

# Corrections Connections

Illinois Department of Corrections | Monthly Newsletter

July 2021

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## Message from the Director

IDOC Staff and Stakeholders,

While summer days may be long, they are certainly not slow for those of us at IDOC. The implementation of meaningful criminal justice reform requires a tremendous amount of thought, effort, and dedication by all staff. The next step on our Journey to Excellence is transitioning to an incentive-based corrections model. This system emphasizes the reinforcement of positive behavior and is built on seven pillars:

1. Updates to security classification – An individual's behavior and commitment to rehabilitation will now play a more important role in classification. Everyone will have the opportunity to reduce their security level, potentially allowing them to gain more privileges and greater access to programs at medium and minimum-security facilities, adult transition centers, or re-entry centers
2. Transfer processes – Incarcerated individuals may request transfers under certain circumstances, including additional educational opportunities, work opportunities, or to place them closer to their home community.
3. Implementation of statewide risk and needs assessment tool – This assessment system will help IDOC better allocate resources to the incarcerated population and focus specialized programming on those at higher risk to recidivate.
4. Individualized case planning – Case plans will address each individual's unique needs and plot a course on addressing them across five domains: criminal attitudes and behavioral patterns, employment, education, social supports, and family.
5. Expansion and streamlining of earned discretionary sentence credit (EDSC) – IDOC is expanding the availability of EDSC awards. All those who are eligible under statute will have an opportunity to earn EDSC based on a combination of positive behavior, demonstrated commitment to rehabilitation, and compliance with an individualized case plan, all at the discretion of the Director.
6. Creation of re-entry pathways – IDOC has established a Re-entry Unit to focus on improved preparation and support for returning citizens. Taking a holistic and systematic approach to preparing individuals for successful reentry into the community, the concentration on reentry will begin upon admission into the Department and continue until final release from supervision.
7. Right-sizing of community supervision – IDOC has made changes to how it administers mandatory supervised release terms by adopting a risk assessment tool instead of relying on holding offenses. As a result, individuals who are deemed a low or moderate risk to recidivate will be placed on lower levels of supervision.

I am excited our agency is moving in a direction that supports rehabilitation over punitive supervision. 94% of individuals in our custody will go home to their communities; it is our responsibility to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to reintegrate into society successfully.

Thank you,  
Rob Jeffreys



**Director Rob Jeffreys**

# Behind the Badge

Denise Chandler is an Account Technician I at East Moline Correctional Center. She has also been a foster parent for the past six years. After raising her own children, Chandler became involved in foster parenting as a way to give back to her community and to be a positive role model for others.

“My work schedule does not offer a lot of opportunities to get involved as a lot of volunteering is done during the daytime hours,” Chandler explained. Family and friends suggested she try foster parenting since her own children were grown. Chandler has fostered nine children in her home. Most of the children average three months with Chandler as their foster parent. The longest stay of a foster child was 18 months; he was then adopted by another family. She states that there are support systems within the community to help foster parents, and notes that her family is a huge support to her. When asked how she balances working outside of the home and foster parenting, Chandler said “I look at working outside of the home and fostering no differently than when I was raising my own children. I just schedule what can be done in a day and try not to overbook myself.”

To become a foster parent, Chandler had to complete an application, pass a background and fingerprint check, and undergo a home inspection. Once these steps were

completed, she had to attend 30 hours of class training and become CPR certified. It takes about four to six months to become fully licensed as a foster parent. Sixteen hours of training is required every two years to maintain the license.



Denise described a positive and rewarding experience she encountered in fostering. She received a child who was in the first grade, and he was struggling academically to keep up with his peers. She advocated for him by talking with the administration, the school board, the principal, and the teacher to show them how far behind he was. She succeeded in getting him moved back to kindergarten to re-learn his basic skills. She says after the child was placed back one grade, he was able to learn, and it was wonderful to see his confidence grow.

When asked to sum up foster parenting in one word, Chandler said, “Nurturing.”

## Pontiac Correctional Center Fundraises for Special Olympics Illinois

Pontiac Correctional Center raised a massive amount of money for the 2020 Law Enforcement Torch Run that benefits Special Olympics Illinois. In a rough year due to COVID-19, Pontiac Correctional Center staff, along with their families and friends, stepped up to do something that a lot of people said couldn't be done – we raised \$23,845! From selling Law Enforcement Torch Run merchandise, Harley Davidson and camper raffle tickets, the Torch of Cash, Virtual Run for Respect, Polar Plunge and Super Plunge, and the Ride for Respect, to the Professional Bull Riders donation of \$5,000.00 and 20% of their ticket sales, Pontiac Correctional Center showed its resilience and winning attitude in spite of the terrible year besieged by COVID-19. Not only did Pontiac Correctional Center prove that anything can be done even in the worst of times, it also proved that there is always heart in the family built by the environment that we work in each and every day. With the dedication of the fundraising

coordinators for IDOC and their staff, the Illinois Department of Corrections, once again, sits atop all other state agencies in fundraising for Special Olympics Illinois! I am so proud to be involved with this great group of coordinators and Pontiac Correctional Center staff. You all are special to my heart!



By Lt. Steven Renner

# The 1978 Pontiac Prison Riot



## ***Pontiac Correctional Center Remembers the Heroes of the Deadliest Riot in Illinois Department of Corrections History***

On July 22, 1978, a group of 17 individuals in custody jumped a line of nearly 600 waiting to return to the North Cell House. Armed with shanks, the rioters stormed the house, immediately killed three officers, and severely injured three more. Nearly 500 individuals in custody, returning from the chapel after watching a movie, joined in the chaos. They set buildings on fire and attacked staff. The Tactical Team cleared North Cell House as officers tended to the injured and attempted to restore order.

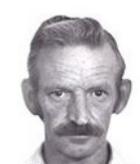
The people in the community waited and wondered, worried about their friends and family members who were on duty at the time. Current Pontiac Mayor Bill Alvey, a former warden of the facility, was walking to a Rotary Club barbeque in the town square, the smell of smoke filled the air, and a fire could be seen from the downtown area. It did not take long before the community learned of the tragic event at the correctional facility. "We all knew the deceased, and it hit the whole town hard," said Alvey.

The Pontiac Police Department, Livingston County Sheriff's Office, Pontiac Fire Department, and Illinois State Police arrived to assist corrections staff. Eight rounds of tear gas were fired into the yard. As firefighters battled the blaze, the officers returned the individuals in

custody to their cells. No hostages were taken. No one escaped.

"This town pulled together and supported the first responders and the staff in every way we could," said Mayor Alvey. "This town and the prison are resilient. The prison staff took great care of this situation even through the tragedy. Please keep all these heroes and their families in your memories."

From Left to Right – Lt. William Thomas, C/O Robert Conkle, C/O Stanley "King" Cole



All three of the men killed were military veterans. They served their country on foreign soil only to be murdered back home at Pontiac Correctional Center. Officer Robert Conkle, 22 years old, was employed at Pontiac for only two months before his death. He had served three years in the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division. He left behind his wife of one year, his father, and five siblings. Officer Stanley E. "King" Cole, 47 years old, was employed at Pontiac for only one year prior to the riot. He had served seven years in the U.S. Air Force and was a member of the Pontiac Veterans of Foreign War. He was survived by his wife, three children, one grandchild, two siblings, and his mother. Lieutenant

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William N. Thomas, 49 years old, had worked at Corrections for four years and was a U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War. He was survived by his wife, children, and grandchildren.

An officer at the time who wishes to remain anonymous said, "I want everyone to know Robert Conkle was a hero. He was able to get away from his attacker with survivable wounds but chose to return to the gallery to save another officer who was being attacked. Conkle died, but the other officer survived."

A first-hand account of the riot was written by Lt. Studley to Captain Harder on the day of the incident:

At approximately 9 am I received a call from the arsenal stating there was trouble in the North Cell house. I quickly reported to PCC. I had the arsenal call the CO's on and off duty that I knew would do the most good for the Riot Squad...I moved the Tact Squad outside the Admin building placing four shot gun men in front of the tact unit...I assembled the rest of the squad consisting of about 30 officers. I moved the squad past the sheet metal building which was on fire and extremely hot. I hollered for the people on the yard to start moving out...At this time the Chapel was on fire. I then assembled the squad again to move to the North Cell house. The door was barricaded and tied at the bottom with a

belt. Sgt. Hallock used his baton to break the belt. Officer Husskinson informed me there were dead and wounded on seven gallery. I immediately called for an ambulance...The R&D and laundry and the general store were all on fire and burning out of control. The count did check at 8pm. I dismissed the Tact Squad. To the best of my knowledge no shots were fired. Officer Ores and Officer Husskinson in my opinion should be commended for their first aid work on Officer Dill when we had no first aid equipment on hand. Officer Drake should be commended for his actions as 2nd in command of the Tact Squad.

The painful memories of the 1978 riot at Pontiac Correctional Center still echo through the facility to this day. As staff walk through the front entrance, they are greeted by a memorial honoring the heroes who paid the ultimate price. It is a reminder of the extraordinary bravery exhibited by Cole, Conkle, and Thomas -- bravery that will forever be etched into the history of the Illinois Department of Corrections.



# Get to Know IDOC's Chief of Oral Health Services

## What experience do you bring to IDOC?

I have been in dentistry for 35 years, primarily in private practice. Since 1990, I have owned and operated my own business along with my wife, Dr. Michele Watson Austin. I believe this experience uniquely qualifies me for the challenge of leading IDOC Oral Health Services.

Clinically, I am directly involved with the evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment of my patients. Administratively, I am involved with the day to day function of the practice including implementing all procedures and policy, management of all financial aspects of the practice, hiring and supervision of staff, implementing continuing education initiatives for my staff and patients, and overseeing marketing and public relations for the practice. Most importantly, however, is my desire to develop relationships with my patients and staff. You must genuinely love and care for people to be successful in this business.

I graduated with a B.S. in Biology from Loyola University and received my Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) from Howard University College of Dentistry. I trained in a general practice residency at Veterans Administration Lakeside Hospital Chicago/Northwestern University. I am a member of the American Dental Society, National Dental Society, Lincoln Dental Society, and the Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors.

## What are your goals as the Agency's Chief of Oral Health?

My goal is for all IDOC dental facilities to provide the very best dental treatment and services to our individuals in custody. We must make a commitment to treat these patients with care and respect, educate them on the benefits of good oral care, and develop relationships of mutual trust.

Our dental staff must do their best to enhance the overall dental health of our patients. We want to do more than just treat dental problems. We want to also enhance their smiles cosmetically. This ultimately increases confidence, creates a sense of pride and positive thinking, and enhances quality of life which, in turn, leads to good citizenship once they re-enter society. We must be more than clinicians. This should be the mission of all our providers.

In order to provide great dental care, our providers

must have quality dental equipment, instruments, and supplies. My job is to make sure my dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants have the tools they need, and a professional skill set to perform these crucially needed services. I want clinicians with the proper mindset. I need them to respect our patients, to display a positive mental attitude, and to educate our patients about the importance of good oral health. We will not settle for anything less! I believe it is vitally important to develop a distinct and progressive culture change in how we practice dentistry in the Illinois corrections system.



**Dr. Russell Austin, DDS**

## What does it mean to be a part of the IDOC team?

It is a privilege to be a part of this team. The individuals I have met and now work with are caring, hardworking people. They don't take their jobs for granted. They want to make a difference. We have a responsibility to the State of Illinois and to the individuals in custody to provide the very best services possible. Everyone has been welcoming, open to questions, and eager to share information.

The Office of Health Services, under the leadership of Agency Medical Director Dr. Steven Bowman, has made my transition to this role a wonderful experience. I have been given guidance and the opportunity to learn. I have also contributed the thoughts and ideas that have guided me in my private practice. The whole team is supportive, cordial, fun-loving, and close-knit. They have accepted me, and I am very appreciative of the bonds we have already created.

Serving in IDOC's oral health services is different than dental practice in the private sector. You can make a significant difference in the lives of incarcerated individuals, and that is our mission!

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At my initial Meet and Greet with the department, I was pleasantly surprised to learn of the vision of IDOC Director Rob Jeffreys. Director Jeffreys enthusiastically prioritizes respect and preparing individuals in custody for re-entry into society. We are not just housing and feeding these men and women. We are doing our best to educate them to improve as human beings. The Director sets the tone and leads by example.

### **As a Leader, who inspires you?**

I'm inspired by so many people, far too many to note here. My core inspiration, however, has always come from my parents. They taught me to always give of myself. They inspired me to sincerely care for others, and instilled the idea that I could be anything that I wanted. "No one is better than you, and you aren't better than anyone else," I was told. My dad died when I was a teenager, so my mother was the wind beneath my wings.

Flora Austin, my mom, sacrificed much so that my sister, Yvonne, and I would have opportunities to achieve. No matter the struggles or obstacles that confronted us, Mom insisted we keep a positive mindset and an ultimate faith in God. She was my hero. All that I am is because of her.

One of the reasons I accepted this position had to do with a visit I made to Stateville Correctional Center

while being recruited. I was so motivated and inspired by the meetings and conversations I had with the men in custody. I had never before visited or toured a correctional facility. The men would invite me over to talk and when they found out why I was visiting, they were so proud and happy for me -- a black man with an opportunity to lead IDOC's oral health and dental department. I left Stateville that day with a whole new purpose in my life.

### **What would you like to share about yourself that cannot be found on your resume?**

The most important aspect of my life is my family – Michele, my beautiful wife, best friend, and business partner for 32 years; my sister, Yvonne, who is my biggest cheerleader and confidant; and my son, Chris, who is my absolute reason for living. The relationship Chris and I share means the world to me. He is such a great son, and I'm so proud of him and his achievements. He is also my hero, and a true blessing from God that has allowed me to be a father. Having the opportunity to be a dad is my greatest honor. Fatherhood is the greatest joy and gift that I will ever receive.

I have been so blessed! My position as Chief of Oral Health Services for the Illinois Department of Corrections is a continuation of God's plan for me. I believe that with all my heart. I am still a work in progress.

## **East Moline Correctional Center Empanels Staff Morale Committee**

Morale represents unit cohesion and people coming together for a common purpose. Often, it is the result of motivating factors that are either instilled in the vision of the plan or an individual's own set of ideals that drives them to meet their goals. Low morale is a result of inconsistency in handling issues, lack of accountability, and ineffective communication. High morale results in a sense of purpose, builds confidence and increases cheerfulness. People are more willing to "buy into" or "roll with changes" when there is good morale. So how does one execute building morale following a pandemic and with all of the changes we are experiencing at such a rapid pace in a correctional environment?

Fortunately, the Illinois Department of Corrections has recognized the importance of staff wellness by assembling a Staff Wellness Response Team. It is an

affirmation that if we don't take care of ourselves, we can't be effective in our duties at work or at home. Morale comes from staff feeling appreciated and valued. It needs to be fostered by effective communication, staff recognition, and strong leadership. Leaders do not necessarily equate to supervisors. The best leaders can be the person standing right next to you...or YOU!

We all intersect in this environment from different cultures, races, religions, and backgrounds. When we enter the gate, however, we are one team, one mission. That is our stated goal, but sometimes we lack the motivation to fulfill it. At East Moline, we decided to form a Morale Committee.

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The committee is only in its infancy right now, trying to find a way to effectively communicate. Our goal is to affect positive change by having representation and input from all assignments and shifts. Our initial message that went out was one of gratitude. Philosopher Cicero once wrote, "Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others." Our mission is to uplift, inspire, and appreciate each other. Our vision is to create a better, more positive work environment where staff feel valued.

Our first objective is to make the entrance to our facility tell a story. Members of the committee have provided ideas for what represents East Moline and our community. The staff, in cooperation with individuals in custody who are very talented artists, will create a mural to convey the positivity we hope will endure beyond the

facility's entrance. A first impression can, and routinely does, set the tone for one's entire workday. We intend to take the ideas put forward by our committee and renovate our entrance into a colorful and inspiring sign that reads **Welcome to East Moline**.

Staff are very excited at the idea of doing more for each other while at work (and after), where we can come together with the common purpose to make our workplace more pleasant.

We recognize we can never achieve our goals if we do not take care of our people first.

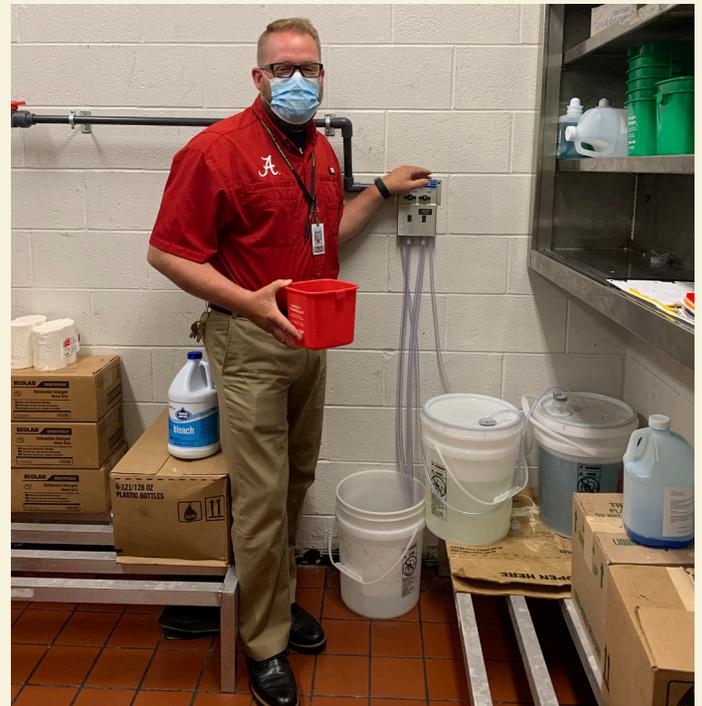
**by Amber Allen**  
**Assistant Warden of Programs**  
**East Moline Correctional Center**

## Rapid Results

### Lincoln Correctional Center Chemical Metering System

Lincoln Correctional Center recently implemented a Rapid Results initiative by installing a chemical metering system at the suggestion of Dietary Manager, Christian Tanner. The new system takes the guesswork out of the amount of cleaning or sanitizing solution to use. In the past, the amount of solution used to complete a task was merely an estimate. This method would often result in overuse of the chemicals which was wasteful and could potentially be a danger to the staff and individuals in custody. However, an insufficient ratio of cleaning

or sanitizing chemicals could result in the spread of potentially harmful viruses and germs. Experience gleaned from the COVID-19 pandemic in congregate spaces, such as a correctional facility, drove home the need to get this ratio right. The installation of the chemical metering system has given assurance to the staff, management, and the individuals in custody that the facility's policies and procedures are safe, scientific, and cost effective.



# BE WELL

## STAYING ACTIVE IN HOT WEATHER

Summer is a great time for being active even, but make sure to take precautions when you are active outside.

If you have heart problems or other health issues, or if you have not been active for a long time, check with your doctor before you start a new activity.

If the temperature is lower than 80°F (27°C), you usually can be active outside without taking extra precautions. It depends on how active you already are and how used to hot weather you are.



But anytime you exercise, it's a good idea to take these normal precautions:

- Drink plenty of water. This is very important when it's hot out and when you do intense exercise.
- Don't exercise as hard when it's hot. Take rest breaks. Exercise more slowly than usual or for a shorter time.
- Stay in the shade when you can.
- Avoid exercising during the hottest times of the day.
- Wear light-colored, breathable clothes.
- Watch for signs of heat exhaustion, such as nausea, dizziness, cramps, and headache. If you notice any signs, stop your activity right away, cool off, and drink fluids.

When the temperature gets above 80°F (27°C), consider the heat and the humidity. Both can put you at risk for

heat-related illness. The hotter or more humid it is, the higher your risk. For example, if the humidity is 60% (moderate):

- Be careful when you exercise in temperatures of 80°F (27°C) to 85°F (29°C). Find shade, take regular breaks, and drink plenty of fluids.
- Experts advise being extremely careful between about 85°F (29°C) and 91°F (32.8°C).
- Conditions are considered extremely dangerous at temperatures over 91°F (32.8°C).

When it is more humid, you should be careful at even lower temperatures. Higher humidity can make it feel hotter, since your body cannot cool off as well by sweating. This puts you at a greater risk for illness. For more information, see the website [www.nws.noaa.gov](http://www.nws.noaa.gov) and search for "heat index."

Older adults and children are at a higher risk for heat-related illness and should be extra cautious. Remind children to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after activity.

If you are overweight, have health problems, take medicines, or use alcohol, you may be at a higher risk for heat-related illness. You may also have trouble if you're not used to exercising in warmer weather.

In hot weather, drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after activity. Water or sports drinks are best. This helps to prevent dehydration and heat-related illness. Water is all you need if you are exercising for less than an

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hour. For longer exercise periods, sports drinks contain carbohydrate and minerals called electrolytes that may help your endurance and keep you from getting muscle cramps.

Call 911 or other emergency services immediately if you have stopped sweating or have other signs of heatstroke, such as a fast heart rate, passing out, high body temperature, feeling confused, or having no energy. Heatstroke is very dangerous.

## OUTDOORS

When it's hot or humid, be active during the cooler times of day. Find shaded areas, like parks with big trees, and drink plenty of fluids. You have less chance of getting too hot if you do lighter exercise, like walking. Be sure to wear sunscreen.

- Take morning or evening walks. Walking the dog or walking with a partner helps you make it part of your routine.
- Go for a bike ride. Find shaded areas, and ride during cooler times of day.
- Go swimming on hot days. This is a healthy family activity for summer.
- Do light yard work or gardening. You'll burn calories while you keep the yard looking good.
- Wash your car. This gets you outside and helps you burn calories. Give yourself a splash to stay cool.

## INDOORS

- Go for walks at the mall. Use a phone app or a pedometer to count your steps. You can set walking goals to help you stay motivated.
- Use light weights or stretch bands at home. You'll stay fit while you watch TV or listen to music. Lift cans of food if you don't want to buy weights.
- Use an online exercise video or a smartphone app. You can stay in shape while you stay cool indoors.
- Go dancing or take dance lessons. Or just turn on some music and dance in your living room. This gets you moving so you burn calories.
- Do indoor housework like dusting, vacuuming, or washing the windows. This helps you stay active while you keep your home looking good.
- On trips, stay at hotels with fitness centers or swimming pools. Make time for a workout. Take a jump rope to use in your room.
- Join a gym or health club. You can take classes or use machines, like treadmills, stair-climbers, or stationary bikes. Many cities have community centers that offer affordable fitness classes. If you have health problems, ask your doctor before you use machines or take classes.
- Join sports programs in your community or at work. Many cities offer indoor sports like basketball, volleyball, and soccer.

## BE SAFE IN THE HEAT!

Source: Healthwise



# Congressman Danny Davis Supports Family Connections

Every year in June, Sheridan Correctional Center works closely with Congressman Danny K. Davis and his staff to bring individuals in custody closer to their families on Father's Day and to provide them with support from the community. Typically, children and family are invited to visit, play, and have lunch or snacks with their fathers. This year, however, the pandemic forced the celebratory visits to be virtual. These special occasions are always encouraging and supportive to the individuals in custody and create a relaxed atmosphere for their family members. They can get up, move around, get food, play games, read, color, or just sit and talk in a less structured manner than what is allowed during a regular visit. The administration at Sheridan has even appeared before the U.S. House of Representatives Ways and Means Committee to discuss the importance of the Fatherhood Initiative spearheaded by the Congressman.

Congressman Davis believes in second chances and has been a tireless advocate for the men and women in custody. Although the pandemic has limited access to correctional institutions, the Congressman did not falter in his support of this holiday. With his team shifting to a virtual event, additional correctional facilities within IDOC were able to participate in the day celebrating fatherhood. The Congressman invited the families and community stakeholders to join him in person so they could learn about facility programming. The men were able to interact with Congressman Davis, the community, and their family members via video-conference. The individuals in custody were grateful and enthusiastic as they listened to several stakeholders discuss potential re-entry resources. Since some family members could not attend, the Congressman's staff made informational video messages available to them. This event was unprecedented in its scope and content. It recognizes the importance of social support systems within the

community and upon release. The Congressman shared his personal journey and words of wisdom to all who attended. He encouraged the men, "Keep hope and don't stop striving forward." With the support of officials like Congressman Davis, this event, and other programs focused on successful outcomes for individuals in custody, the Illinois Department of Corrections is emerging as a national model for correctional reform and innovative re-entry initiatives.



# Murphysboro Life Skills Re-Entry Center Focuses on Fathers

Father's Day is a day to be celebrated here at MLSRC. It is not only a day of being honored as a father, but also to be reminded of the responsibilities of fatherhood.

To encourage the fathers who are in custody here, we put together a series of TV shows to remind them of their children and to celebrate being a dad. The theme for the special programming was called Tuning In To Your Children. The shows ran all weekend, looping 24 hours per day, on the facility's television channel. With downloaded videos from Prison Fellowship's Floodlight website, along with YouTube videos, we put together a video playlist that included Angel Tree promotional spots so the men could learn how to send Christmas presents to their children.

There were sets from comedians Michael Jr. and Tim Hawkins relating parenting events in a humorous way. There were clever and insightful vignettes from the Skit Guys to bring home the value of good fatherhood. There were music videos from groups like the Katinas, who performed a Father's Day concert. There was Hip-Hop music that educates how children are watching and often will follow the same path as their fathers. The lyrics stressed the need for dads to get it right for their children's sakes.

Two of the men here at MLSRC sat down and talked to the Chaplain about what they gleaned from the TV shows. Tyler Washburn, who is the father of a 12-year old daughter, talked about a particular video of a speech given by former Navy Seal, Tyler Williams. Washburn stated that he listened to Williams tell his life's story and how he had wrecked his life with alcohol. Williams thought of himself as being a real tough guy, but one day he realized that on the inside, he was really frail and weak. He realized he needed to take off his armor, so to speak, and become vulnerable and let people see his real self. That's when his life changed. Washburn said that gave him a moment of pause to stop and think about his relationship with his daughter. He felt he had to be stern with her to keep her on the right path, but what he really needed to do was to drop his armor, be softer, and be more vulnerable with her as a dad with a daughter sometimes needs to be. Washburn said it was an eye-opening experience for him.

Another man in custody here, Raymond Chavez, told the chaplain about what he learned after listening to comedian Michael Jr. talk about changing expectations.

Chavez related that before he became a Christian while in custody, he had certain perceptions of what a Christian, or any religious person in prison was. He believed they just got "jail house religion" to make things easier for themselves. He had his expectations of them. But after he became a Christian, he could see that many people are for real, not just putting on some phony religious front. He said that when he gets out of prison, people on the outside are going to think the same thing about him, questioning whether he is genuine in his faith. He knows he will need to help those on the outside see that he is for real. He hopes he can help them change their perceptions and expectations of those in custody.

Chavez went on to say, "It doesn't matter when you find God, and most people find Him when they are broken down." He cited Romans 10:13 as an example, "For everyone who calls on the Lord shall be saved." He added, "The arm of the Lord is not too short to be saved."

These men believe the videos helped them in being a better father. In all, there were seven hours of TV shows that looped 24 hours a day. Although the TV shows were often light-hearted, they sent an empowering message about the importance of being a good father.

**By Chaplain Jeff Baker, MLSRC**



# SWICC Celebrates PRIDE

Southwestern Illinois Correctional Center made recognizing the diverse communities and groups of staff and incarcerated individuals a priority during PRIDE month in June. The facility created an inclusive and supportive environment for the LGBTQ+ community in their celebration of PRIDE and embraced the occasion by incorporating the symbols of PRIDE all around the facility.

A display window was created in the entryway of the Administration Building to be used to announce significant events at Southwestern. The first event to be noted on the new display was PRIDE month. A badge with the trademark rainbow colors of the movement welcomed all to the facility. This image was chosen to visually represent the support of the facility for the PRIDE message. A PRIDE flag was also hung on the entrance gate of the facility.



To encourage staff to engage in the project, Fridays in June were designated as PRIDE-Fridays. Staff members were invited to participate by wearing rainbow colored bracelets, enjoying cupcakes with rainbow icing, and by wearing their PRIDE t-shirts. C/O Rachel Finley accepted the role of “PRIDE at Work” representative for Southwestern and was recognized by Warden Sharlette Rodgers. Rachel wrote about her experiences being part of both the LGBTQ+ and IDOC communities in an article for the Warden and staff. When asked about being connected to both the LGBTQ+ community and Corrections, Finley stated, “I am part of two communities

that would seem to be polar opposite, but in actuality are very similar. The LGBTQ+ and corrections communities, both being sub-cultures in many ways, work as a big family. They are both centered around having each other’s back, and they both are a melting pot of the best people I’ve known.” Finley continued by stating, “I am proud to be queer. I am proud to be an Officer. But most importantly, I am proud of IDOC for recognizing and supporting PRIDE month.”



**From left to right: DeJour Preston, Abigail Rosner, Barbara Dawson**



**From left: C/O Rachel Finley, Warden Rodgers**

An Ally Wall was created in the Armory foyer where staff could sign a note to show they not only support the LGBTQ+ community, but also stand in solidarity with them. These notes were displayed on the wall

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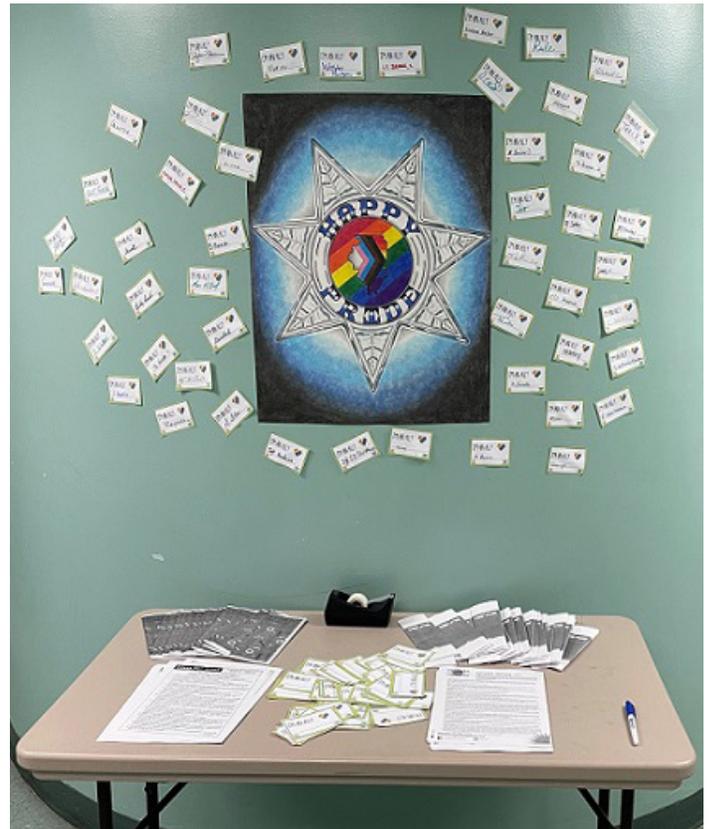
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surrounding a sketch created by Dusty Southard, an artist and incarcerated individual at SWICC. Both he and Larry Lingo, another incarcerated individual and artist at SWICC, created the original artwork for the occasion.

SWICC showed how to really celebrate PRIDE month and make diversity, equity, and inclusion a cornerstone of its operation. It has received very positive feedback, many compliments, and words of encouragement from affiliates who visited the facility in June. Southwestern is very proud of the PRIDE they have shared!



From left: Southard, Lingo



## Illinois State Fair Work Crews

Every year at fair time, Lincoln and Decatur Correctional Centers send work crews to Springfield. The workers are responsible for ordering, designing, planting, and maintaining approximately 250 flower beds, 160 decorative hanging baskets, 60 four-foot concrete containers, 30 two-foot concrete containers, and more than 75 portable containers located on the 325-plus acres of the Illinois State Fairgrounds. They maintain the Governor's and the First Lady's tents during the Illinois State Fair. These workers plant and maintain 4 large indoor planting beds at the Illinois Department of Agriculture building also located on the fairgrounds.

All of the tropical flowers and many of the annuals used during the fair are maintained year-round at the state fairgrounds. The workers learn how to propagate and rehabilitate flowers, how to plant and fertilize flowers, and how to make flower arrangements for hanging baskets and planters. One of the crewmen, Ricky Allen said, "Working here gives us the opportunity to earn



"good time," referring to Earned Program Sentence Credit (EPSC). This program serves as a way for incarcerated individuals to accelerate their projected release date. Each individual earns a half day of credit for each full day of work at the Illinois State Fair. Allen

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added, “It’s hands-on work. You look around, and you know we did all this.” Another worker, Eric Reed, said, “It means a lot to earn good time so that I can get back to my family sooner. People drive around the fairgrounds and see all these flowers and plants, and they thank us for our work. It really makes you feel appreciated, you know? I never want to miss a day out here.” These men learn how to use various types of lawn and garden equipment including weed eaters, backpack leaf blowers, gas trimmers for shaping bushes, and tillers to prepare flower beds. Lawante Bussell, another one of the crew at the fair, had this to say about the work, “We’re tilling, leveling flower pots and containers, weed-whacking, and mowing. It’s hard work, but I enjoy being out here. We get a chance to do better than before. We are trusted to be out here learning new stuff, learning how to landscape. That gives us a new outlook on life. Plus, we earn good time.”

Many of the skills these individuals learn while working at the fairgrounds translate into potential employment at a nursery or landscaping company upon their release from custody. Starting a lawn, garden or floral business of their own may even be conceivable after having acquired these specific skills. Work crew member, Leena Ultsch, told us, “I have gained a lot more understanding on how to plant something and keep it alive! And, I could carry this out to the future with something different. I might even make a career out this. I am thinking about owning my own floral shop in the future.” These workers are motivated to reduce their sentences, and the skills they have learned through this program increases the chance that their re-entry into society will be successful.

Each year, Lincoln Correctional Center and Decatur Correctional Center send at least seven workers to the Illinois State Fair. “It’s peaceful. And, you get to make something beautiful,” said Jennifer Sorenson, another member of the crew who works at the fairgrounds. Samantha Martinez echoed Sorenson’s words, “This is a great program. You get out of the facility for the day and create something beautiful. It’s rewarding to see all the flowers that start out so little and grow so big and beautiful.” Facility staff and the Illinois State Fair work crews take great pride in the work that they provide at every Illinois State Fair, and visitors to the fair are treated to these lovely displays of their hard work.



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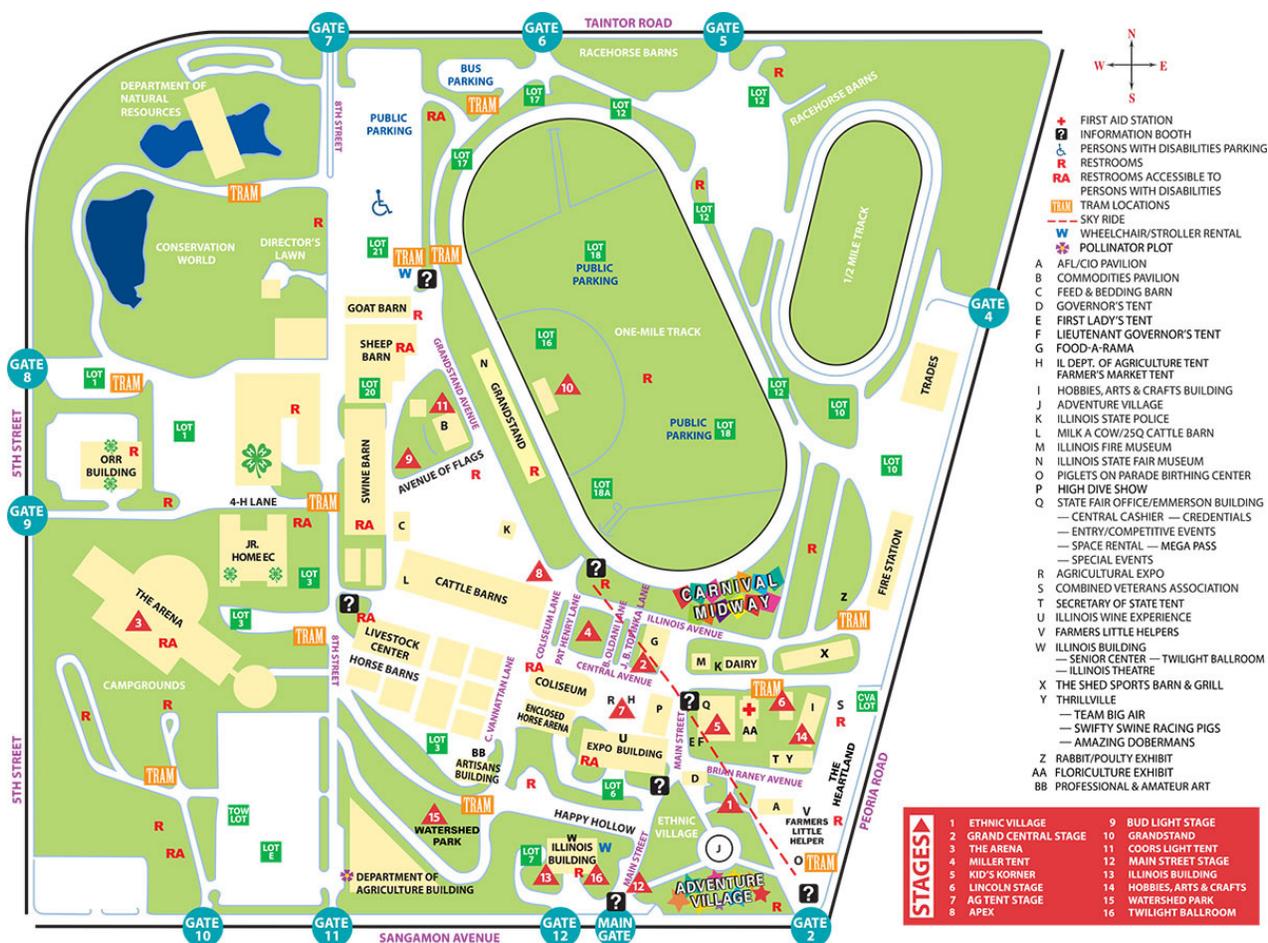
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