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Bishop Dennis J. Sullivan celebrated mass with inmates at South Woods State Prison.

Cover photo: NJDOC staff members and Santa celebrate the holidays during an event at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women.
There’s nothing like the holiday season to inspire a moment of reflection. This past year New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) has experienced its set of unique challenges and successes. We’ve had to keep pace with the evolving world of corrections while remaining steadfast in our mission of keeping the public safe and providing the tools to promote successful reentry into society.

Our philosophy is that we have a responsibility to rehabilitate the entire individual. That’s why the NJDOC provides a variety of programs focusing on reentry, education, behavior modification and substance use disorder treatment realized through the tremendous support of civilian and custody staff, volunteers and a network of federal and state partners and nonprofits.

We are grateful to all those who help execute our mission. Your efforts make a significant impact in the lives of the incarcerated, but also in communities across New Jersey that will benefit from rehabilitated offenders who seek to become productive members of society.

As we look to the year ahead, with the continued support of our network, we will rise up to address new challenges, effectively and efficiently, in ways that never compromise safety.

A huge thank you to our team, partners and friends for your support. On behalf of the men and women of the New Jersey Department of Corrections, we wish you and yours happy holidays.

Sincerely,

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.
HOLIDAY HEROES

Spirit of Giving Takes Over at the NJDOC

By Liz Velez

There’s nothing like the holidays to inspire the spirit of giving — a spirit that has taken hold of staff at the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC).

This holiday season, NJDOC facilities are engaging in a variety of community give-back events.

Among the initiatives, Adopt-a-Family, an annual campaign to assist a disenfranchised family who has a child with a severe illness. Through the Kelly Anne Dolan Memorial Fund, Mid-State Correctional Facility and Garden State Youth Correctional Facility (GSYCF) are collecting much-needed wish-list items as well as holiday gifts. GSYCF also conducts a separate holiday food drive in partnership with HomeFront, a not-for-profit organization that battles homelessness and poverty in
Central New Jersey.

Southern State Correctional Facility and Bayside State Prison share holiday tidings through toy drives that support the United States Marine Corps Reserve program, Toys for Tots.

Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women (EMCFW) takes a different approach to the holiday season, leveraging it as an opportunity to create a parent-child bonding experience for incarcerated individuals and their families.

For more than 40 years, EMCFW has hosted the Title XX Mother/Child Visitation Program through a partnership with the Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

Each December, NJDOC social workers organize the holiday celebration and coordinate donations from a variety of churches and organizations.

As a result, visiting children have an opportunity to unwrap gifts in a festive environment in the presence of their incarcerated family member. The event includes family crafting, a visit from Santa and caroling performed by the EMCFW Choir.

“This is the only holiday I get to spend with my mom,” said Saleem Muslim. “Between the food, Santa, music and the time I get to spend with my mom, it really does feel like Christmas.”

“I value this event as a gift,” added program participant Veronica Aguilar. “Under the circumstances, it gives my kids a family environment, and with me being able to pick a present out for them, it helps with my self-esteem and morale.”

In order to partake in the holiday event, incarcerated mothers must participate in an 11-week program that helps families develop better parenting skill and the resources necessary to navigate parenting while incarcerated.

The event complements other parent-child bonding efforts, including the recently developed children’s visitation playground at EMCFW and Project Storybook, a program designed to provide incarcerated mothers the opportunity to read and record books for their children.

More than 140 CDs were recorded and sent home to children in 2018.
building a pipeline of trained, job-ready candidates, benefiting the local economy.

Developed in partnership with the Department of Labor, the Providing Access to Community Employment (PACE) initiative is designed to eliminate socio-economic inequalities often encountered by those released from custody.

The PACE initiative provides program participants who are 90-days away from their release date with a four-phase job readiness program led by employment specialists. Support includes employment prep, resume writing, job searching, application submission, interviewing skills and soft-skills. PACE partners with the NJDOC
Office of Transitional Services to provide pathways for individuals to obtain necessary job-related documentation such as birth certificates, Social Security cards and state identification to complete the pre-employment process.

“The PACE initiative helps connect individuals to jobs pre-release, providing a smooth transition back into society,” said Markim Shakur-Purvis, NJDOC PACE program coordinator.

Program participant Emery Baskerville noted, “This event is a great opportunity, giving me a head start. Between the interview skills, resume workshops and assistance with the job search, it makes it feel like the NJDOC cares about making sure I continue on the right foot and really wants to prevent us from landing back in here”.

Amazon is a signatory of the program.

“Amazon was very receptive to the idea of sharing its hiring practices with those behind the wall,” said Shakur-Purvis. “They thought outside of the box to truly create inclusive hiring practices.

Amazon Human Resource representatives, including Chandni Patel, were on hand to conduct on-site interviews, collect pre-employment documentation and provide on-the-spot hiring for three of Amazon’s distribution centers, Elizabeth, Avenal and Carteret.

“Amazon believes in giving everyone a chance,” said Patel, Amazon regional hiring manager. She went on to share how supporting this event is personally gratifying, having seen the many challenges ex-offenders face in the job market. “This is my community, too; I believe that everyone should have a second chance, and Amazon can be the one to provide it.”

PACE launched last spring as a pilot program at Northern State Prison, Bayside State Prison, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women, Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility, Southern State Correctional Facility and South Woods State Prison. The initiative also includes job fairs at the pilot facilities.

Employers interested in participating in a hiring event at one of the PACE pilot sites should contact Shakur-Purvis at 609-292-4036 x5321.
It was just after 2 a.m. on an early-November Sunday morning, and Jonathan Brutus was about to enter his residence. Suddenly, he heard a scream loud enough that it distracted him from the conversation he was having on his cell phone. Then he heard a second scream, even louder than the first, so piercing that he felt compelled to take action.

“That second scream gave me chills,” said Brutus, a Senior Correctional Police Officer whose three-year career with the New Jersey Department of Corrections has been spent at Northern State Prison.

“I immediately went to investigate the situation.”

The screams appeared to be coming from the property next to his. That property, which is separated from his residence by a fence, is undergoing renovations and currently is unoccupied.

On the driveway of the neighboring property, Brutus saw a male on top of a female. Neither individual looked familiar to him.

“I called the police and said a woman is being assaulted, possibly raped,” Brutus related. “Then, I tried to get closer so
that I could stop the assault.”

Police arrived almost immediately, and when the perpetrator saw them, he fled. However, the escape route he chose was through the yard of Brutus, whom he still hadn’t seen.

“He went to the back yard, then jumped the fence between the two properties,” said Brutus, a member of State Basic Course for Correctional Police Officers, Class 238.

“Once he got into my yard, he came face-to-face with me. We were standing just a few feet apart, staring at one another. At that point, he reached into his waistband.”

Brutus identified himself as a law enforcement officer, drew his off-duty weapon and instructed the perpetrator not to move. The man put his hands up, slowly backed up, then turned and ran away.

“Fortunately, I held him there long enough that the police were able to apprehend him nearby,” said Brutus.

The Senior Correctional Police Officer checked on the well-being of the still-distraught victim – who subsequently was transported by EMS to a medical facility – and gave police a statement before finally returning to his residence.

“I couldn’t sleep,” Brutus admitted. “I was pretty shaken.”

Still, he had no regrets regarding his involvement in the incident.

“I had to see where the screams were coming from,” he said. “I wouldn’t have wanted to ignore the screams and go into my house, then find out the next morning that an incident I might have been able to prevent took place.

“The Correctional Police Training Academy prepares you for a variety of different scenarios, so I felt comfortable proceeding because of the caliber of the training I received,” Brutus continued. “The words ‘police officer’ are part of our job title, so we have an obligation to respond to these kinds of situations.”

There was another reason Brutus didn’t hesitate to act when he heard a woman screaming.

“Suppose the victim was a relative or somebody else close to me,” he said. “I would hope somebody would try to help.”

“I HAD TO SEE WHERE THE SCREAMS WERE COMING FROM.”
ORDER-UP

Long-time Crew Helped Build Production Kitchen

By John Cokos

Adam Truett walks into his workspace and brings coffee to the crew with whom he has worked for more than 20 years. Together, amid thousands of square feet of freezer space, prep areas and industrial ovens, Truett and his crew have helped transform the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) food service operation into what it is today.

In 1997, the Regional Production Kitchen (RPK), located on the grounds of South Woods State Prison in Bridgeton, began as a food service operation that serviced three prison facilities in the southern region of the state.

“After a few years, we realized we could handle more and began looking for a greater challenge,” said Assistant Supervisor of Regional Food Service Operations James Crackovich. “We recognized there was a need for a change and that we could not only increase the efficiency and reach of the operation, but also design menu items with more than just cost in mind.”

Within a brief period, the RPK went from serving three facilities, to increasing its scope and distribution to all NJDOC facilities throughout the state.

With an increase in its operational efficiency, the RPK now serves roughly 17,000 inmates across 13 correctional facilities.

“Everything – including policies, menu...
design, purchasing and production – is centralized from here,” said Truett, who serves as Regional Food Service Operations Supervisor. “We’ve created a standard menu to cycle over several weeks at each facility as well as a universal order form to simplify the ordering process.”

Even the way the ingredients are gathered for recipes is organized. Before a menu item is prepared and cooked, all the ingredients are placed on a pallet for easy access. Each pallet contains only the ingredients for one menu item.

During a walk-through of the RPK, which operates around the clock on weekdays, one might see 180 gallons of chili simmering in a giant 200 gallon Groen stainless steel kettle, 1,000 pounds of meatloaf or sausage browning in a Hobart industrial walk-in oven or two-gallon bags of macaroni and cheese in a tumble chiller being cooled from 180 degrees to 40 degrees Fahrenheit in an hour.

“To put the size of the operation into perspective, we can look at how we order,” said Assistant Supervisor of Regional Food Service Operations Christopher Connelly. “We order many items, such as vegetables and poultry by the trailer-load, which average about 40,000 pounds per load. We go through 66,000 pounds of chicken, 33,000 pounds of onions and 10,000 gallons of diced tomatoes per month.”

Initially, the RPK crew utilized a test kitchen to help develop menu items.

“We learned early on that you can’t just make a small pot of something and simply multiply the ingredients,” Crackovich said. “It just doesn’t work. You have to carefully calculate the ingredients to the size you are going to need.”

In addition to producing the quantity of food required to feed thousands of people a day, menu items produced at the RPK need to be healthy.

“Everything needs to meet certain standards,” Crackovich said. “We need to maintain certain levels of protein, sodium content and other nutrients to support a heart-healthy diet.”

As with any food service operation, safety is of extreme importance. Truett’s team members have food safety certifications from the National Restaurant Association, and the RPK is subject to random inspections from the New Jersey Department of Health. Safety concerns, like maintaining appropriate cooking and chilling temperatures and avoiding cross contamination, are always considered.

“Each time we finish cooking one food item, the kettles get cleaned to avoid cross contamination,” Truett said. “Food in freezers is stored for a very specific time. Keeping up with equipment maintenance is also a major priority and crucial in ensuring safe food handling practices.”

Since 1997, the RPK has developed into a massive, nearly autonomous food service operation that supplies food for all of NJ-DOC’s facilities.

“Nobody has an operation like this one,” Crackovich, who holds a degree in culinary arts, added. “I love the challenge of doing this, and I’m grateful we have a crew that works well together and that can pull it off.”
PICTURE THIS

Diocese of Camden Visits South Woods


Bishop Sullivan leads those in attendance through “O Holy Night” during the Mass.

Inmates meet with Bishop Sullivan after Mass.

Participants prepare to partake in Holy Communion.