlkes, who also cites complaints from lawyers, bondsmen and citizens that the jail booking time is too long. "I'm not after Mr. Hudson; I'm after efficiency," Fowlkes says. "If somebody isn't doing their job, I'm not going to protect them."

The criticism is parried by Cuffie. "There are going to be problems in a jail the size of Atlanta's," he says. "I get nothing but positive statements about J.D. Hudson."