NJDOC and Princeton University partner on STEM education program in support of reentry.

SEARCH AND RESCUE
Special Operations Group hones its ability to track missing persons.

OCCUPATION STATION
Offender self-help kiosks now includes a free job search application.

PICTURE THIS
The new class of correctional police officers, 118 members strong, graduated on Nov. 15.
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NJDOC welcomes 118 new graduates from the State Basic Course for Correctional Police Officers.

Cover photo: A missing hiker is located during a multiagency search-and-rescue exercise in October.
This month we take a collective breath to reflect on our blessings and offer up our gratitude.

At the New Jersey Department of Corrections, we took a moment to honor our servicemen and women whose selflessness and sacrifices keep our country safe and free with a Veterans Day ceremony. During the ceremony, we acknowledged all those who serve, especially our veteran employees.

Those of you who have worn or wear the uniform of our Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard, we owe you heartfelt appreciation and respect for our safety and freedom, not only on Veterans Day but every day.

This month, we also honored fallen officers at the annual Blue Mass in Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Newark, New Jersey. In 2019, we lost seven of our correctional officers, leaving a profound void in our Department and the lives of all those they touched. We honor their memory and those who came before them.

The mass is also a stark reminder of the dangers of the job, for custody and civilian staff. These individuals play an essential role in the safety and security of our facilities while also serving a critical role in our mission of correcting behavior and rehabilitating individuals back into our society.

Without their dedication, hard work, and sacrifice, the safety of every citizen in the state would be compromised. For them, we are grateful.

As we approach Thanksgiving, I hope you take a minute to reflect on your blessings and join in on the spirit of gratitude.

Sincerely,

Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq.
Veterans presented a program that attracted most of the group’s 59 members as well as numerous guests from the community.

One of the themes of the program was homelessness. Inmate Philip Dixon, Commander of the 35-year-old group, noted that that one in four homeless men and women in America are military veterans.

“We need safeguards in place to protect our veterans and make sure these brave men and women don’t lose everything after serving,” he said.

NO MAN LEFT BEHIND

**NJDOC Recognizes All Veterans on Holiday**

By Matt Schuman

Veterans Day 2019 will not soon be forgotten by military veterans housed in New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) facilities.

As incarcerated veterans groups at New Jersey State Prison and East Jersey State Prison scheduled events to mark Veterans Day, the NJDOC was unveiling plans to establish the state’s first all-veterans housing unit.

The festivities began on November 12 – one day after Veterans Day was officially commemorated – when New Jersey State Prison’s Trenton Incarcerated Incarcerated Veterans of America recognize Veterans Day as well as the group’s own 25th anniversary during a gathering at East Jersey State Prison.
The following day, East Jersey State Prison’s Incarcerated Veterans of America, 57 members strong, recognized Veterans Day as well as the group’s own 25th anniversary. The guest list included a significant community representation.

Like their counterparts at New Jersey State Prison, the East Jersey group focuses on incarcerated veterans helping one another to navigate issues impacting veterans.

Among those who attended both gatherings was a contingent from the Incarcerated Veterans Initiative (ICI), a partnership between the NJDOC and Education and Health Centers of America. The ICI provides a transition process for incarcerated veterans.

“The veteran organizations in these facilities add value to the quality of the lives of the participants,” ICI Project Coordinator Robert Looby said. “It gives them a sense of purpose.”

Utilizing a case management approach, the ICI team meets with former service members in an effort to identify veterans’ military service history, identify eligibility for services and benefits, and connect the veteran to appropriate resources prior to release. The ICI has also been compiling data on New Jersey veterans in custody. This data begins with identification of the veteran’s service record (DD-214), as well as detailed demographic information, such as branch of service, discharge type, years served, conflict/era served and other information that can assist the NJDOC as it continues its efforts to serve this population.

The efforts of the ICI staff do not end when the former service member is discharged from prison or a halfway house. The team remains in contact and provides assistance to many of the formerly incarcerated veterans as they reintegrate into their communities.

“EHCA is proud to have partnered with the NJDOC over the past year in providing casework services to incarcerated veterans,” said Larry DeMarzo, EHCA President and CEO. “We have conducted more than 450 individual interviews with veterans at the 13 state correctional institutions and Residential Community Release Programs. We look forward to further assisting the NJDOC in its efforts to provide additional resources for the incarcerated veteran population.”

Specifically, the NJDOC announced an award of $500,000 from the U.S. Department of Justice’s FY 2019 “Innovative Reentry Initiatives: Building System Capacity and Testing Strategies to Reduce Recidivism” grant to establish an all-veterans housing unit in collaboration with the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NJDMAVA).

The all-veterans housing unit, which will be located at East Jersey State Prison, will provide a comprehensive approach to distribute services and resources unique to the veteran population, giving veterans tools to focus on rehabilitation and reentry in one centralized location.
NJDMAVA Veteran Service Officers will conduct regular visits to the unit to evaluate veterans nearing release for admission into the Veterans Haven transitional housing program.

The grant also includes a staff training component on post-traumatic stress disorder and other issues impacting this community.

“We are committed to providing opportunities for holistic rehabilitation,” said NJDOC Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq. “This program will allow the Department to provide the critical resources needed to assist the approximately 370 veterans in NJDOC facilities in their successful rehabilitation and reentry. The major difference here is that we can play a role in connecting veterans to those resources now, when they need it most, as opposed to after being released.”

As part of Veterans Day activities Acting Commissioner Marcus O. Hicks, Esq., recognized veteran staffmembers through an annual ceremony at Central Office headquarters.
It was cold and damp in Washington’s Crossing State Park, and two hikers were missing. It was several hours before sunrise on this late-October night, but a highly trained team – consisting of members of the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) Special Operations Group (SOG) and individuals from a host of other agencies – already had made significant progress in the search-and-rescue operation.

“When we set up our perimeter, we look at the pedigree information available to us,” explained Major David Scott, who oversees SOG. “Are the people young or old? Are they sick? What is their mindset? Are they trying to hurt themselves? That information allows us to target our search.

“As we get more and more clues – for example, we find scent articles that the canines can utilize – we are able to continually narrow the search,” he continued. “That increases the probability of locating the missing persons.”

Shortly after 9 a.m., the missing hikers, who had split up in the midst of their ordeal, were found. One had a leg injury that re-
quired him to be removed from the park on a stretcher.

Fortunately, the search-and-rescue operation actually was a training exercise, and the missing persons were “planted” in the park by SOG.

Many of those who participated in the exercise were part of the Correctional Emergency Response Team (CERT), which consists of full-time NJDOC personnel who serve as SOG staff members on a periodic basis. Other agencies represented included the Department of Human Services, the Mercer County Department of Corrections and the Essex County Department of Corrections. Statewide Search and Rescue Coordinator Brian Enberg of the New Jersey State Police also was part of the operation.

Each year, the CERT members, more than 100 strong, receive 40 hours of training from SOG, to include such disciplines as mobile field force (riot control procedures), defensive tactics and firearms use, as well as search-and-rescue procedures. In addition, quarterly training is provided in Hazmat, fire safety, tactical support and emergency vehicle operation, among other areas.

CERT members work with SOG on a rotating basis. At any given time, ten or more team members can be part of the rotation.

“If members of CERT are deployed in the field, they need to be up to speed,” Scott noted. “These kinds of training exercises are so crucial because you never know when you’re going to be needed.”

In fact, SOG members were involved with the search for a missing 5-year-old Bridge ton girl who had disappeared from Bridge ton City Park on September 16.

Earlier in September, SOG also played a key role in the search for a missing 12-year-old girl in Hunterdon County.

“Fugitive searches and searches for missing inmates are our expertise,” Scott said. “These individuals don’t want to be found, so we are uniquely trained to find a needle in the haystack, providing us with a unique perspective on how to find a missing person who might be hurt and hidden away from the main pathways. However, in missing person scenarios instead of trying to minimize the noise level, we’re able to call out the person’s name to try to attract his or her attention. It’s an entirely different role.”

Lt. Frank Martin pointed out that it’s hardly unusual for SOG to be enlisted to assist in searches for missing persons.

“As soon as we arrive at the command post, even if it’s not our operation, they often defer to us because we’re so well-versed in searches,” Martin said.

“It shows respect for our level of training,” he said, “and why the importance of search-and-rescue drills can’t be overstated.”
The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) releases several thousand inmates per year. Part of the NJDOC’s mission is to make sure individuals leaving its facilities are better prepared to be productive members of society than when they arrived.

Offenders start preparing for rehabilitation and reentry immediately upon intake and receive personalized, comprehensive rehabilitation plans. With the availability of numerous education and vocational programs, behavioral therapy and more than a dozen transitional services, the NJDOC is becoming increasingly proactive in helping incarcerated individuals prepare for their release.

Programs such as the Pre-Release Employment Navigation and Reentry Program, a partnership between the NJDOC and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, provides inmates with employment readiness and support prior to their release date.

In addition, the NJDOC advocates for the hiring of released individuals through job search assistance.
fairs to help offenders find employment. Now, inmates have access to an added resource.

The JOBview app is now available on offender self-help kiosks throughout the Department’s 13 facilities.

The employment platform is designed to prepare inmates for successful release by helping them stay in touch with the job market, identify prison programs to build on skillsets that match job requirements and to get a head start on finding a job.

The app allows offenders to browse current local and national employment listings.

“JPay is committed to providing no-cost solutions that support the re-entry process for incarcerated individuals,” said Jade Trombetta, a spokeswoman for JPay. “One example of that commitment is offering the free JOBview application to incarcerated individuals in New Jersey Department of Corrections facilities.”

Using the simplified interface, job-seekers can access thousands of local, regional and national jobs that are updated daily.

The job-seeker can quickly browse these jobs using the kiosk and receive a complete description of each selected job. If the job-seeker is interested in applying for a job, JOBview provides on-screen instructions to help access employer contact information.

Search information is also made available to correctional staff to help measure job-seeker success by determining if the job-seeker was actually hired.

Additionally, JPay offers educational videos separate from the JOBview app so incarcerated individuals can learn more about desired industries, such as accounting, business, entrepreneurship and more.

“JOBview is customized for corrections, therefore the application was built to provide incarcerated individuals with visibility into employment opportunities without accessing the Internet,” said Trombetta.

More than 10.5 million job searches have been conducted in the last 12 months across nearly 30 states, including New Jersey.
Princeton students participate in a Prison Teaching Initiative training as part of a combined course with incarcerated college students that was held at East Jersey State Prison.

STEM STUDIES

Science Grant Boosts Inmate Access to STEM Careers

By The Princeton Teaching Initiative (with contributions by John Cokos)

The Prison Teaching Initiative (PTI) at Princeton University is one of five organizations awarded a collaborative National Science Foundation (NSF) grant to build a national alliance that will forge robust pathways to STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) careers for people who are, or were, incarcerated.

Through PTI, the alliance will benefit the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) by helping to ensure the availability of STEM studies for its offenders while incarcerated and after release.

“PTI is one of our partners in NJ-STEP,” said NJDOC Education Director Jecrois Jean-Baptiste. “Through PTI, STEM instruction is provided at select prison facilities by professors and instructors from the university.”

The vision of the STEM Opportunities in Prison Settings (STEM-OPS) alliance is to make educational programming for STEM careers and college study commonplace, accessible and rigorous in U.S. prisons and reentry programs. The alliance is an expansion of work begun under an NSF-INCLUDES pilot grant, “STEPs to STEM” held by PTI under the leadership of Jannette Carey, professor of chemistry at Princeton.
PTI is made up of volunteers from around Princeton University who teach accredited college courses in New Jersey state prisons with Raritan Valley Community College and Rutgers University as part of the NJ-STEP Consortium. Co-founded in 2005, PTI is an initiative offered through Princeton’s McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning.

“We at PTI look forward to working with the STEM-OPS Alliance to build pathways from the prison classroom to STEM careers across the United States,” said Jenny Greene, professor of astrophysical science and PTI’s academic director since 2017.

“We are particularly excited to be part of a large-scale education equity project with leaders who were previously incarcerated,” said Jill Stockwell, administrative director of PTI, “and to propagate our model of summer research internships for formerly incarcerated undergraduates on campuses throughout the nation.”

The continuation of STEM studies post-incarceration has been successful at NJDOC.

“Students, in transition upon release, can continue their work at the Princeton campus,” said Jean-Baptiste. “We have had STEM students who began their studies while incarcerated, then traveled abroad to further classes and research to expand on their skillsets specific to STEM.”

STEM-OPS has the following four main areas of focus:

- The development of a national model for expanding vital STEM programming into existing prison education programs;
- Career and educational readiness workshops for STEM careers; and
- Development of STEM mentorship and professional networks for returning offenders.

Each of the STEM-OPS partners brings key expertise to the alliance, has experience working in diverse socio-geographic contexts, and participates actively in other networks that are working to address systemic challenges facing incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

Alliance leadership organizations include those led by STEM professionals who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system.

“I’m a formerly incarcerated person with three felony convictions, sentenced to 10 years in prison,” said Stanley Andrisse, director and founder of From Prison Cells to PhD. “I was once told by a prosecuting attorney that I had no hope for change. I am now an endocrinologist scientist and assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Medicine and Howard University College of Medicine. This prosecutor’s prophesy was a little off. It’s imperative that we offer second chances. We are missing out on talent.”
The New Jersey Department of Corrections held a graduation ceremony for the 118 recruits who comprised the State Basic Course for Correctional Police Officers, Class 247, on Nov. 15 at the War Memorial in Trenton. A total of 717 correctional police officers have graduated since Governor Murphy took office in January 2018.