

Corrections Connections

Illinois Department of Corrections | Newsletter

Fall 2025

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Message from Leadership

Dear IDOC Team,

I say it often, but it is truly an exciting time to be a part of IDOC. Over the past several months, we've introduced new technologies that reshape how we work, communicate, and serve. These changes go beyond simple upgrades; they reflect our broader vision to build a more connected, efficient, and responsive agency.

One of the most significant technology changes in the Department has been the transition to ICSolutions for phone calls, video visitations, and tablets for individuals in custody. Recently, we utilized the tablets in our transition to mail screening and will continue adding features to support our work. These tools enhance communication services, help staff work more efficiently, and support a safer, more positive environment.

In December, we will launch an electronic health records (EHR) system, starting with three facilities, marking another critical step forward in our transition to digital operations. The EHR system will streamline our medical recordkeeping and care coordination, equipping staff with modern tools to deliver healthcare with greater clarity and confidence.

These initiatives are just the start. We will keep introducing new technologies and tools to simplify operational processes, creating more meaningful opportunities for staff to connect, collaborate, and succeed.

As we modernize the department, I want to thank you for driving these innovations forward. Change doesn't always come with much warning, yet time and again, you've shown flexibility, resilience, and a willingness to adapt, often with tight timelines. Whether it's learning a new system, adjusting workflows, participating in a survey, or supporting one another through transitions, your dedication stands out.

Thank you for giving it your best, asking the tough questions, and helping us move forward. Your commitment fuels our progress. I'm excited about what lies ahead and even more so because we're on this journey together.



Latoya Hughes
Director

Behind the Badge:

Mark Shumake: The Man Who's Seen It All (and Fixed It All) at IDOC

By Crystal Robertson

Ah, Mark Shumake. If you've ever set foot in Shawnee CC, you've probably heard of him. And if you haven't, well, now's your chance to get acquainted with the legend. Mark's journey with IDOC began in May 1995 as a COT in Centralia — a career in corrections that early? And ever since, he's been climbing the ranks faster than you can say "promotional opportunities."

In August 1995, just three months after starting, Mark thought, "Why not level up?" and became an Officer. But he wasn't done yet — oh no. In 1998, he packed his bags and transferred to Tamms as an officer (because who doesn't love a good career change?). Then, in a plot twist that no one saw coming — except maybe Mark himself — he decided to step into the world of maintenance and become an Assistant Chief Stationary Engineer at Shawnee CC. That's right. He swapped his security hat for a hard hat and started fixing things instead of... well, securing them. It was a career shift for the ages.



Fast forward to January 2020, and Mark became the Chief Stationary Engineer at Shawnee CC. When people say Mark "grew up" in IDOC, it's not a stretch. Mark's not just a fixture at Shawnee — he's practically the glue holding the whole place together. His security background makes him the go-to guy for all things mechanical and operational. Need a solution to a facility problem? Call Mark. Need to prioritize tasks faster than a speeding bullet? Call Mark. Emergency? You guessed it, call Mark. He'll remain calm and collected and probably already knows who to call to make sure everything runs smoothly while you're still figuring out where your phone is.

I work closely with Mark every day (and let me tell you, we make a great team). There's an unspoken bond that says, "I trust you" and "I know if you need something, it's because the facility really needs it." Mark's knowledge of my job is so solid that sometimes I wonder if he has a secret "How to Do Everything Perfectly Manual" stashed away somewhere. It's like he just knows — he knows. As his looming retirement approaches, I can't help but feel that we're losing a piece of the puzzle. If you've worked with other chiefs, you'll agree — Shawnee CC hit the jackpot with Mark.

But it's not all business. There's a lighter side to Mark that's hard to ignore. One of my favorite memories involves him getting a little hot under the collar about a procurement change. He was venting, and I could see the frustration building up. Naturally, I smiled and, in my best "I'm a parent" tone, said, "When my boys behave this way, I generally just put them in the corner." Mark stopped dead in his tracks, and after a moment, we both burst out laughing. Since then, we've made it our inside joke. Now, when things get tense, he'll jokingly say, "Better go before you put me in the corner." It's moments like that that make working with Mark such a joy.

When Mark isn't fixing things or making Shawnee CC run like a well-oiled machine, he's probably out with his wife and new Jeep, top-down, enjoying nature like a true adventurer. Though, I bet if his lawn could talk, it would also say, "Hey, Mark, can you please stop trimming me so perfectly?" He's also a proud dad of a college student, so if you ever need advice on managing a young adult and keeping a lawn green, Mark's your guy.

Mark, thank you for everything you've done at Shawnee CC. You've built trust, you've built relationships, and most importantly, you've built a legacy.

Dimensions of Wellness: **Financial**

Managing Your Finances for the Holidays and the New Year

The holiday season is a time of giving, celebration, and reflection. It is also the busiest times of the year, both at work and at home. It can bring financial stress if spending gets out of hand. Between long shifts, mandatory overtime, and balancing family time, it's easy to let financial planning slide. As correctional professionals, we work hard all year and it's easy to feel tempted to splurge during the holidays. With some planning and practical strategies, you can enjoy the season while keeping your finances in good shape as we head into the new year.

This year, build a realistic holiday budget and stick to it. Start by listing all your expected holiday expenses—gifts, decorations, travel, food, and any seasonal activities. Decide how much you can realistically afford to spend without dipping into savings or using credit. A good rule of thumb: set a total limit first, then break it down by category or person. Track your spending with a simple spreadsheet or budgeting app to stay accountable. Overtime pay can be a blessing this time of year, but it can also create the temptation to spend more. If you're earning extra, consider splitting that overtime check - use part for the holidays and tuck the rest into savings or toward debt.

Shopping smart and saving strategically are great ways to stretch your holiday dollars. Time is limited and shopping can feel like another job so plan ahead to make it as simple as possible.

- Try shopping early or online – Take advantage of early During this time of the year, many places offer Black Friday and Cyber Monday deals.
- Try to use cash – When shopping in store, you are less likely to overspend when you can physically see your money leaving.
- Don't forget to compare prices – A few minutes online can save a lot in the long run.
- There is nothing wrong with a homemade gift – Handwritten letters, home-cooked meals, handicrafts, and your presence with loved ones means far more than any present.
- Make sure you keep your credit card use under control – Set a personal limit that fits your budget and don't exceed it. When the bill is due, pay off balance in full to avoid high interest fees.
- Track spending weekly – Review your expenses against your budget once a week to stay on top of spending.
- Use rewards – This is a great time of year to use cash back or points. Be sure to pay the remaining balance and rest easy knowing you've earned additional rewards for future gifts or a summer trip.



Once the holidays are over, take time to review your overall financial picture. The start of the new year is perfect for setting new goals and keeping them. A good way to start would be to open an emergency fund. I like to aim for three to six months of expenses that way if something pops up like car repairs, family needs, or even unexpected sickness, you don't have to stress over the unplanned expenses. Set up recurring transfers into a savings account—it's easier to save when you don't have to think about it. Schedule a small automatic transfer from each paycheck into a savings account. Even \$25 per pay adds up fast. While you are planning ahead, consider your retirement. Join the deferred compensation plan and set your contribution to a comfortable amount. Be sure to increase the amount with every raise or promotion! Every time you promote, raise it and let it sit until retirement. Take the opportunity to set up a Christmas savings account for next year and be prepared for the holiday season. You will have more saved up and less stress when October comes around.

No matter what, don't forget to set financial goals that fit your life. Correctional work can be unpredictable, but your financial goals don't have to be. Pick two or three areas to focus on in the new year. Pay off a credit card or two, pay off a personal loan, or improve your credit score by paying on time and keeping balances low. Save for a family trip or a big purchase. If you need some guidance, look into BeWell Illinois financial resources. Through this program you can take free financial literacy courses, access budgeting tools, get a financial health checkup, and even meet with a Certified Professional Financial counselor.

The holidays should bring joy, not financial strain. As correctional officers and staff, you work in one of the toughest professions out there—so give yourself the gift of financial peace. With mindful budgeting, smart saving, and clear goals, you can finish the year strong and step confidently into the next one. Remember—it's not about how much you spend, but about the memories you make and the peace of mind you carry into the year ahead.

Focusing on Wellness: “All Things You” Days Bring Support and Fun to Staff

The Staff Wellness Response Team (SWRT) brought “All Things You” to several IDOC facilities this summer and fall. These dedicated wellness days aim to support correctional staff’s well-being across IDOC. Events feature workshops centered on the eight dimensions of wellness, offering tools, resources, and hands-on activities to help staff prioritize their mental, emotional, and physical health.

Each facility tailored its event to create an engaging experience for staff:

- Big Muddy River Correctional Center welcomed current staff and retirees to their fair-themed event. Staff enjoyed playing fun carnival games, an inflatable axe throwing station, ping pong, and delicious BBQ. (May 23)



- Stateville Correctional Center enjoyed their first All Things You event with friendly competition throughout the day as staff played corn hole, giant Jenga, and moved to the court for a 3-point shoot off. (May 23)



- Dixon Correctional Center staff planted flowers in the new Memorial Garden and had a silly string fight with the wardens- the staff won! (June 26)



- Fox Valley Adult Transition Center staff enjoyed board and lawn games, such as bingo, bean bag toss, and card games. Staff also had a buffet meal together. (July 23)



- Taylorville Correctional Center staff enjoyed playing with virtual reality Ocular goggles and chowing down on pizza and snacks. (September 18)
- Danville Correctional Center held a scavenger hunt, dunk tank, puzzle contest, friendly games of pickleball, and the barber even donated her time to clean up staff haircuts. Some retirees visited and enjoyed reconnecting with old friends and making new ones. (September 23)



- Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center participated in a “longest football throw” contest and lined up for the chance to dunk Warden Carothers in the dunk tank! (September 30)



- Sheridan Correctional Center welcomed a therapy dog and held a scavenger hunt where staff competed for prizes such as “Shift Supervisor of the Day” and a chance to park in the warden’s parking spot. (October 7)



- Decatur Correctional Center held a fall/Halloween themed event complete with a DJ and a visit from Logan’s therapy dog. The candy salad was a huge hit, and staff were happy to fill a bag with their favorite candy as a take-home treat. (October 16)
- Lincoln Correctional Center staff played pickleball, cornhole, and enjoyed walking tacos. An intense game of UNO stole the show though and everyone was happy to get to know colleagues they don’t normally have a chance to connect with. (October 21)

These “All Things You” days are a fun and meaningful way to promote wellness and show appreciation for our frontline staff’s daily hard work. Stay tuned for an event at your facility!

Miss Bliss

Welcome back, corrections staff, for another edition of Miss Bliss. I was asked last month, “How can I make internal spiritual changes for myself?” First, I explained that spiritual wellness is about more than just religion. It includes having a sense of purpose, sticking to your values, finding peace even during difficult times, and feeling connected not only to yourself but also to your environment. It is hard to stay grounded spiritually when you work in an environment that often feels unpredictable and emotionally heavy, but you can.

How can you balance your spiritual wellness while working in corrections? The first thing I suggest is to reflect on what matters the most to you. Think about what keeps you going during the hard times. It may be family, income, future retirement, or even benefits. Let’s face it- that is what keeps a lot of us going and showing up in a challenging work environment.

Learn to let go of what drains you. We all talk about feeling mentally drained after work —so how do we address this? Whether it’s anger, guilt, resentment, or self-judgment, carrying emotional weight adds stress. Practicing forgiveness, even in small ways, helps free your spirit. It is hard to forgive those who may hurt us, but it’s essential to learn how to forgive. You don’t have to talk to those who hurt you, but you can internally forgive them or write it down on a piece of paper and rip it up. The release you feel after carrying the weight will come, and you can shift your focus to more positive feelings.

Live your values even at work. We all have values, whether learned them growing up or figured them out on our own. Just because you are at work doesn’t mean you can’t live your values. Values can be respect, compassion for others, or even “firm, fair, and consistent.” Whatever your values are, you can try to use them during your daily interactions with coworkers and yourself. You can also try to stay connected with prayer, meditation, or nature while on break to help center yourself. A quiet moment during break, or even just stepping outside and breathing deeply for a minute, can help reset your nervous system. This has helped me recenter myself during challenging moments.

Most importantly, practice gratitude daily to remind yourself of all the great things you have in your life. In a fast-paced environment, look for moments of meaning— whether it’s a supportive word from a colleague or a quiet moment alone. Gratitude, even for small things, helps restore balance and calm.



Taking care of yourself spiritually is a necessity in this line of work. When you are well within, you’re stronger for everyone around you. Practice your own spiritual wellness at work and find moments to continue this practice at home. The more you practice, the more naturally it will come. Nurturing your spiritual wellness is not about being perfect; it’s about staying grounded, centered, and connected to what truly matters. In our line of work, it’s easy to lose sight of yourself. By taking small steps to care for your inner life, you build resilience, clarity, and a more profound sense of purpose that carries you through the hardest days. Always remember that real change starts from within, and even quiet growth can lead to powerful transformation. Until next time, stay safe and enjoy life.

Facility History:

History of Logan Correctional Center

Note: this article contains language that may be considered offensive or outdated by contemporary standards. It is presented in its original form to preserve historical accuracy and context and does not reflect the views or values of IDOC.

Like many other institutions in Illinois, if you walk through the halls of Logan Correctional Center and listen, you may hear the echoes of voices from generations of residents who have walked these paths before. Among the earliest echoes at Logan CC are the children with developmental disabilities and their caretakers who lived and worked the grounds at the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children. Overcrowding at the Jacksonville Experimental School for Idiots and Feeble-Minded Children led to the opening of the Illinois Asylum in 1877. Renamed the Lincoln State School and Colony in 1910, the facility operated exclusively as a children's institution until 1915 when the a bill was introduced addressing the "Commitment and Care for the Feeble-minded Persons" leading to the passage of Illinois House Bill 655 which allowed courts to permanently institutionalize anyone whom a respectable expert deemed "feeble-minded" including the elderly, ailing, and physically handicapped. In 1929, the Illinois Department of Public Welfare purchased 725 acres, expanding the grounds of the Lincoln State School and Colony and adding more than 10 buildings to the farm annex. At its peak, the Lincoln State School (renamed in 1954) housed nearly 5,500 residents by 1958. Residents had varying levels of mental and physical disabilities, and it was not uncommon to see residents farming alongside school supervisors and staff.

Life at the Lincoln State School changed drastically in 1973 when the Supreme Court decreed that working residents had to be paid the same as regular employees. This severely disrupted the school's agricultural operations, as administrators had relied on the underpaid and unpaid labor of residents for a century. As a result of the school's inability or unwillingness to pay, many working residents were transferred to smaller institutions, group homes, or even nursing homes. This legislative change also marked a societal shift towards de-institutionalization. For more than a century, society had relied on institutions such as the Illinois Asylum for Feeble-Minded Children, the Jacksonville Experimental School for Idiots and Feeble-Minded Children, and the Lincoln State School to house people with developmental and physical disabilities and mental health conditions, and lacked the infrastructure to care for and support these communities outside of institution walls. This resulted in former residents and individuals with

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mental health conditions often being at odds with their neighbors and law enforcement. At the same time, the “tough on crime” policies and heightened drug culture of the 1960s and 1970s led to more policing and higher rates of arrest. These issues, along with other cultural shifts, compounded and resulted in an increased need for correctional centers. In January 1978, the Lincoln State School’s Farm Annex was closed and repurposed as the Logan Correctional Center.

For the first nine years of its operations, Logan CC housed male individuals. In 1987, a new policy was enacted to address the rising populations of males and females in custody, and Logan CC became the nation’s only active co-ed medium-security prison. As you can imagine, this led to many logistical and cultural challenges for both staff and individuals in custody.

During this time, Logan housed many notable individuals, including the self-proclaimed “King of Kings,” Willie Lloyd, who paroled from Logan in 1992. At the time, the Chicago Tribune reported that “Five limousines from Chicago made their way through the cornfields of central Illinois to fetch him...his followers brought him après-prison apparel that included leather pants and a mink coat.” While I didn’t join IDOC until 1999, I learned a great deal about this period in the agency’s history from my father, Bill Merreighn, who began working at the Logan CC when it opened in 1987.

In early 2000, IDOC ended the co-ed housing policy, and the female population was relocated across the parking lot to Lincoln Correctional Center, making Logan CC a male-only facility. For the next 13 years, from 2000 to 2013, operations at Logan CC proceeded as usual. The timeline shifted again in March 2013 when Dwight Correctional Center, one of two women’s prisons in the state, closed its doors. At that point, the male population at Logan CC was transferred elsewhere, and Logan became an all-female facility. This, once again, proved to be a difficult transition for staff and individuals in custody.

There were many staff who had never worked with women in corrections, and those of us who had remembered the challenges of the earlier co-ed environment. Almost 2,000 women were relocated from an environment managed by staff with experience overseeing a women’s facility to a new facility with staff who were underprepared for the change. To say that everyone involved was on edge would be an understatement. The existing staff did their best, but most did not feel confident that their previous training and experience would carry over to the new population. Additionally, because there were only two facilities and one Adult Transition Center open to women, Logan

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CC also began accepting individuals with additional mental health needs. This was another area where the Logan staff at the time lacked experience. Despite all the hurdles and potential pitfalls, the staff at Logan CC worked diligently to adapt to this new environment. Since then, IDOC has implemented specialized training and focused on a trauma-informed approach, which has paid dividends. Logan CC still has a diverse population with corresponding needs, but we now have staff who are equipped to address these unique challenges.

I have often said that if you can make it at Logan, you can make it anywhere. This is not intended to disparage staff at other facilities or Logan itself, but to acknowledge those who make a difference in the lives of individuals in our custody. While Logan has its challenges, the dedication of its employees over the years has created an environment that is difficult to replicate. Through years of training and consistent effort, staff have reframed operations, replacing the tumultuous atmosphere with a calmer, structured environment that delivers meaningful

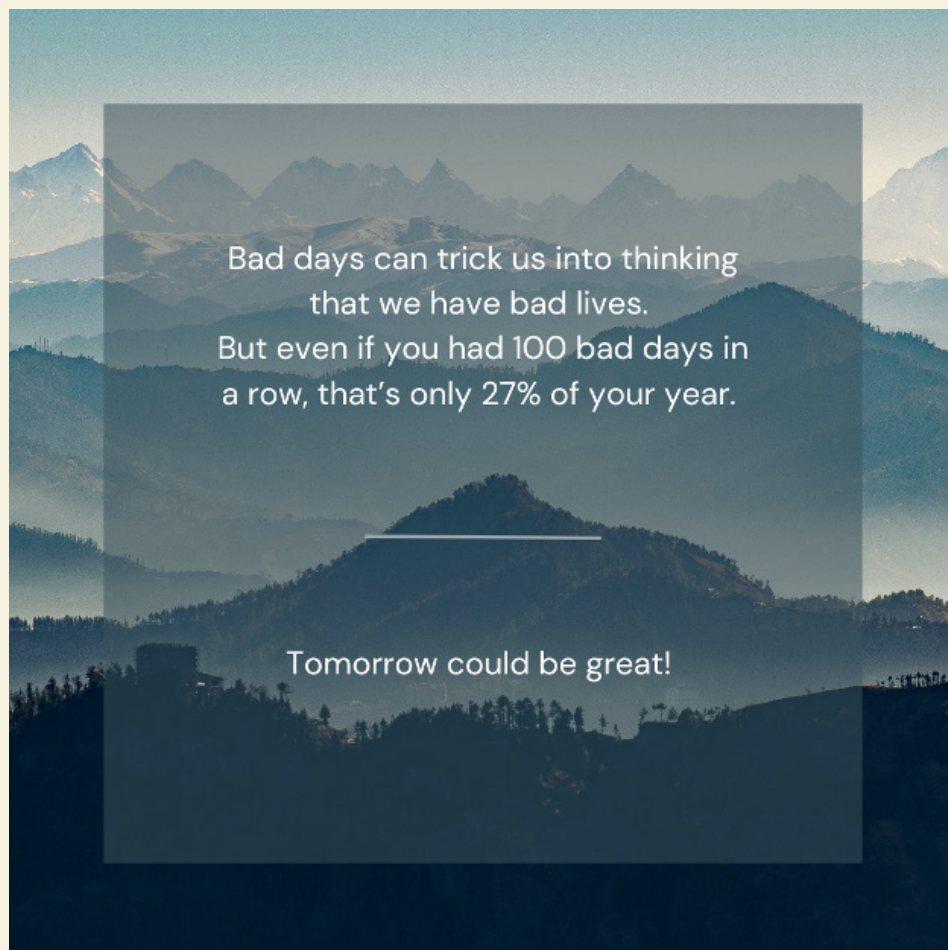
programming and promotes safety.

Winston Churchill is often quoted as saying, “A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.” The new perspective at Logan is one of optimism, as we never forget the “why” behind what we are doing. I am extremely lucky to be in the position of Staff Development Specialist at Logan. This role provides me the opportunity to speak with our staff on a regular basis and reinforce that this career can be one of the most rewarding things you can do - with the right perspective. Never take the impact you have on the world around you or the people in it for granted, regardless of the position you are in. We are limited only by our own vision, and if we have the right perspective and approach our work with integrity and character, then our contribution will not be in vain.

For a list of references used to write this essay, please email doc.communications@illinois.gov.

Motivational Quote of the Month

courtesy of Jonathan Brown, SWRT Program Administrator





"In the Spotlight" is a tribute to the exceptional leaders across IDOC who make a meaningful difference through their leadership. This feature highlights individuals who demonstrate dedication, innovation, and a strong commitment to building a supportive environment. By showcasing their achievements, we aim to inspire others and emphasize the vital role strong leadership plays in shaping our department's culture. Each spotlight serves as a reminder of our team members' extraordinary efforts to strengthen our mission and improve the lives of those we serve.

In the Spotlight: **Warden Anthony Wills and Assistant Warden of Operations Kevin Reichert**

Warden Anthony Wills

Warden Anthony Wills began his IDOC career as a Correctional Officer Trainee at Vandalia Correctional Center in August 1996. Over the years, he steadily rose through the ranks at both Menard and Vandalia, serving as Correctional Sergeant and Shift Supervisor. In 2018 and 2019, he stepped into the role of Acting Assistant Warden of Programs at Menard CC, eventually becoming Acting Warden in April 2020 and officially appointed Warden in April 2021.



Throughout his career, Warden Wills has demonstrated a deep commitment to staff development and institutional excellence. He has been actively involved in the Honor Guard and Internal Affairs and served as ADA Coordinator while Acting AWP. One of his notable initiatives as Warden was the development of a mentorship program that pairs new security staff with experienced officers, fostering a supportive training environment and improving staff retention.

Warden Wills is also a passionate advocate for Staff Wellness. He regularly encourages staff to build strong support systems outside of work and to maintain a healthy work-life balance. He often reminds employees of the importance of planning for retirement, emphasizing the value of having something meaningful to look forward to.

Assistant Warden of Operations Kevin Reichert

Assistant Warden of Operations Kevin Reichert began his corrections career in August 1995 as a Youth Supervisor Trainee at Illinois Youth Center in Joliet. He later served as a Correctional Officer at both Menard CC and Tamms CC. In 2013, he was promoted to Correctional Lieutenant and advanced to Internal Security Investigator II the following year.



In May 2021, Kevin was appointed Assistant Warden of Operations at Menard CC, a role well-suited to his deep knowledge and dedication to IDOC's mission. His extensive experience in the Intelligence Unit includes serving as an Intelligence Coordinator, STG Specialist, and Intelligence District Coordinator.

AWO Reichert, who retired at the end of October 2025, was a vocal champion of Staff Wellness, frequently highlighting the strength and unity of the Menard team. "Menard does it best, when it matters most," he says, reflecting the strong support system that exists among staff during challenging times. As he approached retirement, Kevin encouraged colleagues to plan ahead and save for their future, reminding everyone that it's never too late to start and that every extra effort today helps build the retirement you envision.

Recognizing Excellence: 2025 Facility Review Control Officers of the Year

Each year, the Office of Administrative Directive and Standards honors Facility Review Control Officers (FRCOs) who go above and beyond in their roles to ensure operational excellence and compliance across IDOC. One FRCO is selected from each of the three administrative regions as a Regional Officer of the Year, and from that group, one is chosen as the Statewide Officer of the Year.

To be considered for this recognition, staff members must be active participants in the External Review Team and demonstrate exceptional leadership, in-depth institutional knowledge, and a consistent willingness to support their colleagues.

This year's **Regional Officers of the Year** are:

- **Melissa Rucker** – Southern Region
- **Deanna Lowry** – Central Region
- **Stacey Ziano** – Northern Region

We are also proud to announce **Stacey Ziano** as the **2025 Statewide FRCO of the Year**!

Melissa Rucker was selected for her dedication, keen attention to detail, innovation, and collaborative spirit. She played a pivotal role in developing and implementing a new tool log at Centralia Correctional Center, which served as a pilot facility. Her data collection demonstrated improved compliance, safety, and efficiency as a result of the initiative. Melissa has also generously shared her expertise by assisting and training new PREA compliance managers across the state.

Deanna Lowry took on the FRCO role at Graham Correctional Center after a long vacancy and immediately stepped up to the challenge. She rebuilt the review team from the ground up and has made significant strides in improving facility operations through her tireless work ethic and commitment to excellence.

Stacey Ziano, who has served as the FRCO at Sheridan Correctional Center since 2023, has been instrumental in sustaining the facility's compliance and operational success. Known for her friendly demeanor, consistency, and accountability, Stacey fosters a professional environment built on teamwork and high standards. Her impact has not only earned her recognition as the Northern Region FRCO of the Year but also as the **2025 Statewide FRCO of the Year**.

Please join us in congratulating Melissa, Deanna, and Stacey for their outstanding service and dedication. Their work plays a crucial role in ensuring our facilities are safe, compliant, and aligned with the Department's mission of promoting public safety and integrity.



New Wellness Resource

The advertisement features a blue background with white and red accents. At the top, the title 'The Armor Up America App' is written in large, bold, white letters. Below it, the subtitle 'For First Responders and their Families' is in smaller white text. To the right, a smartphone displays the app's interface, which includes a large shield logo with a white eagle and the letters 'AUA' on a blue background. Below the shield, the text 'Armor Up America' is visible. To the left of the phone, a list of features is provided in white text. At the bottom, there are two QR codes, one for the App Store and one for Google Play, each with its respective logo and text. The App Store logo says 'Download on the App Store' and the Google Play logo says 'GET IT ON Google Play'.

The Armor Up America App

For First Responders and their Families

- **Connect to Peer Advocates 24/7:** Get help right from your phone, whenever and wherever you need it
- **Quick Connection:** One tap connects you to someone who understands what you're going through.
- **Wellness Features:** Take educational surveys, track daily practices, create journal or notes, and watch topical videos.
- **First Responder Focus:** All content is made specifically for first responders and the unique challenges you face.
- **Family Resources:** Content to help your loved ones understand and support you better. 24/7 hotline available to family members needing assistance
- **Complete Privacy:** Your information stays private and secure - no one needs to know you're using the app.

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

The State of Illinois has extended free access to Armor Up America to IDOC correctional officers, retirees, and family members. This app provides support and resources for first responders and their families and includes round-the-clock peer advocates, virtual live trainings, educational surveys, daily journals, and much more! Download from your app store and use this code for free access: **idoc22**

Illinois Correctional Industries: Transforming and Growing

Letter from Kim Larson, Illinois Correctional Industries CEO

I am proud to recognize and celebrate the outstanding accomplishments of the Illinois Correctional Industries (ICI) team. Since we transitioned to IDOC, the team has consistently transformed challenges into opportunities, demonstrating innovation, perseverance, and a shared commitment to changing lives.

Operating under our new mission — “to prepare individuals in custody for successful re-entry through training in sustainable, high-demand careers” — ICI continues to deliver impactful programs. Our hands-on job training, vocational education, and access to nationally recognized certifications are building pathways to personal and professional growth that benefit both individuals and communities across Illinois.

The past year has been transformational. The ICI team has modernized operations, introduced new occupations through the DOL program, and implemented CDL simulators to elevate training experiences. We have expanded our presence with new ICI sites, including Kewanee, Robinson, and Vienna, and have grown to support a record number of registered apprenticeship occupations – from 8 in 2023 to 52 today.

In 2023, staff responded to the closures of the meat processing plants at Hill, Vandalia, Western, and Menard with incredible resilience. They launched new programs in urban agriculture, small engine repair, simulator training, and specialty programs like the Menard Industrial Training Program. Their dedication turned a challenge into a chance to equip individuals with practical, employable skills.

As of June 2025, ICI supports 303 active apprentices, up from 82 in 2023 – a testament to the team’s strategic focus and tireless efforts. In 2024 alone, Robinson and Kewanee joined ICI with new training programs, including CAT and CDL simulator certifications. By early 2025, the Illinois River bakery transitioned fully to warehousing.

Later this year, the East Moline shop will open a new Diesel Technician program. Graham will add certifications for automotive repair and build their program to include ASE certifications eventually. Western will establish a building trades program that mirrors the Mid-America Carpenters Union training facility, and Vienna will begin offering Department of Labor certifications. These initiatives exemplify ICI’s growing partnerships with employers and other organizations dedicated to re-entry success.

The progress is a direct result of the frontline staff working inside the facilities every day and their dedication. There was no formal roadmap – just aging equipment, the old ICI playbook, and a team that stepped up to lead with initiative and resolve.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the ICI subcommittee, made up of AFSCME members and management, whose collaboration, support, and shared vision have been

instrumental in driving this transformation forward. Without their commitment and teamwork, none of this progress would have been possible.

My sincere thanks to every individual who has played a role in ICI’s success – whether in the facilities, behind the scenes, or at the table, helping shape the vision. Your commitment, collaboration, and belief in the mission have made this progress possible. Together, you are not only transforming ICI but creating opportunities that change lives and strengthen communities across Illinois. ICI is doing great things – and with the continued dedication of this team, the best is yet to come.



Lincoln Warehouse/Logan PAWS staff from left to right: Jeff Kowalewski (Maintenance Equipment Operator), Jerry Jones (Supply Supervisor I), Douglas Adams (Warehouse & Trucking Manager), Ryan Eads (Supply Supervisor III), Lisa Dial (Corrections Vocational Instructor), Sterling Adams (Account Tech II), and Austin Carls (Maintenance Equipment Officer).



Shawnee ICI Metal Shop staff from left to right: Keith Meier (Corrections Industry Supervisor), Justin Owens (Corrections Vocational Instructor), Lucas Nannie (Corrections Vocational Instructor), and Allen Lawless (Superintendent).

37th Annual Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees (IAHSE) Conference

The Illinois Department of Corrections has had the privilege of participating in the Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees (IAHSE) Conference over the past several years. More than 40 IDOC employees attended this year's 37th annual conference, held on October 10th, with the theme of "SEGUIMOS PA'LANTE: AMPLIFYING OUR VOICES." IAHSE conference is not only instrumental in highlighting the challenges that Latinos in state employment and the community face, but more importantly in enhancing the state Hispanic employment plan and creating greater opportunities for Hispanic applicants. IDOC is represented on the Board of

Directors for IAHSE by one of our veteran employees, as well as by our Employee Services — Recruiting Coordinators, who attend the yearly job fair along with the conference.

The IAHSE's mission as a nonprofit, volunteer-driven organization is to "advocate for the employment, educational and professional development of the Latino state employees and to ensure quality services to our Latino communities in Illinois." IDOC is proud to take part in this annual conference and celebrate the diversity of our department.



IDOC Employees Shelith Hansboro and Viviana Hernandez with former Chief of Investigations and Intelligence Eddie Escamilla



Conference Attendees with Illinois Comptroller Mendoza



Conference Attendees

Welcome to IDOC

Kim White - Internal Communications Manager

When did you join IDOC and what is your role?

I joined IDOC in June as the new Internal Communications Manager. This role was created to level up internal information sharing within the agency. My job is to examine the ways we communicate with each other and create and implement new strategies to ensure all staff are getting the information they need to stay informed and engaged. In short, I look at how we talk to each other, what we're saying, and how we feel about it.



Tell us about your work experience and what you hope to bring to this new role.

I am a librarian by trade and started my career in libraries. For 15 years as a public librarian, I curated information and built strategic partnerships to find the best ways to connect people to the information and resources they needed. As I grew in my career, I moved from working on the public floor to behind-the-scenes administration where I led special projects and managed government relations. I had the opportunity to explore many different career paths through this work, and as self-proclaimed lifelong learner, I pursued professional certificates in User Experience Research & Design, Project Management, and Corporate Communications.

I am excited to be at IDOC and join the agency at a time when the commitment to staff wellness and progress is so strong. I want to use my experience to involve all levels of staff in conversations to create spaces and touchpoints that promote transparency and engagement and help us feel more confident and connected to our work.

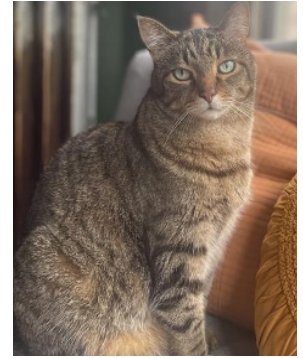
What are you working on right now and what do you have planned for IDOC's internal communications in the future?

Right now, I'm focused on learning as much as I can about the corrections world and the way we connect with each other at IDOC. I've taken over some all-staff communications and am working to ensure my team has the tools we need to carry out our work and make informed decisions about what projects we focus on. As for the future, I've been tasked with taking a hard look at our staff intranet and what we can do to make it a more active, useful space for staff across the agency. There is never a shortage of projects in internal communications, and I'm looking forward to discovering how I can best support all IDOC teams.

What are you most passionate about outside of work?

My little family! My fiancé, Joel, and our cat, Tubbs. I adopted

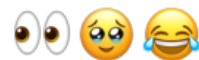
Tubbs 13 years ago and he is the best boy around. Joel joined our family three years later and it's been happily –ever after since. As you might imagine, I'm also an avid reader and active library supporter. I'm always happy to talk about what I'm reading, hear what you're reading, and help you tap into all of the resources at your local library.



Coffee or tea?

Iced chai lattes.

What are your three most used emojis?



Chrissy Thomas - Leadership Development Program Manager

When did you join IDOC, and what is your role?

I joined IDOC in September, taking on a brand-new role as Leadership Development Program Manager. This role is tasked with developing and introducing learning and development opportunities for all levels of leadership, from emerging leaders to long-term leaders. By providing leaders with the necessary tools and resources to support them in their roles, we will build stronger teams that will carry out the mission, vision, and values of this agency.



Tell us about your work experience and what you hope to bring to this new role.

I am a certified Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and have worked in most areas of Human Resources over the last 25 years, with an emphasis on recruitment, onboarding, and learning and development. I have worked in the healthcare industry for the previous 18 years, starting the first centralized recruiting functions for my last two employers. Over the past 8 years, I have immersed myself in the learning and development space, collaborating, creating, and delivering a variety of training programs for leaders and staff at all levels.

I'm also a certified facilitator in Leading with Emotional Intelligence (EQ) through BlueEQ™, training leaders and individual contributors on the topic, which has become a huge passion of mine. I am a huge supporter of professional and personal growth – you're not growing if you're not learning. I am so excited for the current and future leadership of this

agency and to be a part of creating leadership opportunities in partnership with all levels of IDOC, tying what we do day in and day out to help meet the agency's initiatives. Each person at IDOC brings unique skills, knowledge, and perspectives to this agency, and everyone's feedback is critical to the success of a new program that will set new and long-term leaders and their teams up for success.

What are you working on right now, or excited to get started with Leadership Development at IDOC?

First of all, what an incredible opportunity it is to establish a new program through partnerships and collaborations with the people of this agency and other agencies throughout Illinois! Current projects include building a stronger foundation of IDOC's core values to help leaders and staff connect what they do in their jobs to the agency's mission, vision, and values. I'm also partnering with various departments across the agency to deliver Psychological Safety training that includes

EQ elements to help build stronger, more productive teams. Stay tuned as we continue to build out this program, providing a foundation for long-term sustainability.

What hobbies or interests do you have outside of work?

I enjoy spending time with my friends and family (including 2 cats). I have 2 kids who keep me busy with high school and middle school events. I'm also invested at a local gym where I've been attending for 3 years and currently serve as a certified strength-training instructor.

What is your favorite snack/candy?

Reese's – all the way!! I just can't help myself!

What are your three most used emojis?



Cozy Coffee Recipe

With cold weather finally arriving I am now ready to switch out my cold brew for a warm, cozy coffee. Here is a simple, but amazing new recipe I am currently obsessed with:

Maple Vanilla and Brown Sugar Coffee

Ingredients:

8 oz of Brewed Starbucks Maple Pecan Flavored Coffee
1 ½ Tbsp of half and half
2 Tsp of Brown Sugar
½ tsp of Vanilla Extract

Optional:

Whipped Cream or Cold Foam
Cinnamon- Just a sprinkle

Directions:

1. Brew the Maple Pecan Coffee
2. Stir in half and half, brown sugar, and vanilla extract.
3. Top with optional ingredients

Enjoy!





'Tis the Season *by Crystal Robertson*

Ready or not, here comes the season—you know, the one that sprints toward us faster than a toddler after you say “cookie.” I swear it sneaks up quicker every year. One minute it’s September, and the next you’re knee-deep in gift wrap, and wondering if it’s socially acceptable to put a little something extra in your morning coffee.

No matter how early I plan, the holidays still manage to surprise me. But this year, I’m doing things a little differently. I’m hitting the pause button – not just to breathe, but to look around and ask: How can I be generous in ways that don’t involve draining my bank account faster than a Black Friday sale?

I know what you’re thinking: “How do I give to others when I can barely give myself eight hours of sleep and a full tank of gas?” Fair. But hang with me, I promise I’m not about to suggest buying monogrammed robes for the neighbors.

Here’s what I’ve learned with age and ahem wisdom (go ahead and laugh, I’ll wait): The best gifts aren’t always the ones you can buy. Some of the most meaningful things people have given me were 100% priceless—and not in that “thanks for the macaroni art” kind of way.

For example:

- When my mom passed away, someone cleaned my house. I didn’t ask. I didn’t cry in a cleaning supply aisle. They just showed up and did it. Superhero stuff.
- When I was buried under to-do lists and kid pick-ups, someone grabbed my groceries and my children (with my permission, obviously).

- I’ve had friends sit with me in silence on my deck. No words, just support.
- Someone even painted my front door because I had the paint, but not the time or emotional capacity to wield a brush.

These moments? These quiet, thoughtful, deeply generous gestures? They stuck with me way longer than any gift card ever could.

This season, I’ve set a goal: Do small things with great love. I want to find ways to lighten someone’s load, even if it’s just for one day. You don’t have to be a millionaire or own a sleigh pulled by magical reindeer. Maybe someone you know needs:

- Help organizing the chaos that is their pantry.
- Someone to wrap the 43 gifts they impulse-bought on Amazon at 2am.
- A clean car because theirs looks like a Crumb Museum on wheels.
- Or honestly, someone to just sit and be with them.

Here’s your holiday challenge: Keep your eyes open. Look around. Someone near you is struggling, and you might be the only person who notices. Be their helper. Be their peace-bringer. Be the reason they remember this season for kindness, not chaos. Big or small, your gesture could be the bright spot in someone’s dim December.

Seven Values of a Military Veteran

by (SGT. John Howard, Danville Correctional Center, U.S. Army Retired)

According to a 2023 U.S. Census Bureau study, 6.1% of the population —approximately 15.8 million people — are veterans. A veteran, by definition, is a person who has served in an active military status or called to duty by order of the President and released under conditions other than dishonorable. Veteran's Day, originally called Armistice Day, was established on November 11th, 1919, and celebrated the end of World War I. The holiday was officially renamed Veteran's Day by Congress in 1954 to honor all military members who served in various conflicts around the world.

The job requirements associated with the basic functions of military duty often run parallel with IDOC duties (I will guard everything within the limits of my post and quit my post only when properly relieved, a.k.a. General Order #1 for the Army). The similarities bring a strange comfort and frustration to a thankless job. But what do I know? I'm just a grumpy, retired Army Sergeant trying to live my best correctional life. In my humble opinion, there are seven values that most veterans exhibit to set themselves apart from their peers in corrections.

Loyalty. Not just to family and friends, but also to coworkers and positions assigned. There's an understanding of mission accomplishment that carries a veteran forward on their daily tasks. Difficult situations are handled by trusting the person to the left and right to do their job. There's a reciprocal trust that if things go sideways, a team stands ready to help address adversity in any form.

Duty. Working for IDOC comes with many personal challenges. A veteran understands the necessity of a strong work ethic to carve a pathway through each day. A veteran is a problem-solver who takes initiative in the absence of orders and assumes responsibility when no one else wants it. Why? Simple. There's a job that needs to be done. The military standard of accomplishing a task considers both the methodology and the result.

Respect. This applies to seniors, peers, and subordinates. Every member of corrections is part of the team. Most veterans understand the value of working as part of a team and the experience each team member can bring. No one was drafted into IDOC or forced to work behind the walls. There's mutual respect in volunteering to do a difficult job.

Selfless Service. A veteran often goes above and beyond what is asked. Usually, it's at a personal cost (time, money, health, etc). There's no ego involved— only accomplishing what's necessary. This applies both inside and outside the work environment. This is not due to a need for attention or awards, but a need to complete what is asked of them.

Honor. There is pride and distinction in wearing a uniform and/or carrying a badge. The person wearing it serves a purpose beyond self-interest. A veteran stands ready to watch over and protect coworkers, civilian staff, visitors, and residents



alike— bringing honor to themselves, the facility, and the department comes second nature.

Integrity. Doing the right thing when no one is watching should be the cornerstone of everyone who works for IDOC. Every day spent working behind the wall is a journey into the grey. Veterans quickly recognize morally dangerous choices and the consequences of improper actions. Not compromising themselves for pleasure, profit, or personal safety comes second nature.

Personal Courage. A veteran accepts the challenges and adversity found in a correctional setting. Combat veterans uniquely understand the dangers of working in a hostile environment. There's an additional skillset gained through military service that helps a veteran survive in a prison environment.

Twenty-three years of military service prepared me for life in IDOC long before I ever joined as a correctional officer. I know my prior service sets me apart from my peers. Military experience leaves a lasting mark on all who serve. I'm grateful for a day of recognition for my brothers and sisters who've served, and I look forward to making a positive impact wherever the job needs me.

Staff Events

East Moline CC Suicide Prevention Walk

The East Moline Employee Suggestion Committee and DEI Committee teamed up for Suicide Awareness month in September. Staff set up a lemonade stand and joined the Moline community for the “Out of the Darkness, Suicide Awareness and Prevention Walk” on September 21st. Team East Moline CC were the top fundraising team overall, raising \$1610! Timarie Neubert was East Moline’s top fundraiser and brought in nearly \$700 for the cause.

Shout out to everyone who supported the cause by donating, enjoying a tasty lemonade, or participating in the community walk! In our profession, mental health often takes a backseat, and it is important to be aware how this issue can impact us and those around us. Check in with those around you and be kind to yourself and others!



Top Teams	
	East Moline Correctional Center \$1,610 Raised
	Mr V \$1,075 Raised
	Logan's Legacy \$1,047 Raised
	Jake's Posse \$653 Raised
	ARMAGEDDON \$500 Raised
View More	



Special shout out to [@Neubert, Timarie](#) for being our top fundraiser on our team and overall, second place with **\$690!!!**

Top Fundraisers	
	Tracy DeMay \$697 Raised
	Timarie Neubert \$690 Raised



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East Moline CC held a Halloween Door Decorating contest to get into the spooky spirit!



Graham CC Pumpkin Decorating Contest

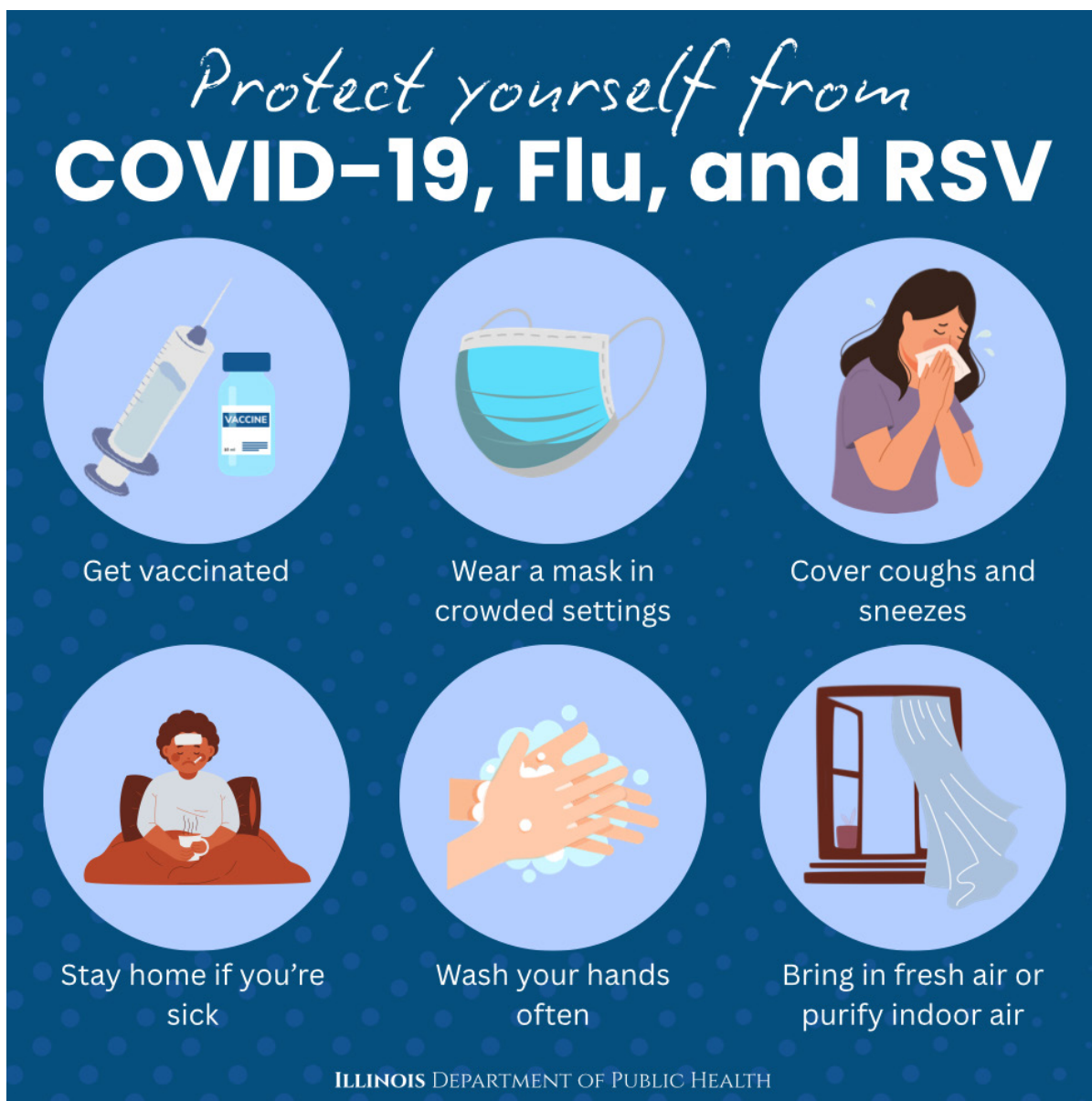
Graham CC held a pumpkin decorating contest judged by special guest Warden Wills (Menard CC). Three winners were chosen from the patch of trick-or-treat pumpkins:

- 1st Place – Sarah Pennington, Correctional Casework Supervisor
- 2nd Place – Carrie Miller, Executive Secretary III
- 3rd Place – Shannon Durbin, Mailroom Supervisor



What are some of the best ways to protect yourself and others from respiratory illnesses like COVID-19, the flu, and RSV?

- Get vaccinated
- Wear a mask in crowded settings
- Cover your coughs and sneezes with a tissue
- Stay home if you're feeling sick
- Wash your hands often with soap and water
- Bring in fresh air or purify indoor air
- Visit dph.illinois.gov for more information about respiratory illnesses and how to prevent them.



State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Corrections



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Story ideas, feedback and comments can be submitted to
Staff Wellness Response Team at
DOC.staffwellnessresponseteam@illinois.gov

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