INSIDE CORRECTIONS
NEWSLETTER OF THE NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
GSYCF administrator discusses leadership, perseverance and passion.

ALWAYS FAITHFUL
Operation Blue for Green supports NJDOC staff members who are deployed overseas.

ININSIDE THIS ISSUE

EFFECTING CHANGE
The Board of Trustees at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women has been resurrected.

IVIES VS. INMATES
The chess tournament pitting Princeton University students against New Jersey State Prison offenders is still going strong.

PICTURE THIS
A fun time was had by all during Take Your Child to Work Day.

MAY 2019
Inside Corrections is a monthly publication of the Office of Public Information at the New Jersey Department of Corrections.

Story ideas and feedback regarding Inside Corrections should be directed to matthew.schuman@doc.nj.gov or by telephone at (609) 826-5662

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2
INSIDE WORD
with Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

3
EFFECTING CHANGE
The Board of Trustees at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women is tasked with making a positive difference.

5
CAREER OPPORTUNITIES
Tracey Shimonis-Kaminski learned the benefits of being a good listener.

8
ALWAYS FAITHFUL
Correctional police officers support colleagues who are deployed overseas.

10
IVIES VS. INMATES
A chess tournament brought together Princeton University students and New Jersey State Prison offenders.

12
PICTURE THIS
Take Your Child to Work Day featured a canine demonstration, crafts, food and much more.

Cover photo - NJDOC officials and members of the Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women Board of Trustees gather at the facility in Clinton.
INSIDE WORD
with Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.

I often point out that the New Jersey Department of Corrections’ single most valuable asset undoubtedly is you, the members of our outstanding staff.

I am committed to providing the tools and resources you need to carry out your responsibilities as effectively as possible. Additionally, we are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to demonstrate to our employees how much you are appreciated. Please allow me to provide just a few examples:

• We recently introduced an Employee Wellness Program, through which staff members will have access to the resources needed to address the often challenging aspects of your jobs. This program promotes whole-person wellness – including physical, mental and spiritual health – and is available to both custody and civilian staff throughout the NJDOC.

• On April 25, for the first time in many years, the Central Office headquarters hosted a Take Your Child to Work Day. Activities included face-painting, giveaways, crafts, a canine demonstration and, of course, lunch. Photos from that fun-filled gathering can be found on page 12 of this newsletter.

• In honor of Public Service Recognition Week – May 5-11 – the Central Office presented its own Peer-to-Peer Employee Choice Awards. I had the pleasure of attending a lunch with the winners. Additionally, I asked all facilities and units to recognize their employees.

• As part of National Police Week, more than a dozen NJDOC employees participated in this year’s Police Unity Tour, a bicycle ride covering nearly 300 miles that culminated at the Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C., with riders from across the country. On May 7, the Department’s participants took part in an inspiring ceremony on the Central Office grounds.

This Department couldn’t carry out its mission without your devotion and support. I want you to know that your efforts are appreciated, and your passion is cherished.

Sincerely,

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.
EFFECTING CHANGE

New Board Members Convene at Edna Mahan

By John Cokos

The roll call of the Board of Trustees at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women suggests a new level of advocacy has emerged at the institution.

In April, after several years of dormancy for the Board, the New Jersey Department of Corrections assembled a roster of volunteers to restaff the Board and help drive the facility’s progression.

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., reached out personally to the seven members to discuss his vision for the Board and why he believes the Board is important.

“It was important to me to resurrect the Board of Trustees at Edna Mahan,” said Hicks. “With the present reforms, it is vital to have outside oversight, different perspectives and new ideas.”

In the past, the main objective for the Board was to appropriate inmate welfare funds, which amass through various means, such as the sale of commissary items. The Board now has a much broader responsibility, and Hicks believes the members have the knowledge, experience and acumen to effect positive change at the facility.

“We really want to emphasize the idea of data-driven, evidence-based practices, and we have a fantastic assembly of talent to help make that happen,” Hicks said.

Sarah Davis, administrator at Edna Mahan, is also enthusiastic about the Board’s restoration.

“We need to strive for needed change and proactively provide the best programs for our female veterans.”
and services to the women at Edna Mahan,” she said.

The all-women Board, many of whom have backgrounds in education, includes one former Board member, a judge, a physician, an attorney, a retired NJDOC training officer and two professors who are also esteemed researchers.

Mary Diehl, a retired educator and former Board member who served three administrators at Edna Mahan, said the Board will have influence.

“When you have people who are not just interested but also knowledgeable, you have the energy needed to make things happen,” she said.

On May 10, after meeting twice previously to familiarize themselves with the facility and each other, the Board convened for a third time to begin developing a blueprint of objectives. One of those objectives will be to design a survey for the offender population.

“One of the original topics we discussed early on was the idea that we want to observe things from the offender’s point of view,” Hicks said.

Board member Dr. Bonita Veysey, a criminal justice professor at Rutgers University - Newark and advocate for trauma-informed care, agreed. She believes one of the most important roles of the Board will be to listen.

“For us to answer complicated questions, we need different perspectives,” she said. “However, the real expertise doesn’t lie with the ‘experts’. It lies with the people who live the experience.”

Board member Dr. Kristen Zgoba, assistant professor of criminal justice at the University of Central Florida, served as research supervisor for the NJDOC for 15 years. One of her roles as a Board member will be to help determine what questions to ask and how to interpret the answers.

Applying a level of methodology to the Board’s function is essential,” said Zgoba. “It will allow us to examine a variety of areas and get the most from what we find.”

In addition to the survey, the Board also will look at the various programs provided at Edna Mahan.

“It’s important to ensure that no time is wasted while incarcerated,” said Lisa Mandelblatt, a Board member, attorney and educator. “For many of the offenders, the education and vocational training they receive through the facility will give them the resources and the desire to stay the course when they are released.”

Many of the Board members are encouraged that the elements for success are in place.

“You have an Acting Commissioner aligned with the Administrator, aligned with the advocacy of Board members,” Veysey said. “You don’t often get that kind of alignment. That means that the will power to make substantive and lasting changes for the women at Edna Mahan, their families and their communities is there.”
Tracey Shimonis-Kaminski remembers her parents telling her that by being a good listener, she can learn something from everyone she meets.

“When you allow people the opportunity to talk, you absorb so many things, not only about them, but about the world,” said Shimonis-Kaminski, administrator at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.

Her parents’ guidance has proven to be as invaluable as the knowledge and wisdom she has acquired by following it.

In 2017, Shimonis-Kaminski was promoted from a correctional police major, the highest rank among custody officers within the New Jersey Department of Corrections, to administrator. Her first assignment in the new position was to help facilitate the reopening of Mid-State Correctional Facility and launch the Department’s first licensed, clinically driven Substance Use Disorder program.

From the earliest phases of her career with the NJDOC, Shimonis-Kaminski seemed to move ahead tirelessly, increasing momentum as each new challenge emerged. Like many of her colleagues, however, she began her career almost unintentionally.

“I became a mom when I was very young,” Shimonis-Kaminski said. “I had two small girls by the time I was 19, and I needed to find secure, stable employment. Law enforcement seemed to
She began her journey in law enforcement as a juvenile detention officer with the Ocean County Juvenile Detention Center.

“When the Department of Corrections finally called, it wasn’t exactly what I wanted to do,” said Shimonis-Kaminski. “I just figured I’d use it as a stepping stone.”

She began her training as a correctional police officer in 1998 with Class 171, one of the earliest waves of recruit training classes to take place at the Correctional Staff Training Academy in Sea Girt. During that time, her savings dwindled as she paid for an around-the-clock babysitter. It was also the first time she had ever been separated from her daughters for any serious length of time.

Shimonis-Kaminski constantly reminded herself that her sacrifices were short-term and that they would eventually pay off.

During her training, she lived by the mantra “failure is not an option,” and she eventually began feeling more comfortable with her decision. Speaking to her bunkmate, Shimonis-Kaminski even expressed her desire to return to the Training Academy as an instructor.

“I remember being quite intimidated, but I also became quite enamored with the process and the instructors at the Academy,” said Shimonis-Kaminski. “They had a profound effect on my opinion of the Department. They were motivating and inspirational, and they made me feel like my career opportunities could be limitless.”

She received her first assignment as a correctional police officer at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women.

“It was 93 miles away from where I lived,” she said. “I was upset with the commute, but I was still eager to embark on my new career.”

Edna Mahan proved to be a great learning experience.

“I am extremely fortunate to have worked at Edna Mahan,” she said. “I learned how to do my job thoroughly and completely.”

At Edna Mahan, Shimonis-Kaminski became immersed in her work and set the standard to which she has held herself throughout her career.

“I was offered many opportunities that extended beyond an assignment as a housing unit officer,” she said. “I participated in the honor guard detail, and I attended the Methods of Instruction course. Afterward, I had the distinct privilege of instructing and mentoring at the Training Academy.”

Shimonis-Kaminski relocated her family closer to work upon her promotion to sergeant at Mountainview Youth Correctional Facility.

“Everything was brand new. It was like starting from scratch,” Shimonis-Kaminski said. “It was a new challenge. It was a chance to meet new people, work with a different type of offender and expand the diversity of my work experience.”

Following her stint at Mountainview, Shimonis-Kaminski was assigned to New Jersey State Prison. Her role at the maximum security prison was one of the most challenging assignments of her career.

“The special needs sergeant at New Jersey State Prison is unique to any assignment I’ve ever known in my 21 years in corrections,” she said. “It was a lot of hands-on. It was a lot of de-escalation. You really needed to know policy. You really needed to know how to protect your staff in terms of the directions you were giving them.”

Shimonis-Kaminski earned the respect, trust and confidence of her colleagues, subordinate staff and supervisory staff at New Jersey State Prison. She was promoted to lieutenant, serving as the facility’s training officer, before being promoted to major. As a major, she was reassigned to the Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center and then to Albert C. Wagner Youth Correctional Facility, where she began assessing her career.

“At that point, I asked myself ‘How could I influence more people in a positive way and also contribute to facilitating some meaningful
“change?” said Shimonis-Kaminski. “That’s when I began to seriously consider taking on the job of administrator.”

As an administrator, especially with her exposure to the Department’s first Substance Use Disorder treatment program, Shimonis-Kaminski realized, more than ever, the importance of what her parents had taught her.

“Anytime I ever said, ‘Okay, I can do this,’ it was because I enlisted the assistance of other people,” Shimonis-Kaminski said. “I want the input of every single person at the table. My experiences, my perspective, may be different from everyone else’s, so I want to know what they think.”

Looking back at her career, Shimonis-Kaminski is grateful for the mentors she’s found and the faith they’ve put in her.

“I have the innate drive to succeed,” she said. “I’m very goal and task oriented and ambitious and all of those things. But without the people who have taken a chance on me, who bought into me as an employee and as a person, I wouldn’t be where I am today. I am fortunate to have had so many people say, ‘Yeah, let’s give her a chance.’”

From Special Operations team leader to certified firearms instructor, Shimonis-Kaminski has frequently stepped outside of her comfort zone, where she believes that the most difficult challenge was overcoming her fear of failure.

“Never be afraid to fail,” Shimonis-Kaminski said. “We are not perfect. We make mistakes. We need to look at those mistakes and grow from them.”

Both at work and in her personal life, Shimonis-Kaminski continues to find new ways to educate and encourage others.

“I think it’s important that when people reach where they’ve set out to go, they should then turn back around and say, ‘Now you, you and you, come with me,’ because leaders cultivate new leaders.”

---

National Crime Victims’ Rights Week Acknowledged

In honor of National Crime Victims’ Rights Week, the Office of Victim Services recognized representatives from the New Jersey State Office of Victim-Witness Advocacy from various counties and the Focus on the Victim guest speakers.
Improvising, adapt and overcome is a longtime mantra used by the United States Marine Corps, and in some variation or another, by all branches of the U.S. military as well as members of law enforcement.

At the New Jersey Department of Corrections, correctional police officers have designed a way to make following that mantra a little easier for their colleagues who also serve in various military reserve components.

Operation Blue for Green is an unofficial program and social media group through which NJDOC employees can help assemble and deliver care packages and letters to coworkers who have been deployed overseas.

“When people are deployed to locations thousands of miles away, dealing with unfavorable conditions, running out of toothpaste or wearing worn-out socks, receiving a care package is a reminder that they haven’t been forgotten,” said Senior Correctional Police Officer Charles Snider, who oversees collections at Mid-State Correctional Facility. “It makes them smile and keeps their spirits up.”

The group came together after Senior Correctional Police Officer Derick DeLima of Mid-State Correctional Facility, who has been a driving force behind similar efforts in the past,
was deployed himself.

Efforts to continue the tradition then resurfaced out of the Correctional Staff Training Academy (CSTA) and spread quickly. Since then, correctional police officers at nearly every facility have helped to keep that support structure active.

The group continuously collects items for care packages, and it organizes larger drives periodically to coincide with deployments.

So far, Operation Blue for Green has helped facilitate the delivery of more than a dozen large care packages, with several more on standby.

“The idea is to maintain a steady flow of items coming into the facilities so we can space shipments evenly,” said Correctional Police Sergeant George Goldner, who coordinates the group’s efforts at Garden State Youth Correctional Facility.

“We want people to continue to receive items throughout the entire deployment, not just at the beginning,” added Senior Correctional Police Officer Matthew Kissane of the CSTA.

In addition to the support garnered at NJDOC facilities, the New Jersey State Policemen’s Benevolent Association (PBA) Local 105 has contributed as well by covering shipping costs.

“It’s personal to me, because I come from a long line of military veterans,” said PBA Local 105 Executive Vice President William Sullivan. “The message we convey by sending care packages is not only significant to service members who are deployed but also to their families. It lets them know we are in it together.”

As members of the NJDOC custody staff continue to serve and deploy overseas, Operation Blue for Green is designed to serve as a reminder that even though it’s not always voiced, their service is valued and respected.

“When we’re all together, it’s easy to maintain the bond,” said Snider, “but once people leave the building, it becomes harder. That’s when our actions mean the most.”

*Operation Blue for Green has expedited the delivery of more than a dozen care packages, with more on standby.*
Walter Lee, a senior majoring in applied mathematics at Princeton University, is used to figuring out complicated math equations.

On this day, however, the calculators were nowhere in sight.

On the last Friday in April, Lee faced an equation that he had never confronted: chess matches with inmates at the New Jersey State Prison.

“I have never been inside of a prison,” Lee said about the time he spent at the twice-yearly chess tournament dubbed as Ivies vs. Inmates. “It’s a good opportunity to make an impact outside of Princeton. It exposed me to something totally different.”

In the gymnasium at the prison, Lee joined six of his peers from the Princeton University Chess Club to compete against 56 inmates for rounds of simultaneous chess, in which multiple games of chess are played by each student.

During the three-hour competition, inmates won nine and drew one. In total, Princeton won 46 games. Four of the seven Princeton students played for the first time at the prison.

“The students are really proud to be part of the tournament,” said John Marshall, the primary organizer of the event. “The inmates look forward to the tournament. This is something I want to keep going for the inmates and the students in the years ahead.”
Marshall’s employer, Windsor Strategy Partners, sponsored the event. First-timer Gabriel Vercelli, 21, was a bit surprised at the difficulties of simultaneous chess.

“It was much harder than I thought. It was a life experience,” Vercelli said.

The Ivies vs. Inmates tournament has garnered national press coverage throughout the years, including Sports Illustrated and dozens of news outlets. A documentary titled “Checkmates” was created about the tournament and was shown at the Montclair Film Festival in 2016.

The tournament started in 2001 after Marshall convinced renowned chess player Jude Acers to come from New Orleans to play against 22 inmates. Acers accepted the invitation and won 21 games.

Two years later, two members of the Princeton University Chess Club played against the inmates. Throughout the years, the program has grown. As many as six to eight students have played against as many as 70 inmates.

The tournament is held in November and April.

Math major Miles Lee, who is graduating in 2020 from Princeton University, enjoyed the experience.

“It was fun and challenging,” Lee said. “It was high intensity and required a lot of process.”

New Jersey State Prison Administrator Bruce Davis said that the inmate population looks forward to the tournaments every year.

“The chess tournament is a source of pride of those who were selected to play,” Davis said. “Allowing the inmates to play with the students from the prestigious Princeton University has helped maintain a stable environment within the prison.”

Inmate Alonzo Lonnie Hill, 49, has competed in every tournament since its inception.

“Inmates and students watch the final stages of a match.

“I like chess,” Hill said. “The game gets me out of a cell and the daily grind of prison. I look forward to the tournaments every year.”

Leon Singletary, 66, among the oldest inmates to play in April’s tournament, said playing against the Princeton University students offered a mental escape.

“It’s a distraction from being in prison,” Singletary who has been incarcerated for the last 36 years said. “It’s a mental exercise.”

Marshall said a grandmaster — the highest rated chess player — will be joining Princeton University’s Chess Club this fall. Marshall is hopeful that the grandmaster will take part in future tournaments at the prison.

“I am happy that we have made it this far with the tournament,” Marshall, an honorary member of the Princeton University Chess Club, said. “Many of the students have told me that coming to this tournament was among the highlights of their Princeton University careers.”
New Jersey Department of Corrections employees and their children participated in Take Your Child to Work Day on April 25th. Throughout the day, the Department held a variety of activities, which included canine demonstrations, fingerprint scans, emergency response vehicle tours, crafts and lunch.

SOG members assist youngsters with donning riot gear.

Correctional Police Lieutenant Michael Nardelli inspects personal protective equipment.

Bagpipes and drums kick off the celebration with music.
Kids check out the decontamination station. 

Riot helmets await the next wave of visitors.

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., is surrounded by special guests.

Every child received a Certificate of Participation.

An honorary hazmat member tries on a uniform.
Various NJDOC vehicles were on display.

Correctional Police Major David Scott has the audience’s full attention. A staff member portraying an escapee is detained.

The SOG canine demonstration steals the show.