Corrections Connections

Illinois Department of Corrections | *Monthly Newsletter* September/October 2021

What's Inside

2 Behind the Badge
3 Their Service Continues
4 Hispanic Heritage Month
11 Global Leadership Summit 2021
12 Teaching the Art of Clean
COVID-19 Vaccine Lottery
13 Illinois & DuQuoin State Fairs Return in 2021
15 Be Well
16 Rapid Results
17 IDOC Employees of the Month - July 2021
18 Virtual Mom & Me Camp
19 Shawnee Drug Education Class
Taylorville Correctional Center Crew Provides Storm Clean Up
20 Taylorville Correctional Center Veterans Garden

Message from the Director

Colleagues and Stakeholders:

Director Rob Jeffreys

IDOC's Journey to Excellence requires the highest levels of professionalism by our workforce. The Department is committed to providing training and support that cultivates transformational leadership -- leaders who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and change agents. Research, policy, and technology will help determine where the Department is going, but it is up to us to decide how to get there. I encourage all of you to be decisive in your own professional and personal development journeys. Invest in continuous improvement of your knowledge and growth in your career. Set personal goals, challenge yourselves and be devoted to self-development and take advantage of non-mandatory training opportunities.

Years ago, I committed to investing in my professional development by reading and learning as much as I could about the multiple levels of the criminal justice system and leadership development. That commitment prepared me to be part of this amazing team at this point in my career. Continuous self-development is an essential key to a happy and fulfilling career.

In addition, I passionately believe that helping others develop their careers is one of the most powerful tools to empowering the workforce and creating a culture where everyone feels valued. I encourage you to be the best employee you can be and serve as a model for others. The Department will support you every step of the way.

Thank you,
Director Rob Jeffreys

Behind the Badge

Correctional Officer Jamie Lidster spends his spare time coming to the rescue. It is something he knew he wanted to be a part of since he was 10 years old. He witnessed a fire engulf the apartment complex he lived in with his family. “I can remember watching with awe as department after department responded to battle this fire,” he said. “I stood there watching truck after truck roll in, and I knew that I wanted to be that kind of person one day. I wanted to be able to help people who were having their worst day.”

Lidster, a correctional officer at Vandalia Correctional Center since September 2019, is a volunteer firefighter, EMS, and dive rescue member for Effingham, Illinois. For 21 years, Lidster has been volunteering as a firefighter. He began working in 1997 at the Watson Fire Department. He then moved to the Effingham Fire Department in 2000 where he continues to volunteer. “I generally respond to at least two calls per week,” he said. “There is training every week, too – everything from HAZMAT, medical rescue, fire suppression, and fire extinguishing.”

Some of his most memorable experiences are from his full-time dive and rescue work from 2002-2006. “I responded to a call when I was off-duty during the Fourth of July,” Lidster said. “The call came in that a 3-year old had drowned at Forbes Lake. When I got there, it was actually a 30-year old that had drowned, but it turned into us saving two of his friends who tried to save him and nearly drowned themselves. Those are the experiences that stick with you. It’s very rewarding. To help save someone’s life is not something everyone can do.”

His work with the fire department led him straight into the EMS. “I really liked being able to see both sides of a rescue,” Lidster said. “Out everything that I have done over the years, EMS was the most interesting for me. I liked helping victims in emergency situations.”
In August 2020, Lidster recalls a thank you from a family whose home was saved from a four-square mile fire in Altamont. “It’s an amazing feeling to have someone sincerely thank you for saving their home,” he said. “That thank you means a lot.”

When a tornado wreaked havoc in Taylorville about two years ago, Effingham Fire Department responded to help. “We searched more than 150 houses after that tornado,” he said. “We went from house to house helping people who were trapped trying to escape from their homes.”
He worked for the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute from 2012 to 2013. “I literally lit fires for teams

to come in and train to put out,” he said. “A lot of it was burning concrete buildings, hotels, houses,” he said.

As for the risks he takes, Lidster said that he has had a few close calls. “I’ve only ever almost gotten caught in a burning house just once,” he said. “It can happen pretty quickly. I have been very lucky. It takes a toll on you mentally and physically. A lot of people cannot do this kind of work, but it is such important work. I don’t think there is anything more rewarding than saving someone’s life.”

Their Service Continues
IDOC Veterans of 9-11

Two decades have passed since the day that changed the United State of America forever. On September 11, 2021, al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial airplanes, crashing two into the World Trade Center, a third into the Pentagon, and the fourth, Flight 93, in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

"I remember that day well," said Illinois River Correctional Center Major Cally Stein. "I received a call from my wife telling me to turn on the TV because we were under attack. I turned on the TV still thinking my wife had lost her marbles, and yet as I turned on the TV, it was just at the moment the second tower was hit. I stood in my living room in a battle of emotions between disbelief and absolute horror. I realized then that if I succumb to panic, it is exactly what they wanted. I refused to let them win. We as a nation got stronger after that day because we decided not to let them win." Major Stein is a veteran corporal of the United States Marine Corps.

The attacks killed 2,977 people from 93 countries: 2,753 people were killed in New York; 184 people were killed at the Pentagon; and 40 people were killed on Flight 93. "The morning of 9/11 I was listening about the terrorist attack on the radio as I was entering my base in response to the attack," said Logan Correctional Center Major Paul Fletcher, a U.S. Navy veteran. "It was a surreal feeling as I began assisting the base to prepare for an attack. I kept asking myself, is this really happening?"

The USO says 181,510 Americans enlisted in the military in the year following 9/11. That included Sgt. R. Fawcett of Jacksonville Correctional Center who enlisted in the Navy. "Watching Americans perish in the attacks on 9/11 fueled my desire to join the military and do my part to protect the country I love," said Sgt. Fawcett. Correctional Officer Jesus Madrigal of Pontiac Correctional Center enlisted in the Army just six months after the attacks. "I was angry and frustrated at the events that took place on American soil." On 9/11, Officer Madrigal, his wife, and his daughter were visiting family in Mexico. When he heard the news, he was struck with fear. "The US Military shut down all flights into and around US airspace," Officer Madrigal said. "We stayed in Mexico an extra week and a half in order to fly back home to California." Illinoi River Correctional Center Business Administrator Luke Divan was only

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

a senior in high school. “These events brought me to a realization that there were groups of people whose sole mission is to harm the United States and our citizens,” said the Marine Corps Corporal. “Four days later, these events inspired me to take a trip to the recruiting office. I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps for four years of active duty.”

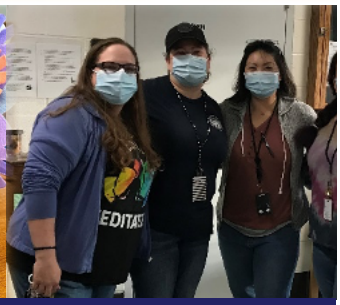
According to the 9/11 Memorial Museum, al-Qaeda hoped that, by attacking symbols of American power, they would promote widespread fear throughout the country and severely weaken the United States’ standing in the world community. “I thought the United States was invincible,” said Illinois River Lt. Shane Woods. “Shortly after the attack, I made the decision to go back into active status in the Army Reserves. I was deployed three times to the Middle East. The attacks made me realize that we, as a nation, seem to take things for granted. Since then, I have learned to enjoy and appreciate the littlest of things in life. If only we could all live like it was 9/12/2001, when we were all together, with no division,” Lt. Woods said.

Sgt. Alan L. Newhall, Jr. of Pontiac Correctional Center is a veteran of the Illinois Army National Guard and was deployed three times during the War on Terror. From March 2004 to March 2005, he was stationed in Iraq. He deployed to Afghanistan in September 2007 and again in 2015. “9-11 is special to every person in the military today, said Sgt. Newhall. “It’s almost like Pearl Harbor was for World War II veterans. We hold that day in reverence to those whose lives were lost and who later lost their lives while serving their country.”

After these heroes fought to defend and protect our nation, they continued their public service as esteemed employees of the Illinois Department of Corrections. As we pause to remember the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, we honor our own who courageously answered the call.

NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

September 15 to October 15



Judy Oakley

Senior Parole Agent
Illinois Department of Corrections

Being Hispanic has helped me understand and draw strength from the diversity that makes up our department. Working alongside people with different skills and experiences has been beneficial in helping me learn and grow. In Hispanic culture family comes first. For me, this means being there for my work family, also. Being fluent in English and Spanish has been very useful in my career. It has been rewarding to work as translator to the Spanish-speaking incarcerated individuals, and those on parole, who could not communicate due to the language barrier. Knowing who you are and where you come from is very important because that will help guide you to where you should be.

(continued on page 6)

Erika Rubalcava

Administrative Assistant I
East Moline Correctional Center

I have been with the state since February 1, 1990. I was born in Mexico, I came here when I was very young. My parents always made sure that I would never forget my roots or the language. I have always wanted to become an interpreter and I have done that with the State of Illinois for over 31 years. I retire July 2022. I started with the state when the State of Illinois lost a lawsuit and Human Services needed to have bilingual employees. I was hired and the rest is history. It really has been a pleasure to be able to use my bilingual skills in so many areas, first in Human Services and now in Corrections. The people I have interpreted for have always been appreciative and it has made my career very fulfilling.

Victoria Wiewel

Correctional Counselor II
Western Illinois Correctional Center

My grandmother immigrated to the United States from Spain. Growing up in a bilingual family played a large role in becoming the person I am today. It inspired me to learn more about the Spanish language and the cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. As a Spanish-speaking Correctional Counselor at the Illinois Department of Corrections, I am proud to be able to facilitate communication between staff and Spanish-speaking individuals in custody.

Jesus Madrigal

Correctional Officer
Pontiac Correctional Center

My parents immigrated to America in the early 1960's. My father signed up with a program started by President Kennedy to be a field laborer of agriculture in many different areas of California. My parents had been living and working in America, for years. In 1968, my mother was pregnant with me, her fifth child. My father decides to travel with the whole family to Michoacan, Mexico for me to be born at our family home. Around February of 1969, as a 3-month-old newborn, is the first time I entered the United States. I wanted to give something back to America and I am proud to be a naturalized US Citizen in 1995, enlisting in the US Army and proudly serving and working as a Correctional Officer to this date. I am blessed and honored to have served both at home and abroad especially after the attacks on 9/11.

(continued on page 7)

William Puga
Chief of Psychiatry
Illinois Department of Corrections

My parents came to this country from South America to pursue the American dream. With them I believed in the American Dream…that hard work and effort would pay off. Approach the future with passion and perseverance, trust God, and know your family is behind you all the way and keep pushing forward. One day and one challenge at a time.

My parents came to this country from South America to pursue the American dream. With them I believed in the American Dream…that hard work and effort would pay off. Approach the future with passion and perseverance, trust God, and know your family is behind you all the way and keep pushing forward. One day and one challenge at a time.

Diane Skorch
Office Coordinator – Clinical Services
Pinckneyville Correctional Center

How lucky I am to have parents that embrace their Mexican heritage. They lead by example so that my brother, sister and I will carry on our traditions with our own families. Being Mexican-American gives me the opportunity to participate in many programs within IDOC. I never imagined that speaking two different languages would be so beneficial with my career at IDOC.

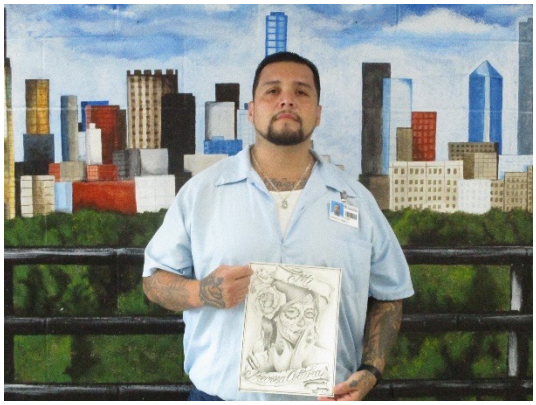
Luis Vicente
Correctional Officer
Shawnee Correctional Center

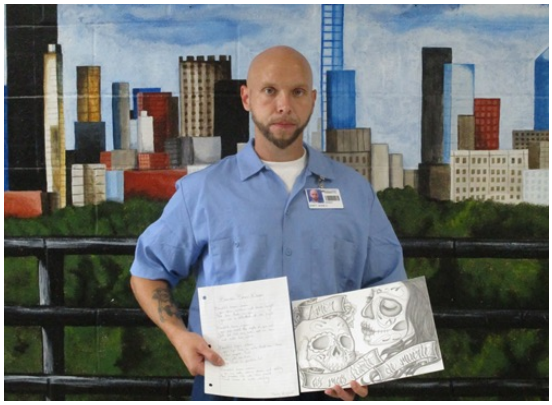
(continued on page 8)

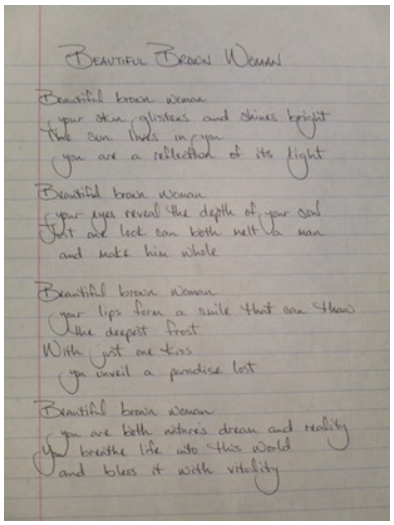
Jorge Tapia
Locksmith
East Moline Correctional Center

My Latin heritage has afforded many opportunities to participate in committees as a bilingual speaking employee. I have been assigned to the Tact Team, Crisis Team, Hostage Team, Diversity Committee and Morale Committee, Adjustment Committee so that I can give a Latino perspective on issues. It expanded by career in many ways besides just doing key control. I have been able to see and experience great things.

Pinckneyville Correctional Center celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month with an art and poetry competition for the individuals in custody. Pictured below are 1st-place winners, Jamie Cornejo and Jesse Smith.







Beautiful Brown Woman

Beautiful brown woman
your skin glistens and shines bright
the sun lives in you
you are a reflection of its light

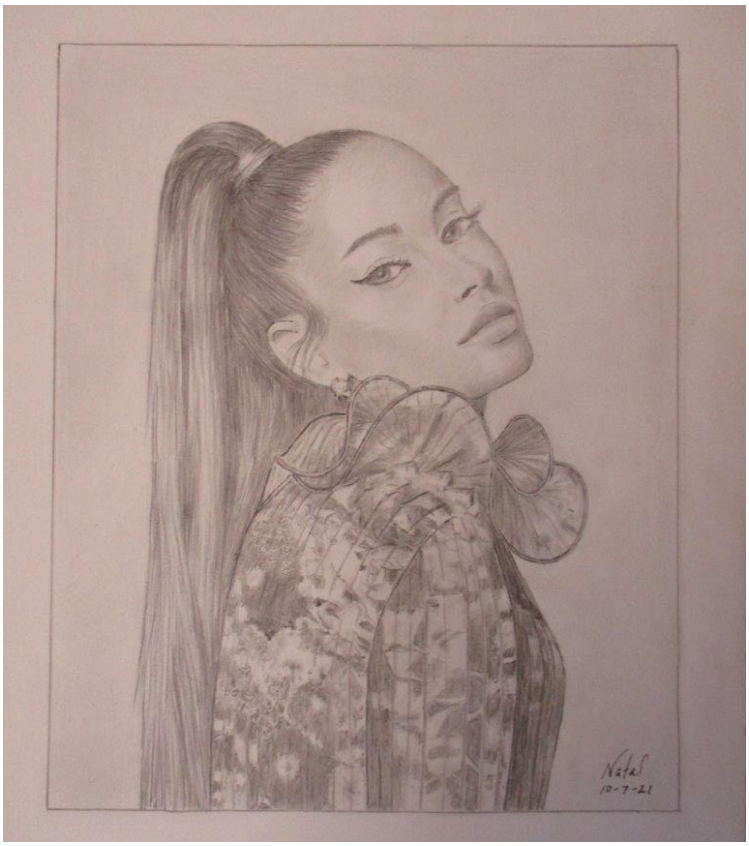
Beautiful brown woman
your eyes reveal the depth of your soul
that one look can both melt a man
and make him whole

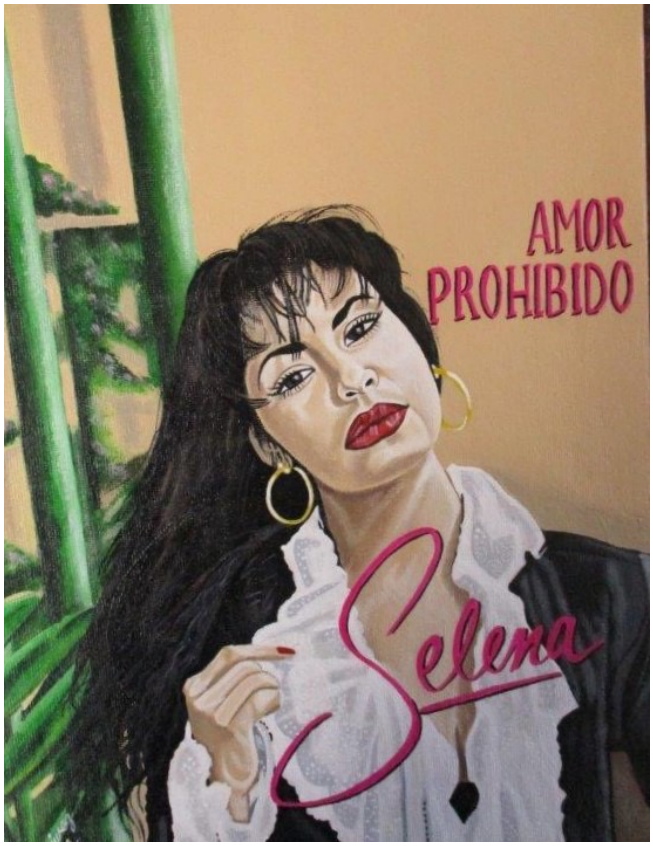
Beautiful brown woman
your lips form a smile that can thaw
the deepest frost
With just one kiss
you unveil a paradise lost

Beautiful brown woman
you are both nature's dream and reality
you breathe life into this world
and bless it with vitality

(continued on page 9)

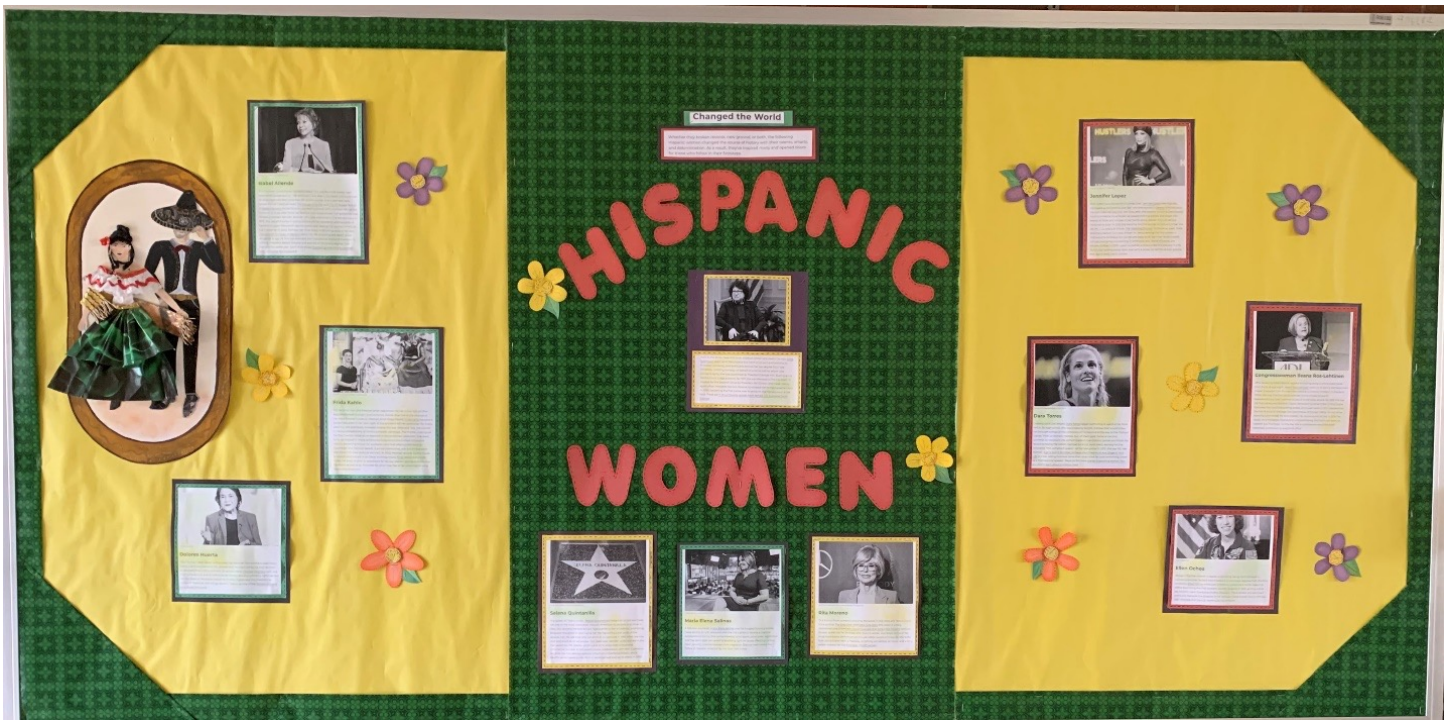
Hill Correctional Center's Hispanic Heritage Month Art & Essay Contest also featured the talents of individuals in custody. Pictured below is the winner of the art competition, Adolfo Frair, and winner of the essay competition, Mark Quiles. Also pictured are other entries in the art category.





(continued on page 10)

Individuals in custody at Logan Correctional Center highlighted Hispanic Women on their bulletin board.



Others competed in an art contest. Pictured above (L to R): 3rd Place - Crystal Cepeda, 2nd Place - Lauren Valerius, 1st Place - Afton Faris.

Global Leadership Summit 2021

Providing meaningful and impactful professional development opportunities is key when growing transformative leaders and improving organizational culture. Leaders throughout the Illinois Department of Corrections recently participated in the annual Global Leadership Summit in August. The GLS goal is to inspire participants to use their influence for good, cultivate their leadership skills, strengthen relationships and positively transform organizations. The two-day summit gave employees and those in custody an opportunity to learn from world-renowned presenters and faculty. They provided resources for innovative thinking, new perspectives, fresh ideas, actionable concepts, leadership principles and inspirational real-life stories of transformation.

The summit was held in 124 countries and more than 100 prison sites, reaching more than 10,000 corrections employees and individuals in custody throughout the United States. Thirteen IDOC facilities streamed the summit to socially distanced groups or through the facility televisions channels, while 80 executive staff, upper level managers, and wardens were able to join off-site. Surveys and testimonials prove the success of the summit as one participant shared how necessary it is to take some time away to focus on how to become a better leader while also taking care of yourself. Facilities that were unable to participate during the live event in August will be given the chance to view the summit during this fall and the upcoming spring and summer 2022.

Teaching the Art of Clean

At Jacksonville Correctional Center individuals in custody add to their Custodial Maintenance vocational program curriculum with hands-on experience.

Since 1999, Patricia Burchett has been teaching Custodial Maintenance for Lake Land College. She began her custodial teaching career with Jacksonville's MacMurray College at the Pittsfield Work Camp. In 2004, she transferred to the Jacksonville Correctional Facility, where she has offered the program under Richland Community College and currently Lake Land College. Ms. Burchett brings years of experience working as a custodial technician in the Jacksonville School District and transfers personal experiences and the requirements in the custodial field to her students.

As well as teaching the skills needed for a custodial technician, Ms. Burchett teaches her students about the equipment of the trade and how to care for and maintain it. The hands-on experience provides the students the opportunity to work as a team and know what it's like to be a productive employee and appreciate and be proud of their work. Additionally, Ms. Burchett provides her students with what is required to begin their own business in the field, if that's the direction they choose. With the current pandemic, organizations have come to realize that cleanliness and sanitation of all facilities is even more vital. The expectation is that jobs will be plentiful for students who have completed the Custodial Maintenance certificate program after their release.

COVID-19 Vaccine Lottery

The IDOC Vaccine Lottery was lucrative for some employees. The concept was simple. Get the COVID vaccine and automatically be entered into the Department's COVID vaccine lottery. Get the shot, and win a prize is hard to resist especially when the prizes were $10,000, $5,000, sporting event and airline tickets, lifetime hunting and fishing licenses, and much more. So, IDOC Parole Agent Mike Harrington got the shot and won one of the lottery prizes — tickets to the 1914 Club and great seats at a Chicago Cubs baseball game at Wrigley Field! On July 28th, Mike and his family took in the game against the Atlanta Braves. The Cubs didn't come out on top that day, but Mike and his family enjoyed the experience anyway. IDOC would like to thank Mike for his commitment to safety by getting the vaccine.

Illinois & DuQuoin State Fairs Return in 2021

The Illinois Department of Corrections proudly displayed exhibits from several correctional facilities at this year's Illinois State Fair in Springfield. Thanks to the generosity of Mutual Aid Box Alarm System (MABAS), the Department welcomed fairgoers inside its air-conditioned tent. A hard-working team of staff from Lincoln Correctional Center assembled the tent and built a stand for a metal sign made in Shawnee's Industries shop.

Earlier this year, IDOC correctional centers competed for the opportunity to showcase their facilities at the fair. The State Fair Manager and IDOC executive staff had the tough decision of narrowing the proposals down to just six. All the submissions were creative and thoughtful, but ultimately, the following facilities were chosen: Southwestern Illinois, Menard, Shawnee, Sheridan, Vandalia, and Decatur. Several staff assisted in the set-up of the exhibits, including members of the Tactical Response Team.

Southwestern Illinois highlighted its treatment programs and services by displaying information and photos on various wooden panels. The exhibit also included a house framing built to scale by individuals in the construction program. There were also live plants from the horticulture program on display, as well as packets of seeds families could take home and plant.

Menard Correctional Center took fairgoers through a timeline of its history. The facility built a black three-sided structure that people could step into for a theatre-like experience. A video showcased pictures of the facility from the 1880's to present day.

Shawnee Correctional Center utilized its Industries metal shop and construction program for its exhibit on the facility's Shawnee Wellness Assistance Therapy Training (SWATT) dog program. Families had the opportunity to put together a dog-shaped puzzle, press a button on a metal cutout of a dog to make it bark, and submit names for the program's mascot! Sadie, a dog trained by an individual in the program, made several guest appearances and was big hit.

The Home Builders Institute (HBI) at Sheridan Correctional Center presented several pieces of furniture, including Adirondack chairs, benches, a side table, cabinet and more that were constructed by individuals in custody at the facility. They also built interactive games to demonstrate the plumbing and electrical components

(continued on page 14)

(continued from page 13)

of the program. HBI staff were on hand each day of the fair to talk with fairgoers and hand out hard hat stress balls, carpenter pencils, rulers, and drawstring bags.

The Second Chances racehorse rescue program was the theme of Vandalia Correctional Center's display. The exhibit featured artwork of the facility's horses that were hand-drawn by an individual in custody. Visitors could practice bridling a horse and wrapping a leg using life-size dummies.

Decatur Correctional Center showcased the unique programs within the Women's Division, including dog grooming and dog training, Scouting Behind Bars, Reunification and Moms & Babies, charity events and more. A video of dog grooming participants demonstrated how to make poms that they put on the dogs' collars when they are groomed. Fairgoers could select a pom to take home for their own pet.

The Staff Wellness Response Team was also present at the fair. Their spinning wheel gave people the opportunity to complete an activity associated with one of the eight dimensions of wellness. IDOC recruiters also attended the event to speak with potential applicants about the benefits of working for the State of Illinois. Posters were displayed on a wall constructed by individuals at the Pittsfield Work Camp and delivered by Jacksonville staff.

Immediately following the Illinois State Fair, IDOC headed south for the Du Quoin State Fair. The Honor Guard represented the Department by marching in the Twilight Parade. Shawnee and Menard Correctional Centers displayed their exhibits while recruiters shared information on job opportunities.

From Sadie the comfort dog to games, educational displays, interactive activities, coloring pages, and more – there was plenty to see and do at IDOC's exhibit at the Illinois and Du Quoin State Fairs.

BE WELL

Coping with Grief and Loss

How to Best Navigate Our Feelings After Losing Someone

We know that loss is an emotional event, yet we often hasten to quell others' emotional expressions. Without the processing of relevant emotions, we become stuck in the trauma of loss, which leads to us being impacted more implicitly. Even though losing a loved one hurts and can evoke anger, frustration and sadness, our natural emotions are meant to be felt and experienced.

I first considered writing this post after being approached by an interviewer about my thoughts on coping with death. At the time, I found the timing to be appropriate, given that I had recently lost two people to whom I was close. Since then, my proximity to death became even closer with my father passing away and then having to attend not just one, but two funerals in the span of weeks.

Coping with a loss is not meant to be easy. We know loss is an emotional event, yet we often hasten to quell others' emotional expressions, offering platitudes such as "don't cry" or "try not to think about it." For many, faith becomes a valuable resource during a period of loss. I have personally witnessed the power of faith and prayer when I attended the funeral for the dearly departed father of one of my students. This difficult moment was filled with inspiration and hope created by parishioners and loved ones united in a celebration of life.

As I was told by a family member during one of the most difficult moments in my recent past, "Grief is private and personal, and everyone copes in their own way." Thus, I would like to share a few things I have learned that have been helpful in my own coping with death and loss.

Allow yourself to feel

This may seem like a simple act, but it's probably the hardest part of the grieving process. Loss is painful, and the greater the attachment, the greater the wound. We instinctually deal with negative situations through avoidance, denial, and distraction. Simply put, "If pain hurts, why should we feel obliged to feel it?" Unfortunately, experiencing these emotions is integral to healing. Without the processing of relevant emotions, we become stuck in the trauma of loss, which leads to us being impacted in a more implicit and chronic manner.
As our sympathetic nervous system becomes activated by the emotional threats of loss and grief, our brains continuously search and comb through our memories to find an explanation for the occurrence. While the physiological portion of this function is a necessary survival instinct, it can take hold when it continues as a method of processing and not only helps sustain negative feelings but reinforces and increases them as well.

Even though losing a loved one hurts and can evoke anger, frustration, and sadness, our natural emotions are meant to be felt and experienced. This is normal, so denying these emotions does not invite peace but instead provides a false sense of security that further distances us from peace and acceptance. Talking to those in whom you confide, journaling, or simply introspecting can be helpful. Holding back tears does not make them disappear, but instead drives them deeper, so allow yourself to emote.

Try to find meaning in the loss

Our neurophysiology and anatomical constitution cannot help but constantly look for a reason. It's an innate function that can either be an asset or a detriment. Since meaning is essential, we usually look for it in many places. Initially, we try to answer the question of "why?" We may blame ourselves, others, and even existence in general. Faith and religion are often able to fill that void for many, although some may look elsewhere.

Finding meaning amid suffering is difficult, but necessary. For me, meaning is found in everyday occurrences. There is no need to look for "nodal points"; rather, one should seek to find value in the moment. There is an intrinsic value in life, and with value there is meaning. Now, the tricky part is not necessarily finding meaning in death but finding it in life.

Do your best to find internal peace

As Elizabeth Kübler-Ross demonstrated, coping with loss is an emotional storm, yet finding peace is crucial. Belief in a higher power and religious tenets can bring peace through concepts such as eternal life, which helps what feels like a goodbye seem like more of a "see you later." Peace may also come from a better understanding of the connectedness embedded in existence or from exploring spirituality. We often think that peace is a passive exercise in which we must place

(continued on page 16)

(continued on page 15)

ourselves in a quiet, calm environment, but life is often not calm or quiet. Therefore, peace must be an active experience fueled by intention.

Keep your loved ones "alive"

Using the words of author Sir Terry Prattchet, "no one is actually dead until the ripples they cause in the world die away." Finding ways to keep a person "alive" after they're gone is another effective way to cope with grief. For example, artists are often appreciated after their time, and we seek to cherish their memories after they have passed. While we often like to say that people live on in our memories, thoughts, and prayers, I like to think it's a bit more tangible than that.

Our loved ones become part of who we are. We are forever changed by them and evolve through every interaction we have had, with more meaningful interactions being significantly more impactful. Thus, the deceased continue to live on in our actions, everyday behaviors, and noteworthy achievements.

To honor someone "in our own way" can mean that with every one of our corresponding actions and interactions we give them life. But therein lies a paradox. So why not apply these tenets more proactively by seeking to live our lives by feeling more, finding meaning, exerting peace, and honoring them through our actions? We should not fear death, nor should we seek to welcome it.

Often, we are reminded about our own mortality when we experience the passing of a loved one. We usually cope with grief in a reactive manner because the ambiguity and finality of death can be overwhelming and scary, and so we choose to not think or discuss it.

To be a human being is to be in a dynamic state of action. Therefore, it is through our actions that the departed remain, resulting in a more proactive approach in which the prospect of death does not hinder us in celebrating their lives through ours.

Isaac P. Tourgeman, Ph.D., M.S. ClinPharm
for Psychology Today

References

Kübler-Ross, E. (1969). On Death and Dying. Simon & Schuster/Touchstone

Rapid Results

BIG MUDDY RIVER CORRECTIONAL CENTER GYM FLOOR RENOVATION

Big Muddy River Correctional Center has recently realized significant cost savings through their gym floor renovation project. The scope of the project was to remove and replace the existing worn carpet. Pollutants and allergens trapped in the old carpet presented health and safety issues. Areas of ripped carpet presented a trip and fall hazard. The facility secured outside bids to remove and replace the carpet with floor tile at a cost of $113,000. The Big Muddy Maintenance team and a group of individuals in custody, removed the carpet and refurbished the concrete subfloor at a total cost of $3,500. This represents a cost savings of $109,500!

The final touches being put on the floor include painted graphics, sealer, and a clearcoat finish. A group of talented art students in the population have been enlisted to paint graphics of a "Big Muddy" basketball at center court and sets of stars in the keys of the court. Pictured is the floor following the removal of the carpet and application of the paint lines. Also pictured is the graphic of the center court basketball.

IDOC Employees of the Month
August and September 2021

Facility	Name	Title
Big Muddy River	Randy McFarland	Corrections Maintenance Craftsman
Centralia	Lea Sisney	Correctional Officer
Decatur	Dalton Sonneborn	Correctional Officer
	Debbie Ross	Librarian
Dixon	Christopher Wheeler	Correctional Sergeant
East Moline	Jack Sellers	Correctional Officer
Graham	Bryant Briggs	Correctional Officer
	Dan Wilson	Corrections Counselor III, TA CWS
Hill	Joshua Rickey	Correctional Officer
Illinois River	Jennifer Pinkerton	Office Associate - HCU
Jacksonville	Devin Smock	Correctional Officer
Lawrence	Juriah Sutton	Correctional Officer
	Patrick Suddarth	Correctional Officer
	Stephanie Stoneberger	LPN
Lincoln	Christopher MCKinney	Correctional Officer
Logan	Lewis Chas Johnson	Correctional Officer
Logan	Don Glover	Teacher
Menard	Derek Threadgill	Correctional Officer
	Geddy McDonald	Correctional Officer
	Sean Henry	Corrections Supply Supervisor
Murphysboro Re-Entry	David Hiller	Correctional Officer
Pinckneyville	James Groves	Sergeant
Pontiac	Alex Penrod	Office Associate - Mailroom
	Ericka Jones	Correctional Officer
Robinson	Michael Brown	Correctional Officer
Shawnee	Shawn Murphy	Corr Identification Supervisor
Sheridan		
Southwestern Illinois	Megan Wichern	Account Tech I
	Adam Schilling	Correctional Officer
Taylorville	Nicole Taylor	Correctional Lieutenant
Vandalia	Rick Metzger	B of I Technician
	Kyle Hays	Correctional Officer
Vienna	Jennifer Long	Correctional Officer
Western Illinois	Cody Arens	Correctional Officer

Virtual Mom & Me Camp

Collaboration Brings Moms and Their Children Together

To overcome challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Illinois Department of Corrections is implementing innovative solutions to continue safely providing programming for the incarcerated population. When Mom and Me Camp was canceled for the Women's Division for the second year in a row, IDOC partnered with the Freedom Child Foundation and camp volunteers to host a virtual event.

Mothers at Logan and Decatur Correctional Centers applied to take part in the camp and were selected based on positive behavior. Children logged onto their computers, tablets or cell phones at home and were able to speak to their mother and participate in fun, educational virtual activities.

"The Mom & Me program was a wonderful way for me to interact with my son," said Monica Gray. "Not being able to see him due to COVID has been hard for all of us. This program brought us together for the day. We both laughed and cried. His talent was amazing. His favorite part was the virtual space center and being able to see me and hear my voice. I think this program was a great benefit to both the moms and kids. I highly recommend this program!"

The virtual space experience was provided by Adler Planetarium in Chicago. Other presentations included Shedd Aquarium, the Museum of Science and Industry, Miss Chicago Monica Nia-Jones, and global performer Alex Boye.

"My daughter is in love with learning new things," said Denise Williams. "One of the parts of the program was about the planets, she answered questions and learned new things. She also loves animals, that's something we share. We loved seeing the dolphins and penguins and learning the difference between them."

A talent show was held for both the women and children. From double dutch to singing, tumbling, and more, everyone had an opportunity to share their special skills on screen.

"I always knew I was never alone, that other women here are in the same situation, but that day just confirmed everything I thought about since day one of being here," said Facionda Washington. "It also helped me connect with more people. I believe my child was over the top with happiness. She loved everything about it. Especially being on camera and showing off her gymnastics skills." The Freedom Child Foundation was founded by Wandjell Browning, a former participant of Mom and Me Camp. Browning's organization mailed a box of goodies, including stationery and toys, to each child who participated in the event. The box also included a t-shirt provided by volunteers of Mom and Me Camp. The Freedom Child Foundation secured food donations from Jimmy John's for all the moms to enjoy at lunchtime. Women in the Baker's Apprenticeship at Logan Correctional Center baked treats, including a personalized Freedom Child Foundation cake. The rooms had special decorations that were all handmade by individuals in custody.

"It was so great to see my kids after not being able to see them for so long," said Brandy Barns. "This program made it possible for me to see my kids smile again. Talking to my kids afterwards they explained how seeing other kids with their moms in the same place as I am, showed them that they aren't alone and just because Mommy's in prison doesn't mean she doesn't love you or want to be there for you. They are so much more understanding of the fact that I'm not a bad person, I just made bad choices, along with other moms in with me."

The technology portion of the event was accomplished with the assistance of Melissa Hunt, LAN at Taylorville Correctional Center, and Patrick Beaird from the Illinois Department of Innovation and Technology. IDOC utilized WebEx which allowed the children and women at both facilities to tune into the program simultaneously.

"Me and my children had a lot of fun together," said Mary Parker. "It was a great way to bond with my children. Even though we couldn't be in the same place, it felt like we were together. I am very thankful to be a part of this program."

The virtual Mom and Me Camp could not have been accomplished without the support of the dedicated wardens, clinical staff and leisure time activity specialists at Logan and Decatur Correctional Centers.

"This opportunity meant a lot to both of my kids and to me," said Amy Taylor. "As an incarcerated parent you miss out on everyday things with your children. It was a blessing to be able to participate in an event like this. It's another way to show them that I care even though I can't be there, and my kids enjoyed it. A couple of weeks later my daughter, who's 6, said, "I want to do the Mom and Me thing again!" Thank you to everyone who made this possible!"

Shawnee Drug Education Class

Shawnee Correctional Center offers individuals in custody the opportunity to better themselves with programming including a drug education class. Hazelden's A New Direction is the curriculum utilized by certified staff for this class. A New Direction is a flexible, evidence-based, cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) curriculum that treats addiction and is proven to reduce recidivism. The class teaches that substance use disorder is a chronic disease and recognizes the negative effects addiction has on the body and all aspects of life. Students in the class learn that they can choose to change and live freely in recovery. The class also gave students an opportunity to listen and learn from others who have had similar life experiences.

IDOC Counselor II Kim Johnson was able to restart the class in May with nine individuals enrolled. This number met the COVID-19 social distancing requirements for classroom space. The students and instructors also wore face masks during the entire 90-day course. The class met five days a week and did not lose any instruction days due to COVID-19 constraints or quarantines.

A graduation was held on August 3rd to recognize the achievement of the students and celebrate their commitment to completing the course. The class graduated eight members, losing only one individual to an unexpected transfer. The Drug Education Program is a vital resource to many individuals looking to gain a better understanding of the effects of drugs and alcohol on their bodies and lives.

Taylorville Correctional Center Crew Provides Storm Clean Up

A work crew from Taylorville Correctional Center cleaned up downed tree limbs and debris after a severe windstorm wreaked havoc in Taylorville and surrounding communities. In the early evening hours of August 12th, a squall line of up to 50 mph winds swept across the area leaving large branches and limbs on the roads and streets, disrupting traffic flow, and interrupting electrical service. For two weeks following the storm, the crew from Taylorville Correctional Center worked daily to remove the branches and debris. This work shines a light on ways that individuals in custody can give back to the communities where they live and provides a sense of pride and accomplishment for the men.

Taylorville Correctional Center Veterans Garden

The Taylorville Correctional Center has many gardens within the facility. In 2019 an addition was made to provide a garden space for the TCC Veterans Group. In 2020, using heirloom seeds, the garden was planted and harvest producing over 5,200lbs of food that was used for the benefit of all incarcerated individuals at Taylorville Correctional Center. In early 2020 a local food pantry was located, that accepts fresh produce. However, issues stemming from COVID-19 the food pantry was not able to accept the produce and that resulted in the produce being used at the facility. Currently in the 2021 growing season the garden has produced more than 2,500lbs of food, over 400lbs donated to the local food pantry and the remainder being used at the institution.

The TCC Vet's Garden would not be successful if not for the dedication to service of the individuals who plant, weed, harvest, and collect seed, to ensure the garden is at its full potential. These Veterans are an example for many others, showing that even while incarcerated they can provide further service by spending time and effort to produce for less-fortunate families in the surrounding community. It has been a pleasure to watch these Veterans learn and teach gardening skills to each other, giving each of them another skill that can be used to give back to society, much like signing the dotted line when volunteering for military service.

Tim Carpenter CCII

Veteran's Post Advisor

State of Illinois
Illinois Department of Corrections

Story ideas, feedback and comments can be submitted to Lindsey Hess at lindsey.hess@illinois.gov

@IDOC_Illinois

Printed by the Authority of the State of Illinois
11-21 WEB IOCI 22-0454