

Corrections Connections

Illinois Department of Corrections | Monthly Newsletter

August 2021

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Message from the Director

Colleagues and Stakeholders:

As you read through this month's edition of Corrections Connections, you will notice an unintended overarching theme: service. Many of our staff and individuals in custody take great pride in giving back to our communities. Each year, the Illinois Department of Corrections raises thousands of dollars for Special Olympics athletes through our involvement with the Law Enforcement Torch Run. In addition, many of our employees spend their personal time volunteering as sports coaches, Scout leaders, firefighters, and more. Individuals in custody receive the same intrinsic rewards when they support those who need it most. Whenever I speak to work crews, the individuals always tell me how meaningful it is to give back – whether by cleaning a community ravaged by a tornado, laying sandbags or planting flowers, there is much to gain from serving others. The staff who oversee these crews also understand the benefits and often jump in to help.



Director Rob Jeffreys

IDOC is a family, and it is proven every day by the actions of our exceptional workforce. I have witnessed staff unite during the worst of times — tragedy, death, grief, and sickness — just as blood relatives would. As COVID-19 gripped our facilities, IDOC employees did not shy away from the challenge. Instead, we all came together and did what we had to do to keep everyone safe and healthy. One of my favorite quotes is by author John Maxwell who said, “You don’t overcome challenges by making them smaller but by making yourself bigger.” That’s exactly what IDOC staff have done during the pandemic – they have stretched and grown, gone above and beyond, and worked harder than ever before to overcome the challenges presented by COVID-19. Their dedication inspires me to be the best leader I can be so we can come out on the other side stronger than ever. It is truly an honor to lead an agency comprised of thousands of servant leaders who are all committed to making Illinois a better and safer place to live.

Thank you,
Rob Jeffreys

Behind the Badge

Long before Correctional Lieutenant Alex Moore started his career at Menard Correctional Center in March 2010, he was introduced to fishing by his grandfather. Since 2015, Moore has participated in Fishing League Worldwide (FWL) tournaments across the country in the Bass Fishing League (BFL) circuit. He has qualified to participate in the Regional Championship Tournament six of the seven last years. This year he also began fishing in two divisions of the FLW Toyota Series circuit. These tournaments are a higher level of competition, and he finished 30th out of 250 fishermen. The pinnacle of his fishing career to date has been a 3rd place finish in the BFL circuit and 9th place in the Toyota circuit. Moore stated these were both very exciting and not easy to accomplish. As a Pro Staff Member for a couple small companies, he has traveled to nearly a dozen states to fish in tournaments. His favorite place has been Lacrosse, WI where he fished on the Mississippi River. A couple of Moore's best fishing stories involve the man who taught him to fish, his grandfather. He was with him when he caught his largest bass in Lake Fork, TX weighing in at 7 lb. 11 oz. Last year, they fished a tournament together and ultimately won. Moore remarked, "It was a special win because it was with him, and you never know how many more he will get to do." Looking forward, Moore has goals to qualify for the BFL All American Tournament and the Pro Circuit in the Toyota Tournament series. Moore appreciates



the support from co-workers, friends, and family who follow his progress. He commented, "Working in corrections has certainly helped financially with all the related expenses involved in my fishing career. I couldn't do it without my paychecks, for sure. Above that, corrections is stressful. I like my job, and I don't tend to get stressed out much. I relate this to enjoying my hobby outside of work extensively."

Building Fences at Jacksonville Correctional Center

Individuals in custody at Jacksonville Correctional Center are getting to play a role in giving the facility a new, updated look. The Jacksonville Correctional Center Construction Class is participating in a project to renovate the entrance to the facility. Under the supervision of Construction Instructor Michael Huesing and College Coordinator Malea Harney, the workers in this class are repurposing pallets into fence boards. The boards will then be constructed into a new fence for the facility. The men enjoy being a part of this project and take pride in what they are building. They are learning new ways to use their wood working skills that can translate into critical job skills upon release.



Planting with Pete:

Decatur Correctional Center Horticulture Program

Decatur Correctional Center did not have a horticulture program – not until Pete Vercellino showed up to develop one. That was December 2018 and Lake Land College and Decatur Correctional Center saw an opportunity to put Vercellino’s talents to good use.

Starting from scratch, Pete upgraded the existing greenhouse to meet college standards and installed and filled an appropriate tool cage. With brand new textbooks that were provided, he built a robust curriculum for the students he would be teaching. Then COVID invaded. As with so many correctional programs last year, Decatur’s horticulture program would need to adhere to new safety protocols. After quarantine, the greenhouse was assessed to find out which plants could be salvaged after a such long period without maintenance. As the pandemic eased a bit, the class started once again, but with restrictions. Social distancing reduced the class size and greenhouse space for teaching labs. Pete has done an excellent job of maximizing space. He totally transformed the courtyard – adding flower beds and tilling new garden space and helped plan a unit garden to supply dietary with produce grown by individuals in custody.

Pete is always very cordial and professional with everyone. There is no doubt that he has a true passion for what he does. He is willing to share his knowledge of plants and how to care for them with anyone. On occasion, Pete shows off his culinary skills for his coworkers. It seems culinary skills are a family thing. Pete’s daughter Marie is the culinary instructor for Lake Land at Decatur Correctional Center.

Our highlight of Pete Vercellino would not be complete without mentioning his involvement in the community. Pete has been a vendor at many local farmers markets selling fruits, vegetables, and herbs he has grown himself, along with canned products and local honey from his business. He has always been generous in donating any extra produce to shelters, food banks, civic organizations or those in need.

“We have been active in farmers markets since 1980. We started as a vendor selling plants and fresh produce at the Central Park Farmers Market in Decatur. Before farmers markets, you would sell from roadside stands and rely on word of mouth. The early years of the farmers markets were challenging. The funding always seemed to run out in the second year, and a new group



would step in until they had funding issues. In the early part of the 1990’s, we were having market discussions with local leaders and heard about the funding issues again. I made a comment to the Mayor that they should put someone in charge who knew what to do. He said he would consider that. The following week the city

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council decided to offer management of the Central Park Farmers Market to me. I then got an education in getting insurance to cover Central Park for Farmers Markets. What an education! I quickly found that most policies cost about the same, way more than I could afford. I finally found a company that would let us pay monthly to get the policy paid for.”

“All these years later, I realize the difficulties that all markets face each year. I feel fortunate for all the years we have been able to provide a viable local farmers market that has never had to depend on local, state, or federal funding to keep our market operating. We keep going every year, as a private enterprise, working out the details every Saturday morning with vendors - old and newer - on beautiful, perfect days and days that are not as pleasant, because it’s what we do. We feel lucky to be in Decatur, a market that goes back to Lincoln’s days, with customers that support us and newspapers, radio, and television that help to get the word out about what we do. We work as vendors in other town markets – in Bloomington, Clinton, Monticello, and Springfield and marvel at the reception in each town for the produce and plants we offer. I try to instill in the ladies in our program these basic concepts: to make money, work diligently, be consistent in your product, be straight up with your customers, and stand behind your product. You will be successful and sleep good at the end of the day. We want them to be ready for the workplace they are entering back into.”



Hill Correctional Center Donates Pet Supplies

Hill Correctional Center takes pride in being involved with their community and recently held a Pet Supply Drive throughout the month of June. Hill employees were encouraged to donate items that would help benefit the animals at their local Knox County Humane Society. A donation bin was left at the facility’s main gate which allowed staff to conveniently drop off items when they arrived at work. Some of the items that were donated included pet food, treats, toys, towels, bedding, and cleaning supplies. Hill Correctional Center has many staff members who are animal lovers, and they were more than willing to help support a great organization. This successful event meant a lot to not only the humane society, but also to the staff who donated these crucial supplies. The humane society staff and volunteers were extremely grateful for the abundance of donations. Monetary donations, in addition to donated pet supplies, are vital in helping the organization thrive and properly attend to the animals in their care. Hill Correctional Center’s Leisure Activities Specialist, Meg

Ryan, looks forward to making this a successful event each year for the sweet animals it benefits.



Construction of Joliet Inpatient Treatment Center Nears Completion

The Joliet Inpatient Treatment Center (JITC) is in its final stages of construction, with substantial completion anticipated this month. The state-of-the-art 180,000 square foot facility will help provide services to individuals who require inpatient level of care. The facility is comprised of 150 mental health beds and 50 infirmary beds designed to accommodate all genders. In addition, the facility provides support spaces including a modern administration building, clinic area, laundry area, dietary/dining hall, and a central utility plant. The medical clinic will provide space for examination rooms, dental services, physical therapy, x-ray/CT scan, optometry, and dialysis. The technologically advanced design provides a touch screen security automation system and cameras throughout the facility, as well as message boards and televisual equipment. Natural lighting, acoustical details, and landscapes throughout the facility will assist with stress reduction and promote

the overall health and wellness of the people being treated.

Dr. Catherine Larry, Psy.D.
Warden
Joliet & Elgin Treatment Centers

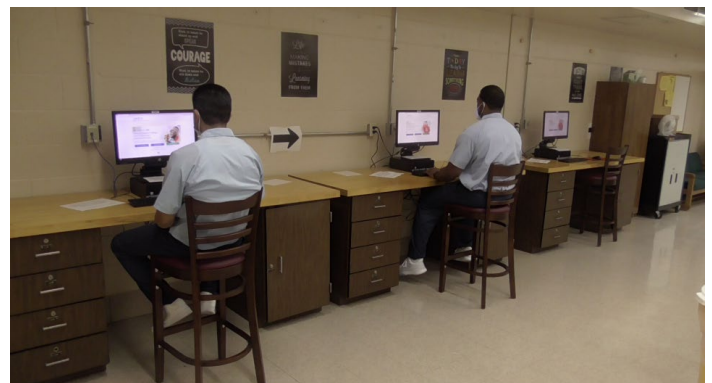
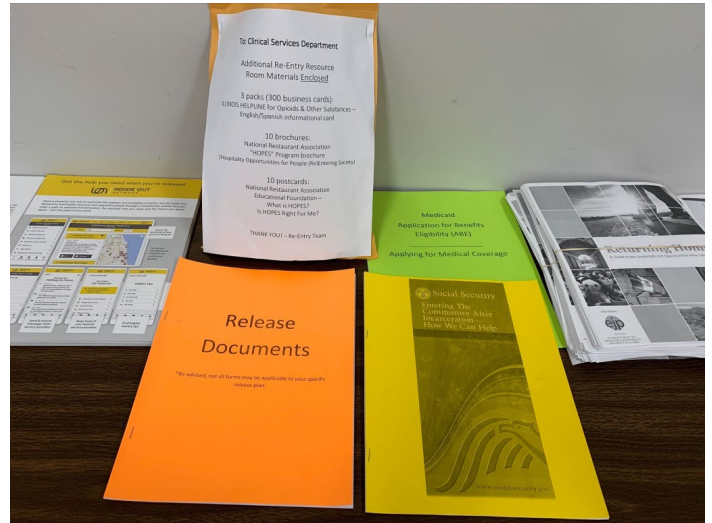


Resource Rooms Aid Successful Re-Entry

On January 1st, 2020, the Illinois Department of Corrections formed the Re-Entry Unit in order to expand services to individuals in custody as they prepared for release from the Department's custody. The term re-entry refers to the transition of individuals in custody back into the community. In the past, re-entry has been a challenge for some due to limited access to technology in our IDOC facilities. To provide the necessary tools for successful transition back into society, Illinois correctional facilities have developed Re-Entry Resource Rooms.

These resource rooms give individuals the ability to be proactive in their forthcoming release. Everyone in custody can visit the Re-Entry Resource Room at least once prior to release and can get resource guides for organizations and services available in the area to where they are returning. They can utilize computers to complete resumes and conduct job searches, get information on expungement and sealing of court or personal records, and research child support obligations. They can request release of pertinent documents, get housing and GED resources, and contact the Internal Revenue Service and the Social Security Administration. The rooms have statewide and regional resource guides and paper-based resources that individuals can take with them. The Re-Entry Unit supplies updated resources, identifies new resource materials, and makes all this information available in the resource rooms.

The development of the statewide resource rooms signals that the Illinois Department of Corrections continues its commitment to reducing recidivism and giving the soon-to-be-released solid opportunities to succeed.



The Gardens at IDOC

In 2012, IDOC created the Green Government Sustainability Committee, a campaign to alleviate excess waste and utilize all items to their full potential. Several facilities around the state have implemented sustainable initiatives such as recycling, gardening, and composting.

Lawrence Correctional Center

The gardens at Lawrence Correctional Center not only provide food to the facility itself, they also provide a learning experience, life-long skills, and a sense of accomplishment to the people maintaining them. Zucchini, cucumbers, eggplant, tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, bell peppers, cabbage, and sweet peppers are planted, cultivated, and harvested at Lawrence. The produce supplements the dietary program and provides fresh, wholesome vegetables for the facility's population. The Food Service Program Manager said, "If you've never experienced the joy of accomplishing more than you can imagine, plant a garden."

Lincoln Correctional Center

Lincoln Correctional Center utilizes its inner perimeter as a garden space during the spring, summer, and fall. The garden is planted and maintained by a dedicated garden crew of individuals in custody. The Horticulture classes and instructors contribute to the garden as well by growing seedlings in the green house in preparation of planting the garden. Many different crops are grown at Lincoln. In the spring, kale, spinach, and radishes are harvested. In the summer, the garden produces green beans, zucchini, yellow squash, onions, tomatoes, eggplant, pumpkins, watermelon, cucumbers, bell peppers, and jalapenos. About a quarter of the crops are donated to local community food banks, and in autumn, pumpkins are donated to local grade schools. Last year, over 400 pumpkins were donated to local kindergarten students. The remaining crops are utilized in the dietary meal preparations and preserved for use throughout the winter.

The garden program at Lincoln Correctional Center offers life-long skills to the individuals in custody. The ability to grow and harvest one's own food is a life sustainable skill. The garden crew is designed as a mentoring concept, pairing experienced individuals in custody with the inexperienced. This aids in the learning process to those new to gardening and enhances leadership and training skills to veteran gardeners.



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Overall, the garden at Lincoln Correctional Center is a benefit to the community, the garden crew, and serves the dietary needs of the population as well as the facility staff.

Logan Correctional Center

If you visit Logan Correctional Center and take a tour you will find that a half-acre garden space has been created on the north side of the facility within the perimeter fencing. Seven days a week you will find members of the garden crew working diligently planting, maintaining, nurturing, and harvesting the crops. The garden crew is a team of individuals in custody working together with one common goal to provide a bountiful, healthy harvest for the community where they work and live. The garden crew works daily to maintain the quality and health of the garden. You will find them weeding, watering, pruning, harvesting, hand tilling the ground, and seeding.

Recently harvested crops were used in the dining hall to complement the salad bar. Plentiful green bean crops have fed the whole camp during recent dinners. This year's crops include green beans, zucchini, yellow squash, onions, tomatoes, watermelon, pumpkins, cucumbers, bell peppers, and lettuce. At the peak of harvest, most daily meals will include produce harvested from the garden. The growing season this year was later than usual due to COVID-19 protocols and social distancing policies. Nonetheless, the garden crew worked extremely hard to ensure that the facility's harvest yield will be larger than in past years.

The garden program at Logan Correctional Center allows the individuals in custody to feel proud knowing that their bountiful harvest has and will continue to provide both goods and a valuable service to the community where they work and reside. The garden crew plays a key role in the wellness endeavors of Logan Correctional Center. Sustainability, ensuring the growth cycle of the plants, and responsibility are just a few of the skills the individuals involved in the garden program learn. The members of the garden crew are self-motivated and work independently making them a great team! They have doubled their garden space this year and continue to cultivate plots and space adjacent to the current garden.

Sheridan Correctional Center

Sheridan Correctional Center is pleased to announce that it has made its first of many donations of fresh produce



for people in need at The Illinois Valley Public Action to Deliver Shelter. Sheridan took on the task of creating a garden to provide fresh produce for its population and local food shelters. The garden, which boasts such produce as tomatoes, cucumbers, jalapenos, zucchini, butternut squash, and assorted greens, has come to fruition and is now producing lots of fresh produce! The individuals who maintain the garden are excited to see the results of their hard work and are proud to serve local communities with fresh produce. Bureau of Identification employees Ryan Hinton and Christopher Wolf oversee the garden and the crew.

BE WELL

How Right Now Campaign Supports Mental Health During Pandemic

The How Right Now campaign, developed by NORC at the University of Chicago with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and funded by the CDC Foundation, provides resources that support mental health during the pandemic and offers ideas for ways to cope with COVID-19 related stress.

While there are many groups of people who are facing mental health challenges during the pandemic, there are several specific groups who are disproportionately affected. These include:

- Adults over 65 years and their caregivers;
- People with pre-existing mental and physical health conditions;

- People who are experiencing violence; and
- People who are experiencing economic distress.

National, community, and professional organizations taking part in the How Right Now initiative include AARP, NAACP, United Way, Red Cross, National Latino Behavioral Health Association, and the National Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health America.

Visit www.howrightnow.org to access a collection of helpful tools, links, and advice to help us continue to cope and be resilient in the face of ongoing uncertainty.



Feeling stressed and overwhelmed?

We've got this. We can find a way forward together.

Visit howrightnow.org to access links, tools, and resources to cope with the ongoing pandemic.



IDOC Employees of the Month

July 2021

Facility	Name	Title
Big Muddy River	George Kuhn	Correctional Officer
Centralia	Jeffrey Spihlmann	Correctional Craftsman
Crossroads ATC	Allen Avdic	Corrections Resident Counselor I
Dixon	Michael Remmers	Correctional Lieutenant
East Moline	Robert Lund	Correctional Officer
Fox Valley ATC	Richard Schwartz	Corrections Resident Counselor I
Graham	Ronnie Gelsing	Correctional Officer
Graham	Susan Pearse	Administrative Assistant II
Hill	Marshall Hendricks	Correctional Officer
Illinois River	Billy Grove	Correctional Officer
Jacksonville	Paula Sumpter	Office Associate
Kewanee Re-Entry	Jon Lindbom	Correctional Officer
	Tony Garcia	Corrections Food Service Supervisor II
Lawrence	Jeffrey Bice	Correctional Sergeant
	Deana Seed	Registered Nurse
Lincoln	Courtney Edwards	Correctional Sergeant
Logan	Scott Dammerman	Correctional Officer
	Brandon Hamm	Correctional Officer
Menard	Sandy Walker	Correctional Sergeant
	Renee Studt	Office Associate
North Lawndale ATC	Latisha Jordan	Facility Review Control Officer
Pinckneyville	Laura Huff	Laundry Manager I
Robinson	Maggie Chenault	Corrections Food Service Supervisor II
Shawnee	Michele Wollard	Correctional Officer
Sheridan	Nate Roberts	Correctional Officer
	Todd Bateman	Casework Supervisor
Southwestern Illinois	Jerid Pickford	Correctional Lieutenant
Stateville	Latoya Allen	Correctional Officer
	Thomas Scott	Correctional Counselor II
Taylorville	Bryon Suey	Correctional Counselor II
Vandalia	Loretta Arnold	Office Associate
	Tyler Blankenship	Correctional Officer
Vienna	Starla Harris	Account Technical I
Western Illinois	Bryan Evans	Correctional Counselor II

The Giving Spirit at Shawnee Correctional Center

Individuals in custody at Shawnee Correctional Center recently donated various items to the Marion Veterans Administration and Heaven's Kitchen in Harrisburg, Illinois.

On July 8th and 9th, individuals donated hygiene items, new clothing, food, batteries, chess boards, and photo albums to the Marion VA. They also donated food products – noodles, peanut butter, salsa, cakes, cookies, cheese cups, and much more – to Heaven's Kitchen in Harrisburg.

This project began about seven years ago. The individuals can purchase items at the commissary and donate them to local charities. Donations are collected throughout the year and then delivered up to three times a year to worthy causes. Over the years, donations have been made to the local food pantries in Hardin and Pope counties, Vienna, Harrisburg, Equality, and the Baptist Children's Home and Family Services in Carmi.



Illinois River Raises Over \$5,000 For St. Jude

At the end of June, individuals in custody at Illinois River Correctional Center participated in a fundraising event for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Approximately 320 individuals volunteered to run or walk a 5k. Many of those unable to participate in the 5k, donated their own money to the cause. They raised \$5,254! They also designed cards and artwork and donated them to the children at St. Jude.

Chris Henzler, one of Illinois River's Leisure Activities Specialists, came up with the idea. "I know St. Jude 5k's are going on all over right now. We thought this would be a great program here even with COVID going on. I went around and asked what they thought about the idea, and they all said it would be great to give back to the community and help sick children. We thought it was a good way for the population to give back to the community in a positive way."

This first-time event at Illinois River was a successful joint effort by staff and the individuals in custody. To follow COVID guidelines, each housing unit had a designated day when they went to the yard to do the 5k. They ran or walked 5 laps around the entire yard. The fastest time was 23 minutes and 41 seconds.



State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Corrections



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Story ideas, feedback and comments can be submitted to
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