

INSIDE CORRECTIONS

Newsletter of the New Jersey Department of Corrections

MEET THE NEW DEPUTY COMMISSIONER: ERIN NARDELLI

By Mackenzie Fitchett
Senior Public Information Officer

Appointed in October to the role of Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Erin Nardelli has set her focus on creating safer facilities as well as improving morale and wellness to benefit both staff and incarcerated persons.

"Through my time in the Department, I have grown to care for and respect the sacrifices and significant burdens of all the men and women here and appreciate their service to the citizens of the State of New Jersey. They are an important part of the fabric of public safety in our state, in ways seen and unseen. They work every single day to ensure our communities are safe, and their efforts can be undervalued," said Nardelli. "Officers work long hours and miss time and holidays with their family and do not always get the recognition that they deserve. They have stepped forward to protect and they should be appreciated for that."

Nardelli grew up in Bridgeton where subsequently South Woods State Prison was built. The construction of this facility allowed her to guide her academic journey toward a position within the Department of Corrections. Nardelli graduated early with honors from Rowan University, where she received a BA in Sociology and then attended Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research MSS. She joined the NJDOC in 2002 at South Woods State Prison as part of the social services department with a background in mental health and juvenile justice, among other considerable skills.

Throughout her career, Nardelli held multiple positions in the prisons before being promoted to Director of Operations in Central Office Headquarters, which allowed her to focus on the health and safety of everyone who lives and works at the facilities.

"The best part of the Division of Operations is being challenged every day," said Nardelli. "Operations has oversight into nearly every aspect of the institutions and how they operate, from infrastructure and procedures, to staffing, emergency response, security, and healthcare. That is an incredible responsibility that we all take very seriously."



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GET TO KNOW: NICOLE SARGENT WELLNESS COORDINATOR

Responses have been edited for space and clarity.

Tell me about the job you have here at the NJDOC:

As of June 2023, I am the NJDOC's Wellness Coordinator, the first position of its kind in the Department. I am responsible for developing and implementing programs and initiatives that will benefit staff wellness. The job includes partnering with both internal and external stakeholders to increase awareness of mental health and other programs. I also organize awareness events, gatherings, fundraising drives and community outreach, as a means to engage staff in activities that promote wellness. The goal is to promote the eight dimensions of wellness – social, spiritual, physical, occupational, emotional, intellectual, environmental and financial – to all staff within the NJDOC.

How did you get here?

I began my career with the NJDOC in 2005, in the Office of Human Resources. In 2008, I moved to the Executive Staff offices, serving as the Assistant for the Deputy Commissioner. Since that time, I have had the privilege of working for several different Commissioners, Chiefs of Staff and Deputy Commissioners. My work as the Commissioner's Executive Assistant allowed me to "unofficially" become the COHQ event planner for staff gatherings such as the Summer BBQ, Take Your Child to Work Day and multi-day executive-level conferences in Atlantic City. When the COHQ Workforce Wellness Committee was organized, I became a member to build on the momentum that was already created. From there, additional programs and initiatives were discovered and implemented and, once an official wellness position was announced, I was already heavily invested and motivated.

How did you start with the Wellness Committee and why is it important?

The Wellness Committee was an initiative that was strongly backed by NJDOC Commissioner Victoria Kuhn, who was serving at that time as the Chief of Staff and saw a need for a push toward staff wellness in all areas. The nature of the work in the DOC is unique and the daily work we're often faced with is challenging and heavy. Having felt that stress and weight of the workload on my shoulders, along with difficulty balancing the responsibilities of work and home demands, I realized the absence of a work/life flow is real. I also realized, if I'm experiencing this, there are probably plenty of other DOC staff experiencing it. So, from my own personal growth and experiences, coupled with wellness trainings, I developed a passion for expanding wellness initiatives specific to correctional staff and a need to give back more to our corrections family and community. Our wellness committees carry the message throughout the facilities, organize recognition events and donation drives, and are able to offer resources to staff in need. The wellness initiative truly could not exist without the selfless work of the wellness volunteers and I am thankful for each and every one of them for their time and continued efforts.

How do you show that you are NJDOCPROUD?

I show that I'm #NJDOCPROUD by wearing my DOC gear when in the community, and by constantly trying to engage community groups to work with our Department – either by providing our employees with the opportunity to volunteer through outside organizations or requesting that organizations offer our staff information and trainings about specific topics. I am consistently promoting the DOC to other agencies, so as to generate strong relationships and foster a cooperative, reciprocal environment. I want to hear what our employees have to say, so that we can continue to grow, improve and move forward in our wellness initiatives.



Her position in the Division of Operations allowed her to learn about the facilities and staff and how infrastructure and staff morale should be improved. This insight helped shape her goals for her new position.

"The correctional police officers in our facility have taken on a job that could expose them to a great number of potential risks and that takes a special kind of sacrifice," said Nardelli. "We want to make sure we are doing what we can to help improve the safety and well-being of our custody staff to give them the best chance for success."

Other initiatives Nardelli hopes to pursue include working to improve recruitment numbers to better support existing staff, improving infrastructure, and increasing technology within the institutions. She also wants to find a way to connect all of the departments to create better communication and flow of ideas throughout the NJDOC.

"I want to build a bridge between Operations and the many other Divisions that work to support the Department. My time in COHQ has shown me the very real effort, dedication, and hard work by COHQ staff that I did not have an appreciation for when I worked in the prisons. Each staff person, whether custody or civilian, has an important role to play and every employee helps to keep the institutions safe," said Nardelli. "We all have different functions but every department is important and it is critical that we realize our interconnectedness and take care of one another."

While the roadmap of her career was unplanned, Nardelli is excited to use her experience inside and outside of the facilities to contribute actively to the department during a difficult time in corrections.

"Life is like a river. No matter how you try to control it, it will flow and place you where you are needed. I have always tried to serve where I was called," said Nardelli. "I was not expecting this position. It was not my career goal, but I was determined to respond to the call and do my best to work to support the staff and the many missions of the NJDOC."

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MATES INN: PAST, PRESENT AND

FUTURE

THE COFFEE HOUSE IS LOCATED ON THE COHQ CAMPUS AND IS OPEN ON TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY AND THURSDAY FROM 9 A.M. TO 12:30 P.M.



By Mackenzie Fitchett

The New Jersey Department of Corrections offers a wide variety of opportunities and initiatives through the Division of Programs and Reintegration Services. One unique program gives the incarcerated population tangible and marketable skills to help them excel in the hospitality industry upon their release from state prison.

In June of this year, the Department of Corrections welcomed a local Starbucks Community Store in Trenton to host an eight-week barista program for five incarcerated men from Garden State Correctional Facility. This program taught important life skills from communication and customer relations to the creation of custom orders.



"The barista training program is an excellent opportunity for each participant to learn a new marketable skill in the coffee house industry," said Dr. Darcella Sessomes, Chief of the Division of Programs & Reintegration Services. "Participants not only learn how to make signature coffees, teas, and cold brews, but most important, they learn customer services, teamwork, and transferable skills such as resume writing and practice mock job interviews. These skills are critical to opening up doors for future employment as they return to the community."

The first class of individuals have since graduated from the program and been released with job interviews set-up for them in the community. According to Cher McCall, the Deputy Director of the Office of Community Engagement, the program assisted these individuals in passing their interviews with "flying colors." Some of those individuals were able to return and pass their knowledge on to the next group of baristas.

The NJDOC helps to support the efforts of incarcerated persons approaching release to pursue activities and programs that will enhance the experience of reentry into the community. Vocational and job-training programs also include carpentry, welding, culinary arts, cosmetology, and other skills.

"A program like this is used to teach the incarcerated population marketable skills which will make them employable in the community," said McCall. "The skills we provide to these individuals allow them to reenter society with better communication and societal skills. It also assists them in finding employment to help start their new journey with goals and aspirations."

According to McCall, Mates Inn and The Coffee House will continue to grow by offering more skillsets and opportunities after their reopening, which will be coming soon.

PRESERVED FARMLAND PROGRAM CELEBRATES 40 YEARS: AND THE NJDOC WAS A PARTNER ALL ALONG

There are nearly 250,000 acres of preserved farmland across the state of New Jersey and all of them are adorned with the iconic green and white Preserved Farmland signs many commuters can see from the roadway. This year, these signs are celebrating their 40th anniversary, and the NJDOC is celebrating along with them.

Every Preserved Farmland sign ever created was made by the incarcerated persons at South Woods State Prison. The facility receives all of the materials and the incarcerated population is able to make and package the signs that are sent out to preserved farmland areas. One of the very first Farmland Preservation signs made was signed by each incarcerated person and is now on display in the work space at South Woods. Now, every time you pass those green and white signs proudly displayed next to thousands of acres in New Jersey, you can remember the large part the NJDOC played in their construction.

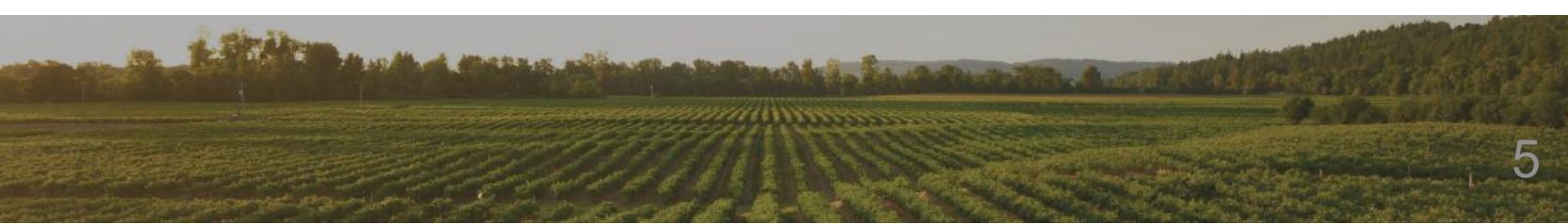
Soon, the Preserved Farmland Sign Program will be delivering a slew of brand-new signs with single cedar posts, all made by the incarcerated men at South Woods State Prison.

With the long-standing partnership the New Jersey Department of Corrections has with the Department of Agriculture, these signs now proudly represent over 2,843 preserved farms.

The Sign Shop at South Woods State Prison does not only create signs for preserved farmland, but they also make signs for organizations including the New Jersey Department of Transportation and New Jersey municipalities. But this is not the only shop that teaches important life and industrial skills, South Woods is also home to a bakery, textile and license plate workshop and a professional print shop, all run by the incarcerated population.

These operations are made possible by the work of DEPTCOR, New Jersey's correctional industry program. DEPTCOR provides high quality products and services manufactured and offered by adults incarcerated in New Jersey's correctional system.

By Mackenzie Fitchett



LEARNING TO SAVE LIVES: ACADEMY CLASS 255 TRAIN IN FIRST AID AND CPR



The Correctional Staff Training Academy Class 255 started their training in September with a class of 104 students. As part of their training, recruits participated in first aid and CPR classes in the fifth week of Academy. The group learned hands-on how to do CPR on adults, children and infants. They also learned how to use an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) along with practices and procedures for emergency situations. To finish the class, the group learned how to save people of all ages from choking by using abdominal thrusts, previously referred to as the Heimlich maneuver.

Photos by Mackenzie Fitchett



K9 UNIT GIFTED RENOVATED OBSTACLE COURSE THANKS TO BOY SCOUT

By Mackenzie Fitchett

On an unseasonably warm October day, Boy Scout Troop 36 from Toms River gathered to scrape, sand, paint and renovate the K-9 training facility at Central Recruitment Unit in New Lisbon. This hard work was the start of Boy Scout Cody Ammerman's Eagle Scout project.

According to Cody, he always had a love for animals, especially dogs, and always admired and looked up to law enforcement, including his dad, Lt. Chad Ammerman, who is a correction officer at Garden State Correctional Facility.

"I have always loved dogs and K-9 units and I always loved law enforcement," said Cody. "So for my Eagle Scout Project I wanted to do something for dogs, especially a K-9 unit...My dad is a correction officer so this was the perfect opportunity to help law enforcement as well as the dogs. When I realized how much rebuilding and restoration needed to be done, I figured it would be a great project."



The project started back in April of 2022 when Cody had his first meeting with the NJDOC about his idea to refurbish the K-9 training obstacle course. While the project originally started as renovating the obstacles that were in deteriorating shape, Cody soon discovered that the K-9 Unit was hoping to get a fence for the course back in 2020, and was more than happy to help with that request as part of his project.

Cody then started fundraising through businesses and collected other donations which, in the end, helped to fund the entire project. He then bought everything he needed, from paint and plywood to all sorts of tools, before asking for help from family and friends to get the project done.

After a full morning of hard work with help from the Special Operations Group, the Special Operations Response Team and the K-9 Unit, the group gathered for a K-9 demonstration and a cook-out lunch. Because of all the help given to Cody, the project was completed by late afternoon that same day.



The course now has freshly painted obstacles along with a brand new fence that will allow the K-9 unit to work with their dogs off-lead while working with scent boxes.



CINT NAMED THE "BEST OF THE BEST"

In Bridgewater, NJ at the TD Bank Ballpark, Home of the Somerset Patriots, the NJDOC Special Operations Group and Critical Incident Negotiations Team were awarded the "Golden Bullhorn" trophy at the State-wide Crisis Negotiation competition for the fourth year since its inception.

The competition took place on Oct. 13 and brought together CINT teams to network, evaluate operational issues and challenge each other through scenario-based role play activities.

This competition is hosted by the Newark FBI field office and Somerset County's Crisis Negotiations team. It has been held every year since 2014 with the exceptions of 2020, 2021, and 2022 due to COVID restrictions. The competition is open to any law enforcement crisis negotiations teams in NJ.

As the day began, the teams were briefed on a theoretical scenario that mimicked a real world event or crisis. This year, the scenario was based off an incident in which a homicide suspect shot a police officer who had come to his house to execute a search warrant. The subject then barricaded himself in a house with a two week old baby. The Crisis Negotiations teams were called in to attempt to deescalate the situation and encourage the barricaded subject to surrender to the responding tactical teams.

The team consisted of a primary negotiator, a coach, two people on "boards" (who track the information obtained and put it up on large poster boards where the primary negotiator can see it), an intelligence officer, a liaison to outside teams (such as SWAT command / incident commander), a person assigned to work with any third parties that are used for intel gathering or possibly as a third party intermediary, a timekeeper to track the overall incident development, and a team leader who assigns the other team members to their position and keeps the entire team focused and on track to accomplish their mission.

"Though the competition was fierce and the results were close, I am proud to announce that the NJDOC team emerged triumphantly," said Lt. David Kuperberg, CINT Team Leader.



"CINT has proven once again that our team is the 'Best-of-the-Best' when it comes to crisis negotiations."

The evaluators were members of the FBI and Somerset County Crisis Negotiations Teams and monitored the Negotiations Operations Center setup, the ability to work as a team, and whether the negotiations proceeded according to established guidelines and techniques.

Each category of the competition was scored based on how well the teams performed and the NJDOC winning score was 13 points ahead of the second place team. The feedback received was overwhelmingly positive from all of the evaluators, who particularly praised teamwork and the diversity of the team's work backgrounds and experience.

This is not the first time the team has taken home the special "Golden Bullhorn" award. The team previously won the award in 2015, 2017 and 2019. According to Lt. Kuperberg, the trophy is particularly meaningful because it is named in memory of NJDOC's late Major Edwin Rodriguez, who was the former team leader of CINT.

The team was recently welcomed to Central Office by NJDOC Commissioner Victoria L Kuhn Esq. who took time to congratulate them and give them certificates and specialty challenge coins.

CINT is always looking for new members from both the civilian and custody staff. If you are interested in joining the 'best-of-the-best,' reach out to Lt. Kuperberg at David.Kuperberg@doc.nj.gov.

The following is the list of team members who participated in the competition:

Lt. Jonathan Ash #1375 (GSCF)
Lt. David Kuperberg #1327 (NSP)
Sgt. Rashaun Green #1879 (BSP)
Sgt. Matthew Parsons #1657 (SWSP)
Sgt. Freddy Ramirez-Huertas #1733 (CTU)
OFC Monica Rivera #4248 (NJSP)
OFC Marcus Smith #7266 (GSCF)
OFC Vincent Tracy #3758 (EJSP)
Civilian Shanea Foster (Prog. Assist) (GSCF)
Civilian Joyce Rufolo-Prior (Prog. Specialist) (COHQ)
Civilian Kelly Scott (Asst. Supervisor of Education) (ADTC)