Homecoming for New DOC Commissioner
By Darren Duarte

When you meet the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction for the first time, you might think you know her already. "I'm very approachable and reasonable," said Commissioner Carol Higgins O'Brien. "I think sometimes people get in a position like this and they think they have to be somebody else, and I just think that it's easier to be yourself wherever that happens to take you." That attitude, along with her education and experience in corrections, has taken this former Billerica High School athlete far. Except for an internship at a county jail, O'Brien got her start at the department she now heads. She was hired as a corrections counselor at MCI-Collinsville in 1984. "When I became a deputy superintendent, I thought this is it. It's the pinnacle, this is great." O'Brien loved that job not realizing what was next in store.

She left the Massachusetts Department of Correction in 2000 to accept an appointment by Essex County Sheriff Frank Cousins. O'Brien met Cousins while studying in the Senior Executive Program at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. Cousins recruited her as the Superintendent of the Essex County Correctional Facility where she was responsible for the care, security, and rehabilitation of more than 1,100 inmates. Two years later, Massachusetts Governor Jane Swift named her as Undersecretary of Criminal Justice in the Executive Office of Public Safety and Security.

O'Brien hopes her background, along with her staff's expertise will reveal additional "best practices" for the department. She believes collaboration among agencies is key. "I'm relying on staff to get the best results. "...I don't mind having other people tell me what they think. In addition, my opinion is not always the most important opinion as far as I'm concerned. I personally don't mind not being the smartest person in the room, I actually prefer to have many people around me smarter than me because it makes my job easier. I can tap into their resources."

One of the keys to success for the new commissioner is collaboration, not only with her executive and line staff but with external stakeholders too. "...We need to collaborate with Parole, Probation, police departments and sheriff’s departments, because these clients belong to all of us," said O'Brien. The commissioner knows reentry plays a huge role in the success of our clients and in our success as a state agency.

"Our clientele are people and we need to help them become better and more productive citizens." She's already had conversations with leaders in other criminal justice agencies in an effort to partner with the DOC to reduce recidivism. Once a leader for inmate program and reentry herself, O'Brien recalls an interesting moment she once had with an inmate. "...there was an offender in an institution that I worked in at one time. He was in our program unit and eventually released...I didn't realize he lived in my town but I ran into him and he actually lived in the complex where I was. He approached me outside one day and started talking and he was thanking me for what we did for him. He had his own business. He got married and had a family and he was clean and sober. And that was refreshing."

As the DOC strives for even more reentry success by offering inmates a skill, the department will undoubtedly face the failures that come with it. Overcoming adversity is what we do.

Remember in this business it's a marathon, not a sprint the commissioner said. We can finish the race on top if everyone pitches in. Her advice to staff is to remember what we all learned in the academy, "Be firm but fair. Be friendly but not familiar. Be consistent. I think all of the same principles apply when you manage people." Carol Higgins O'Brien currently manages more than 5,000 employees. Never in her wildest dreams did she think she would become commissioner of the department where she began her career. Born to Irish Catholic parents whose generation never heaped much praise on their children for" fear it might ruin them." Her mom once worked as a nurse in the corrections business. Her parents passed away long before their middle daughter achieved this milestone. When asked how she hoped her parents would react to news of her becoming the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Correction O'Brien sat back and reflected before she answered and then said..."I think they would think this is pretty cool."
Way to Go
By James Rioux

What began as a reality based board game for patients attending the expressive therapy group at Bridgewater State Hospital (BSH) in November 2008, Way to Go, has expanded for use in most day treatment and chronic mental illness groups. First developed by Licensed Occupational Therapist and MCH employee Roberta Kirshner, Way to Go teaches patients about the consequences of their actions. For instance, demonstrating hostility towards others, not participating in groups, and engaging in self injury are examples of negative actions that can influence a patient’s continued placement in a strict security setting like BSH. Positive participation in groups, speaking to a staff member when experiencing distress, and exhibiting good behavioral control can lead to placement in a less secure setting such as a Residential Treatment Unit within the Department of Correction or a setting within the Department of Mental Health.

The board game is designed to look like a blueprint of the BSH campus. For instance, the ITU (Intensive Treatment Unit) which is reserved for those patients who are considered an imminent risk of harming themselves or others represents the highest level of security. The ‘Max’ units represent mid level security, and the remaining units on the board represent minimum security. Participants are instructed to take turns drawing from decks of cards which correspond to three housing security levels. A patient who draws a minimum security action card which instructs him to share his feelings of paranoia with a clinical team member or psychiatrist will allow him to move six spaces on the board, thus moving one step closer to a less secure setting. However, a patient who draws a maximum security card which may correspond to a physical altercation with a staff member or with another patient would result in him losing his turn and having to return to a higher level of security.

Kirshner who was interviewed for this story stated “because patients are encouraged to discuss action cards chosen and to assist one another in moving board pieces, there is a real cohesiveness amongst group participants.” Kirshner added that the game educates participants about accepting their mental illness, preventing relapse, and the importance of following institutional and societal rules. ‘Way to Go’ is just another example of how BSH staff is helping to restore patient competency and psychological wellness.

If you are interested in learning more about Way to Go please contact Roberta Kirshner or Donna Lebow, Director of Rehab Services at Bridge-water State Hospital.

Toys for Tots
Commissioner Higgins O’Brien sending off one of the trucks loaded with gifts for Toys for Tots.

MCI Framingham Conducts Dialogue Skills Sessions
By Jason Dobson

This past September, for three consecutive weeks MCI Framingham conducted a series of Dialogue Sessions to explore aligning inmate job assignments with skill sets to better serve the needs of the facility and aid in reentry. With the support and leadership of Superintendent Lynn Bissomnette, Karen Swank, Division of Staff Development and Director of Classification Colette Rosales, MCI Framingham co facilitated the sessions. Both Colleen and Karen along with a selection of other Department of Correction staff were trained as Dialogue practitioners by consultants Jane Ball and Peter Garrett in March of this year. The sessions were well received by the staff at MCI Framingham and it is hoped that the practice of the Dialogue will help with better use of inmate skills and needs.

Cisco IT Essentials Course and Certification
By Thomas Romaniecki

The Massachusetts Department of Correction is proud to be the second in the nation to add the Cisco IT Essentials course and certification to our inmate education program. Through a federal grant we were able to staff and build four new lab style classrooms in addition to the one we already had at Shirley Minimum. MCI-Concord, MCI-Shirley, MCI-Framingham and also South Middlesex Correctional Center are the locations now currently teaching their first class. The Cisco IT Essentials course and certification is an excellent addition to our roster of academic and vocational programs to help educate and reduce the rate of recidivism among our inmate population.

The IT Essentials curriculum supports students who want to prepare for entry-level positions in the information and communications technology (ICT) field within several different types of working environments:

• A corporate or mobile environment with a high level of face-to-face client interaction. Job titles include enterprise technician, IT administrator, field service technician, and PC technician.

• A remote work environment where client interaction, client training, operating systems, and connectivity issues are emphasized. Job titles include remote support technician, help desk technician, call center technician, IT specialist, and IT representative.

• Settings with limited customer interaction where hardware related activities are emphasized. Job titles include depot technician and bench technician.

IT Essentials is a hands-on, career-oriented course with an emphasis on practical experience to help students develop fundamental computer skills, along with essential career skills. The Cisco® IT Essentials curriculum also helps students prepare for entry-level ICT career opportunities and the CompTIA A+ certification, which helps students differentiate themselves in the marketplace to advance their careers. In addition, the course provides a learning pathway to the Cisco CCNA® curricula. IT Essentials 5.0 provides a comprehensive introduction to the ICT industry and interactive, hands-on exposure to personal computers, hardware, software, and operating systems. The curriculum offers the following features and benefits:

• Students develop working knowledge of how computers operate and how to assemble them.

• Students gain confidence in working with the components of desktop and laptop computers by learning the proper procedures for hardware and software installations, upgrades, and troubleshooting.

• Curriculum materials and labs are delivered through the Cisco NetSpace™ learning environment and include new topics such as mobile devices and client side virtualization, and expanded networking and troubleshooting topics.

• The NetSpace user interface provides improved functionality and flexibility for instructors.

• Hands-on labs and the Virtual Laptop and Virtual Desktop learning tools help students develop critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills.

• Cisco Packet Tracer simulation-based learning activities promote the exploration of networking and network security concepts, while allowing students to experiment with network behavior.

The IT Essentials course covers the fundamentals of computer hardware and software and advanced concepts such as security, networking, and the responsibilities of an IT professional. It is designed for students who want to pursue careers in ICT and students who want to gain practical knowledge of how a computer works. Students who complete this course will be able to describe the internal components of a computer, assemble a computer system, install an operating system, and troubleshoot using system tools and diagnostic software. Expanded topics include security, networking, and troubleshooting. Hands-on lab activities are essential elements that are integrated into the curriculum. The Virtual Laptop and Virtual Desktop are stand-alone tools that enable students to virtually disassemble and reassemble desktop and laptop computers. Both tools are designed to supplement classroom learning and provide an interactive “hands-on” experience in environments with limited networking equipment.
Health and Wellness Committee, Share the Spirit...
By Amanda Mckenzie

Once again, the trees are bare, the weather is colder, and soon winter conditions will be in full effect. For many of us that means warm hearty meals, cozy fires, and family movie or game nights. But for some, there are days spent wondering where the next meal is coming from, and if their family has warm clothing and shelter.

Did you know that 11.4% of Massachusetts households are food insecure? That means 700,000 children and adults can’t confidently predict where their next meal is coming from. That number is staggering, but in true DOC fashion, so many of you’ve answered the call for help and participated in one or more of the many collection drives held throughout the DOC to help our neighbors in need.

From coat and blanket drives, to food drives, to adopt-a-family programs, along with countless other fundraisers and collections… your continued support and generosity has helped to make this another successful year. Here’s just a snap shot of how staff at various facilities are helping out:

- The Health and Welfare Committee (HAWC) at Boston Pre-Release Center identified two local families in crisis in Dorchester and Hyde Park. Staff at BRPC generously donated food items to fill Thanksgiving Day baskets that were delivered to each family. The HAWC at Northeastern Correctional Center held a raffle to raise money for the St. Peter/St. Andrews Parish food pantry in Worcester. With the $420 they raised, NECC purchased enough produce in bulk to contribute to 500 Thanksgiving Day baskets.
- MCI-Norfolk put a spin on their annual Thanksgiving food drive. For a small donation of $5, staff were able to wear a New England sports team item to work. MCI-N raised $240 for the Norfolk Food Pantry during this drive and will likely expand this fundraiser next year. For the past five years, MCI-Plymouth has adopted a local family of five in Carver. MCI-P provides this drive and will likely expand this fundraiser next year. For the past five years, MCI-Portland has a local family of five in Camper. MCI-P provides this drive and will likely expand this fundraiser next year. For the past five years, MCI-Portland has a local family of five in Camper. MCI-P provides this drive and will likely expand this fundraiser next year.

- The Northeast Correctional Center Gym was the place for fellowship and celebration as the Department of Correction celebrated its fourth Annual Unity Day on November 6, 2014. According to Merni Quinones, Director of the Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity, Unity Day is an event to promote inclusion and cultural awareness at the agency. “Every year we have an opportunity to have fun as we showcase our cultures, eat different foods, and listen to music from the various ethnicities represented,” she said.

- This year’s cultural exhibits represented Cape Verde, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Germany, Ghana, India, Ireland, Japan, Panama, Peru, Portugal, Azores, Puerto Rico, Ukraine, USA, and the Koyukon Athabascan Native Tribe (Alaska).

- Several employees got a glimpse of each culture as they admired exhibits prominently displayed around the gym. The most colorful display went to Haydee Pineda for her El Salvador exhibit. The most patriotic prize went to Shahnaz Hussain for her Panama display and Shahnaz Hussain received the most creative award for her India exhibit.

- Staff members and volunteers provided entertainment through either song or dance. Deputy Commissioner Paul Dipaolo said he hopes Unity Day enhances cross-cultural awareness, and encourages interaction among staff. “I hope everybody takes away some of the cultural treasures that are presented here.”

- Members of the Commissioner’s Diversity Advisory Council worked tirelessly on the 2014 event. Director Quinones thanked them for their efforts and hopes the attendees will use the event to encourage and promote interaction, inclusion, understanding, teamwork, harmony, pride and mutual respect within the DOC workforce.

A Perfect Score
By Darren Duarte

Perfection may not be attainable, but that has not stopped Northeastern Correctional Center Employees from chasing it. American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors gave the facility its highest honor with a perfect score. “The score was one hundred percent. They did not drop a standard. That’s super,” said auditor Rick Hart.

For two days, ACA Auditors Gerald Carnes and Rick Hart reviewed all NECC policies and procedures, toured the prison and the farm, and interviewed staff and inmates. In order to receive re-accreditation, the facility had to comply with 100% of the mandatory standards identified by ACA and comply with at least 90% of the non-mandatory standards identified by ACA. The staff at NECC went beyond those standards.

“I was most impressed with the files and their concise setup,” said ACA Chairperson Rick Hart. “They nailed the standards. We did not have to ask for a lot of additional materials. Staff knew their jobs. You have very few uses of force and significant incidences at this facility. Very few walk aways from this facility and that says a lot. You’ve got the good training programs, which is good for the inmates and this community. And the culinary arts is fantastic,” beamed Hart. Mr. Hart and his colleague addressed some of the staff along with Deputy Superintendent Mari Lou Whalen and Commissioner Carol Higgins O’Brien.

The commissioner congratulated employees on the audit and thanked them for providing excellence to the Department of Correction. The Deputy Superintendent joined O’Brien in urging those who attended the ACA Audit Closeout to share the news with everyone at the farm. “…you need to get out there and see the line staff and thank them too. Not only is the paperwork in order, you did a great job with that, but you showed true professionalism while auditors walked around and talked with your staff and as they talked with the inmates. I think they’re (ACA) coming away realizing we’ve got a good team in place and one of the best,” Commissioner O’Brien said. Whalen agreed. “It’s because of their hard work that we were able to get a 100%. It’s not a one-person show. It’s everyone pitching in everyday to get it done.”

Achieving a perfect score may very well be a team effort, but that did not stop the auditors or Whalen from singling out ACA Policy Coordinator Shawn Zoldak for organizing the files and presenting the information for accreditation. “They did call me out. I can say it feels good. It’s been a long process with a lot of time and effort. A lot of sweat put into it. But in the end, you know it’s my second audit, my second hundred. So I guess I have to get right back at it and look forward to three years from now to reach for that bar again,” said Sergeant Zoldak trying to hold back a smile.

Each Department of Correction facility takes the audit process seriously. Whether it is an in house or external look at the inner workings of a prison, the correction staff consistently strives for excellence. However, a perfect score on one of these examinations is hard to come by.

Jennifer Gaffney, Director of the Policy Development and Compliance Unit has overseen the audit process for the last five years and knows the behind the scenes effort put into each and everyone of them. She says when one of our institutions receives a perfect accreditation score; the entire department feels a sense of pride.

“IT’s a team effort. My team goes out to make sure each facility is ready. This morning I was on the phone with Bill Dupre from Training Academy to get documents from him. Yesterday I was on the phone with the Division of Resource Management getting stuff from them. So it really is an agency thing. Even though it is facility specific, everybody is involved in the process. Therefore, it’s really Team DOC doing our best and proving it to these auditors nationwide,” said Gaffney.

According to Gaffney, NECC was the first facility in the DOC to receive an accreditation from ACA. It received its first stamp of approval in 1982 and has maintained accreditation ever since. The Department of Correction is one of 20 states to receive the ACA’s elite Golden Eagle Award, which Gaffney says makes Team DOC a Golden Eagle State. “It means that everything that we can have accredited is. All of our eligible facilities, our training academy, our industries program, and our central office are all accredited.”
Prison Pup Benevolent Association

The Prison Pup Benevolent Association held their first annual "Divots Fore Service Dogs Golf Tournament" on Friday September 5th, 2014 at New England Country Club in Bellingham, MA. 88 golfers participated, along with 11 volunteers. There were generous sponsors included: TJX, Blue Buffalo and Keefe Corporation. In addition to the tournament, there was a silent auction and wide variety of raffle items to include a chocolate lab puppy, a gas grill and a flat screen television. The event was very successful and raised $6000 to be given to each American Vet Dogs and NEADS. Great job to the Benevolent Association members. Plans are already underway for next year, so make sure to mark your calendars and save the date, September 25, 2015. Prison Pup Benevolent Association Members include: Lynn Bissonnette, Lynn Lizotte, Laura Calvani and Phil Restifo all from MCI Framingham; Chris Frazier, Baystate; Paul Henderson MCI Shirley, John Morin, NCCI; Karen Horn MCI Plymouth; Kim Lincoln Pondville; Peter Rice SMCC; Donna Paul MCI Norfolk; Ken Lizotte PDCU; Rachel Goguen MCI Concord; Kerri Ciccarelli SBCC; Bree McDermott and Deb Heniques OCCC.

Senior Softball USA Tournament of Champions

By Amanda McKenzie

Many congratulations to Division of Staff Development Program Manager, Gerri Riley, for her softball teams win at the 2014 LVSSA/SSUSA World Masters Championships in Las Vegas last September. Not only does Geri play as catcher for the Twisted Fossils softball team, she is also the Head Coach! With the Twisted Fossils’ win in Las Vegas, they have won the privilege of competing against the very best Senior Softball teams in the country at the Tournament of Champions, held in Polk County, Florida next month. Terry Hennessy, chief executive officer of SSUSA said, “It’s a battle of tournament champions taking on tournament champions to determine which team is truly the top team of the year.” And if that wasn’t exciting enough, a representative from the Twisted Fossils softball team will have the opportunity to play in the Wounded Warriors Game. This game showcases an All Star Team comprised of SSUSA members playing against the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team. The WWAST represents some of our nation’s bravest and most determined heroes, soldiers and veterans! Good luck Twisted Fossils!

Training Academy Receives RTC 302 Plaque

A few months ago, staff from Recruit Training Class 302 came together to have a plaque made for their class. Many discussions were held regarding how to approach this task and getting everything together years later was not easy for this group. After reaching out to multiple sources they were finally able to collect everything needed to put together a plaque. On July 22, 2014, Sgt. Jason Dobson from Recruit Training Class 302 presented the plaque to Captain Raymond Gonsalves of the Training Academy.

Retirements:

Neil Antoniotti—Aug 1987
Ronald Bissonnette—Feb 1982
Eugene Butler—Oct 1986
Charles Carroll—Jan 1982
Ronald Cavanaugh Jr.—Mar 2006
Christopher Chamberland—May 2006
Leonard Costa—Jul 1984
Richard Cotton—Sep 1980
Daniel Davis—Jul 1994

Linda Donnelly—Apr 1987
Theodore Faber—Oct 1991
Michael Foti—May 1992
Timoteo Gallant—Sep 1982
Joseph Giampietro—Nov 1983
Thomas Griffin III—Jul 1991
Joyce Gustafson—Jan 1994
Thelma Hincapie—Sep 1986
Robert Howard—Jun 1990

Nicole Kennedy—Apr 1992
David Lavoie—Sep 1991
Justin Leveille—Jul 1993
Brian Marcklais—Mar 1988
Phillip McLeod—Sep 1996
Robert Murphy Jr.—Oct 1976
Michael Newton—Apr 1986
John O’Brien—Nov 1987
David Odgren—Jun 1986

Promotions:

Matthew Arpano
Donna Benedict
Stacey Butkowski
Robert Clauss
Paul Costa
Nestor Cruz
Donald Denomme
Fiona DiGliandomenico
Richard Doyle

Janel Duggan
Steven Ferreira
Bruce Gelb
Michael Hamm
Holly Harris
Charles Hooper
Karen Horn
Do Le
Patricia Lesperance

Stephen LeVangie Jr.
Veronica Madden
Kristine Marcotte
Kathleen McGovern
Maureen Mullin
Eugene Munroe
Donna Paul
Justin Prario
Cynthia Prescott

David Pimentel—Dec 1985
Jose Portalatin—Sep 2000
Dawn Rizzo—Jul 1996
Christopher Roe—Oct 1986
John Savage—Sep 1984
Joseph Tammaro—Nov 1989
Richard Tirzasoks—Oct 1982
Jonathan Yuele—Nov 1987

Samuel Ramos
Ana Rosario
Cara Savelli
Melissa Tasca
Antonio RI
Harold Wilkes

Community Correspondents

Network

Daniel Alves
Lisa Antunes
Collette Bais
Vanessa Burns
Patricia Capozzoli
Lori Costa
John Cunningham
Jason Dobson
Ryan Donlon
Darrin Duarte
Sherry Elliot
Christopher Fallone
Sharon Ficco
Bet Gentz
Jailleen Hopkins
Kimberley Lincoln
Marianne Lizotte
Mary Lynch
Anne Manning
Brenda Melanson
Gregory McGregor
James Morrone
Debra Moschos
John O’Malley
Chris Pearson
James Raoux
Armando Santillo
Cara Savelli
Christopher Shlimon
Kate Sullivan
Gary Temple
Shawn Zeldak

Facility Key

BSCC—Bay State Correctional Center
BPRC—Boston Pre-Release Center
BSH—Bridgewater State Hospital
LISH or LISHCU—Lenoir-Shaftick Hospital
MASAC—MA Alcohol & Substance Abuse Center
MTC–MA Treatment Center
MCI–Cedar Junction
MCI–Concord
MCI–Framingham
MCI–N–Norfolk
MCI–F–Plymouth
MCC–Shirley
NCCI–North Central Correctional Institution
NECC–Northeastern Correctional Center
OCAC–McColony Correctional Center
PCC–Pondville Correctional Center
SMCC—South Middlesex Correctional Center
SBCC–Souso Bancowski Correctional Center

We’re on the Web:

www.mass.gov/doc

Commissioner Carol Higgins O’Brien

Massachusetts Department of Correction
DOC Central Headquarters
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Retirement Key

BPRC–Bosston Pre-Release Center
BSH–Bridgewater State Hospital
LISH or LISHCU–Lenoir-Shaftick Hospital
MASAC–MA Alcohol & Substance Abuse Center
MTC–MA Treatment Center
MCI–Cedar Junction
MCI–Concord
MCI–Framingham
MCI–N–Norfolk
MCI–F–Plymouth
MCC–Shirley
NCCI–North Central Correctional Institution
NECC–Northeastern Correctional Center
OCAC–McColony Correctional Center
PCC–Pondville Correctional Center
SMCC–South Middlesex Correctional Center
SBCC–Souso Bancowski Correctional Center