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INSIDE WORD
with Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of joining colleagues and families in honoring the Department’s group of passionate volunteers at the Volunteer Appreciation Ceremony. From educational programming and religious services to addiction counseling and mentoring, the efforts of our volunteers make a difference by changing lives and giving hope to our inmate population.

Last year, more than 1,000 volunteers donated their time and service to the NJDOC. We also have:

• 12 volunteers who have 25 years of service;
• 9 volunteers who have 30 years of service;
• 2 volunteers that have 35 years of service; and
• 4 volunteers who have 40 years of service.

Our volunteers are shaping neighborhoods for the better and I am grateful for their passion and commitment to helping inmates successfully reenter society. Volunteerism is how we will continue to meet the ever-evolving challenges of reentry. Because of engaged, dedicated volunteers, we are closer than ever to closing the gap between corrections and community.

The outstanding work of our Officers, employees and volunteers continues to be extremely impressive, and I am honored to lead such an extraordinary Department.

Sincerely,

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.
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COBRA Unit Prepares Outside Agencies to Handle Dangers of Opioid Crisis

By John Cokos

More than 70,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year. Fifty thousand of those deaths were caused by synthetic opioids such as fentanyl and the even more potent carfentanil.

Dealers from almost every U.S. state promote a continuous flow of these drugs into the country through online purchases and complex distribution networks. On the receiving end is a New era of drug entrepreneurs, fortifying low-quality drugs with cheap and powerful upgrades, ready to distribute these dangerous cocktails to a growing number of Americans seemingly willing to try anything to get high.

New Jersey sees a steady influx of synthetic opioids annually. This year, authorities confiscated 5 million lethal doses of fentanyl during one operation alone. The New Jersey Attorney General’s Office reported nearly 2,800 drug overdose deaths in 2017, with synthetic opioids likely responsible for the 24 percent increase in deaths from the previous year.

As these powerful opioids circulate throughout the country, they present a significant hazard to law enforcement. Although the exact risks of exposure to synthetic opioids are still being examined, both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Drug Enforcement Agency have cautioned first responders of the dangers.

COBRA, a division of the Department’s Special Operations Group (SOG), has helped to increase the state’s chemical response readiness through cross-training exercises with hazardous material technicians from the New Jersey State Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and, most recently, the New Jersey National Guard’s 21st Weapons of Mass Destruction-Civil Defense Team.

“This exercise was an extremely unique opportunity for COBRA members to cross train with one of the leading hazmat teams in the nation,” Correctional Police Sergeant Kevin McGowan of SOG’s Office of Emergency Management said.

The exercise focused on the planning and execution of a reconnaissance mission after an unidentified hazardous chemical surfaced in a simulated prison environment. The joint teams completed the drill with a run-through of the tactical decontamination process.

Tactical decontamination, one of COBRA’s specialized functions, involves the rapid assembly of intricate decontamination stations. The group uses several stages to safely secure weapons, quarantine contaminated gear and decontaminate personnel. COBRA’s expertise is considered a significant asset in chemical response training and incident support to the State Police, and the Philadelphia Division of the FBI, which covers Camden, Gloucester and Salem counties in New Jersey.

“NJDOC is the go-to agency for weapons and tactical decontamination,” Special Agent Erik R. Negron, FBI Hazardous Materials Team Leader, said after a COBRA training exhibition designed to demonstrate best practices in tactical decontamination to local law enforcement.

NJDOC Senior Correctional Police Officer John McKay, educated local law enforcement officers about the risks of exposure to controlled dangerous chemicals in a variety of scenarios. He also discussed the importance and process of a thorough and systematic approach to decontamination.

“Tactical teams are executing a warrant, going into a house doing some room clearing, next thing you know, you run into a chemical lab. How are we not going to bring that stuff home to our kids and our wives and our families?” McKay asked.

Because of the potential stress caused by a situation involving chemical exposure, COBRA team members have different specialties to organize and expedite the decontamination process.

“Guys coming out of a situation are likely thinking one thing, ‘Just get me out of here,’” McKay said, “So you have somebody to help you every step of the way, if necessary, from firearms to electronics to tactical gear.”

Police canines are particularly at risk for inhaling synthetic opioids, so COBRA incorporates canine decontamination in its incident response planning.

“NJDOC has 26 dogs and 13 handlers, so we train a lot with them,” McKay said. “We have to decon that dog if he gets exposed to something, so we have a canine shower and special handling practices.”

COBRA currently has three teams assigned to the southern, central and northern regions of the state. They advocate interagency communication and training to encourage statewide readiness for hazardous materials response and to help smaller agencies without specific hazardous material teams to develop their own plan of action.

“We’re in an age where we should realize we can’t do everything ourselves,” McKay said. “We have to reach out and start encouraging mutual aid. You don’t know when or where you’ll come into contact with [hazardous chemicals], so you want to have that hazmat asset in your command post.”

‘GO-TO AGENCY’
The power of giving is greater than the joy of receiving.”
- Norbert Harms

THE HEART OF NEW JERSEY
At the NJDOC, the Season for Giving Has Already Begun

By John Cokos

October is a busy month for Yvonne Jefferson, Personnel Records and Payroll Supervisor for the New Jersey Department of Corrections, and her staff. In addition to their regular duties, they organize the annual benefits enrollment Health Fair and the New Jersey Employee Charitable Campaign (NJECC) events for the Department.

New Jersey officially commenced the campaign on Sept., 13, at the New Jersey State Museum in Trenton. During the kickoff, NJDOC employees, as well as representatives from many other state agencies and charitable organizations, shared information with hopes of giving the campaign a robust start.

Throughout the campaign, which runs through December, state employees can select from a diverse list of local, national and international charities and donate money through small payroll deductions.

In her fifth year as the campaign coordinator, Jefferson is passionate about the campaign and about giving in general.

“Everyone’s life has been touched by at least one of the organizations on the list,” Jefferson said. “You may know someone who suffered from cancer, a mental illness, drug use disorder, or who was homeless. Now is the time to recognize this and give back.”

Jefferson is confident the campaign is going to be even more successful than in previous years, noting the Department won a Growth in Giving Award last year.

NJDOC Chief of Staff Suzanne Lawrence, who is also passionate about giving back to the community, had similar feelings.

“Many of us are blessed to have these jobs in corrections, and in state service in general,” Lawrence said. “So if we can give a little back from what we have been given, to people who are less fortunate, then I think that is an awesome opportunity.”

There are many remarkable stories around why people give, Lawrence added.

“It usually starts with something that has happened in someone’s life which helps them realize there is a need,” Lawrence said.

For Lawrence, that something was the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, where she volunteered at Ground Zero.

“Think about the people who worked on the second shift,” Lawrence began. “We considered them the lucky ones because they survived. But they suddenly had no income. The Salvation Army was there, writing checks to cover the cost of food and rent. They provided clothes and vouchers for temporary housing and kept clinical social workers on hand. They dealt with the tragedy in a global way, and that’s why I give to them.”

The Salvation Army is just one of more than 1,000 state-approved charitable organizations participating in the campaign. The organizations must meet strict guidelines maintained by the Employee Charitable Campaign Steering Committee to qualify. By law, the state can use only 10 percent of donations for administrative costs, then 90 percent goes directly to the charities.

“It’s not necessary to make huge financial sacrifices,” Jefferson said.

The idea behind small payroll deductions is to lessen the financial impact on the employee and maximize the number of donations.

“A gift of two dollars per pay period is 52 dollars a year,” she added.

That number may seem insignificant Jefferson pointed out, but if even a quarter of the department gave this amount, the total would reach to more than $100,000, which is 10 percent of the state’s $1 million campaign goal for this year.

Jared Maples, Director of the New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, was selected by Governor Phil Murphy to chair this year’s charitable campaign. Maples was one of the guest speakers at the campaign’s kickoff.

“I see hate every day in my current position, but I also see hope and love. That’s why I am personally passionate about this. It’s very important to me as the Director of Homeland Security because we talk about things like resiliency, we talk about things like community relations, with law enforcement, with emergency responders, and efforts like [this campaign] are key to that.”

NJECC offers the best opportunity to bolster our communities, according to Jefferson, who noted, “Better community, better city, better world.”

Interested in Contributing?

Representatives from multiple charities will be available to NJDOC employees during this month’s Health Fair on Oct., 17 in the lobby of New Jersey State Prison from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Contributions can be made online at www.charities.org/NJECC or by filling out a form available through each facility’s campaign coordinator.
Although he didn’t know anyone in the small town, he made his familiar nighttime commute to work. Senior Correctional Police Officer Travis Muller, as he convoyed behind the convoy he trailed, he would soon become a very important part of their lives.

“Just past Six Flags, the cars in front of me flew in different directions,” Muller recalled. “The car in front was hit head on; those vehicles overturned. The cars directly in front of me swerved off the road, then both hit trees and flipped over.”

As driving deaths continue to rise, some people who have narrowly escaped becoming another statistic, have members of the New Jersey Department of Corrections to thank. Although Muller was able to evade the crash, he felt he had a greater responsibility. There were multiple vehicles, five seriously injured people, and no one else around to help. So Muller called 911 and began triaging victims.

“The worst part was having to decide who to help first,” Muller said, “But I had to trust my instincts, make a decision and roll with it. The most important thing was not to panic. Nothing beneficial ever comes out of that.”

With all of the victims trapped, Muller checked each vehicle to determine who was in need of medical attention and who he was able to help.

The Saturn was directly in front of Muller when the driver, attempting to avoid the initial crash, veered off the roadway and struck a tree. The impact pinned the driver between the steering wheel and driver seat, displacing the windshield and causing severe injuries to the driver’s head and chest.

“I made him my priority,” Muller explained. “I was focused, locked in on getting him out.”

Through the driver side window, Muller tried to keep the driver alert.

“What’s your name?” Muller asked. “Where are you from?”

The driver answered, but continued to become less responsive. Muller attempted to free him from every angle, but each attempt presented a new obstacle.

“I tried to remove the door, but his arm was caught in it, and he was wedged in too tight against the steering wheel to remove him,” Muller said. “That’s actually why he started passing out, because he wasn’t getting enough air.”

Muller stayed with the Saturn’s driver while the first responders, who were three firefighters, assessed the other victims. Soon the accident site was flooded with State Troopers as well as local police and rescue workers from numerous municipalities.

“They sent everybody,” Muller said. “They got there in maybe five minutes. It was awesome to see everyone come together.”

Responders then went to work with various extrication tools and requested medical evacuation helicopters for each victim.

“When the next fire truck came, an older guy came over and attached a giant cutter to the top,” Muller said. “I broke out the windows, then we took the top of the car off, removed the windshield and pried the driver’s seat away from the steering wheel.”

Emergency medical technicians administered oxygen after the driver was free, and Muller helped place the driver, nearly unconscious by that time, onto a stretcher.

“After we got the driver out of the Saturn and onto a stretcher, another firefighter threw me a wrench and I began cracking out the windows of the other vehicles,” Muller said. “Then I held large spotlights over the cars so the [rescue workers] could see while they cut open the tops and pulled people out.”

Police interviewed Muller about the accident, then relayed the details of Muller’s assistance to his shift commander, whom Muller had alerted earlier.

“I was there until we got everybody out,” Muller said. “My shift commander was fine with me helping and told me to do what I had to do.”

After an exhausting hour and half assisting with various stages of the rescue, Muller continued his commute to work.

“The first thing I did was wash off the oil and the blood and pick out shards of glass from my hands,” Muller said.

A nurse at Mid-State suggested Muller go to the hospital, but he instead chose to change his uniform and start his shift.

The NJDOC joined police and firefighters in commending Muller, who received a Meritorious Service Award from the NJDOC and the Lifesaver Award from Corrections USA, a national not-for-profit organization.

“My actions were definitely influenced by all the training I’ve had,” Muller said. “In our line of work when a situation like this happens, you tend to have ice in your veins. You do as much as you can and hope you know enough to help somebody.”
New Jersey’s 4th Annual Suicide Prevention Conference kicked off on September 13 with a panel discussion featuring NJDOC Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Shereef Elnahal, NJ Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson, and New Jersey Department of Children and Families Christine Norbut Beyer.

The Commissioners addressed New Jersey’s current and future initiatives to address suicide and emphasized that preventing suicide is possible through a collective effort within the community.

Hicks highlighted the many initiatives NJDOC has in place to prevent suicide and offer support to Correctional Police Officers, employees and inmates.

**Combatting the Opioid Crisis from Behind the Wall**

NJDOC Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., New Jersey Department of Health Commissioner Elnahal, and NJ Department of Human Services Commissioner Carole Johnson met with the NJ County Jail Warden’s Association to discuss the importance of offering Medication-Assisted Treatment to addicted offenders in an effort to reduce recidivism.

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**Perkins Grant Achieves Maximum Impact**

Each year, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act allocates one percent of available grant funds for criminal offenders in correctional facilities. These funds are provided to expand, improve, modernize and develop vocational education programs to meet workforce demands.

For fiscal year 2018, the NJDOC was awarded $164,987.

“We determined how the grant will be utilized long before we actually received the award,” said NJDOC Director of Educational Services Jecrois Jean-Baptiste. “It’s a collaborative effort, and the importance of that process cannot be overstated.”

Funding from the grant was distributed in three areas:

- Technology: $31,191.81;
- Supplies (books, guides, manuals, etc.): $15,854.07;
- Vocational Education Classes: $117,940.03.

That adds up to $164,986.81 in expenditures, which means all but 19 cents of a grant for nearly $165,000 was used to educate offenders.

Director Jean-Baptiste credited the Division of Administration, representatives of the various facilities and an array of departmental managers for their input in implementing the nearly flawless grant allocation process.

“It’s all in the planning,” he said with a smile.

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**S.W.E.A.T Training for Special Operations Group**

This month, members of the NJDOC Special Operations Group joined the New Jersey National Guard S.W.E.A.T Team (Soldier Wellness And Education Training) for intense training in physical fitness, health, and nutrition.
LIFE AND DEATH

Officer from New Jersey State Prison Lends Assistance to Heart Attack Victim

By Matt Schuman

Andrew Brodzinski will never forget his first day on the job at the Retro Fitness in Jackson, even though it was many years ago. A customer suffered a medical emergency, and Brodzinski watched as two other members of the fitness center feverishly worked to save the stricken individual.

“I wanted to help,” Brodzinski recalled, “but I didn’t really know what to do.”

Fast forward to Mother’s Day, 2018. Senior Correctional Police Officer Andrew Brodzinski, a member of the custody staff at New Jersey State Prison for the past seven years, was at the same Retro Fitness that once employed him for a morning workout. Suddenly, he noticed a group of women frantically running out of an exercise room, unmistakably shaken. He immediately glanced into the room they had vacated and saw a man lying on his back, flanked by two men who appeared to be checking his pulse.

Almost instinctively, Brodzinski rushed into the room to lend assistance.

“The two men had determined that the person in distress had no pulse,” he related.

With an anxious cluster of onlookers surrounding them, Brodzinski and the others removed the man’s shirt and secured an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) to him. One of the other men began chest compressions until the AED advised that a shock should be administered.

“The AED then said to continue compressions, which I did,” he said. “The AED eventually told us to stop and evaluate the man and that no additional shocks were required. Finally, the man started moving his eyes and mumbling. By the time police and paramedics arrived, he was talking.

“It was pretty cool to see that,” he added, smiling.

A few days later, the manager of the fitness center notified Brodzinski that the man had suffered a heart attack – his fourth – but that he was recovering and was expected to be released from the hospital after a seven-to-10-day stay.

Not only was Brodzinski pleased by the news, he also was pleased he was able to respond far differently than during the previous incident in the same gym.

“It’s because of the training I received from the New Jersey Department of Corrections,” he said. “In an emergency situation, you don’t even think. You just react. You go toward a person in distress when most people tend to keep their distance, and you do so because you’re taught how to respond without panicking.

“When you’re in a class, sitting there and watching videos, you’d never think that’s what would come to your mind during a potential life-and-death situation. Yet, that’s exactly what came into my mind, right down to the beat of the music that was playing in the training video.

There is no question that those classes the Department provides on a regular basis are critically important.”

Despite the distinct possibility that Brodzinski’s actions saved a man’s life, he firmly rejects the hero label that some had bestowed on him.

“It’s just a matter of doing the right thing,” he said. “What happened to the person at the fitness center could happen to anyone, including me. Faced with that situation, I would hope that somebody would do the same thing for me.”

NJDOC Recruitment Visits Local Universities

The New Jersey Department of Corrections Recruitment team have been visiting universities and career fairs throughout the state to recruit members for the NJDOC.

To learn more about a career with the NJDOC email NJDOChiring@doc.nj.gov.
Getting a Kick Out of Soccer

Southern State Correctional Facility Lieutenant Reflects on Benefits of Coaching

By Matt Schuman

It’s not unusual to see longtime coach Edward Keen helping to put lines on the fields that the Millville Soccer Association uses for its games. It’s even less unusual to see him toting trash bags to the dumpster following games.

Keen, a lieutenant at Southern State Correctional Facility whose career with the New Jersey Department of Corrections dates back 21 years, has a ready explanation.

“Everyone always says, ‘You know what they should do?’ Well, they is us,” he said. “Rather than complain about something that needs to be done, stand up, and go do it. Nobody likes emptying trash, and I don’t blame them, but I’m willing to do anything that’s needed.”

When Keen tried to sign up daughter Natalie, then a preschooler, to play soccer, even though the registration deadline had passed, he was told that his daughter could play if he’d agree to coach her team.

So began his relationship with the Millville Soccer Association, where he’s served as a coach, recreation director and, on occasion, trash collector.

“In the beginning, I knew nothing about soccer,” Keen admitted. “It was basically a matter of teaching the kids not to use their hands and to try to kick the ball into the net. As they’ve grown, I’ve grown as a coach. I’ve had to keep doing my homework.”

Eventually, Keen began coaching son Nate’s team as well.

“Coaching has proven to be a great experience for me,” he said, “but the fact is, I would have been quite content being a parent sitting in the stands, cheering the team on.”

It’s no accident that his dealings with the parents of the children on his teams have been largely positive. Prior to the beginning of each season, he meets with the parents to discuss his approach.

“I explain to them that their job is not to coach or correct, but to provide constant praise,” Keen related. “Just tell their kids how much they appreciate their effort. That way, the kids don’t have to be afraid of letting their parents down.

“If I’m showing the kids how to get better, and their parents are telling them what a great job they’re doing, it’s likely that the kids are going to enjoy the sport,” he continued. “And that’s what it’s all about.”

Significantly, Keen’s top priority never has been winning.

“Good sportsmanship is the big thing with me, and all of my parents are okay with that,” he said. “I’ve coached dominant teams where we’ve won every game, and that’s a good feeling. However, it’s not a good feeling if you’re on the team that loses every time. So there will be times when I’ll play without a goalie to give the kids on the other team a chance to score goals.”

When Keen was coaching a team of 8- and 9-year-olds, he showed up for the squad’s game with face paints and proceeded to paint the faces of his players like tigers. Then he painted his own.

“The kids aren’t likely to remember if we won or lost,” he pointed out, “but they’ll remember that they got their faces painted and that they had fun.”

The positive impact Keen has had on those he’s coached is well known in the workplace and the community, especially since he was selected to receive the Commissioner’s Challenge Award at the 2018 Departmental Service Awards Ceremony.

“Receiving the award was both humbling and flattering,” Keen said, “but I don’t do what I do in order to get recognition. That said, I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to work for the Department of Corrections. Without this job, I probably wouldn’t have had the confidence to coach.

As those he’s coached grow older, he remains in contact with many of the parents with whom he’s interacted.

“It’s great when parents let me know what their kids are up to,” Keen said. “Some of them have continued to play soccer, and some of them haven’t. I tell the parents to encourage their children in whatever they decide to do. Be the child’s biggest fan.”

In fact, when Keen’s daughter joined the Girl Scouts, he agreed to serve as the assistant leader of her troop.

“When it’s your kids, you have a choice,” he explained. “They can go without, or you can step up. Someone needed to step up, so I did.”
NJDOC VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION CEREMONY

The New Jersey Department of Corrections celebrated its volunteers with a ceremony held at the Trenton War Memorial.