



INSIDE CORRECTIONS

Official Newsletter of the New Jersey Department of Corrections

VOLUME 26
ISSUE 5
Sept. - Oct. 2024



NJDOC Hosts First-Ever Civilian Day Awards

By Patrick Lombardi

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) hosted its inaugural Civilian Day on October 22, 2024, recognizing the hard work and integrity of our employees. An awards ceremony honored staff members and shed light on the invaluable and appreciated diligence and commitment that helps our department grow and succeed.

Departmental service awards were distributed in a dozen different categories and honored various staff members for their dedication and excellence. The event, held on Central Office grounds, was organized and facilitated by Civilian Day Awards Committee co-chairs Nicole Sargenti and Crista O'Neill.

“It was truly an honor to serve as a co-chair of the first-ever Civilian Day Awards Committee and to coordinate such a momentous event that meant so much to our civilian staff,” said Sargenti, who also was appointed as the Department’s Wellness Coordinator last

year. “The Committee worked tirelessly to coordinate a memorable event, and all of the award recipients were incredibly deserving of the honors they received.”

The Civilian Day Awards ceremony featured remarks by Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq, and Chief of Staff Kristina Chubenko, Esq. Awards were presented to employees by several members of the NJDOC’s executive staff.

“Having worked for the NJDOC for 20 years,” said Sargenti, “I can wholeheartedly say our agency is lucky to have such incredible people who selflessly go above and beyond both inside the workplace and within our communities.”

The Department plans to turn Civilian Day and its corresponding awards ceremony into an annual event. Both supervisory staff and colleagues of the awardees relished this day of recognition and were appreciative of the committee for organizing and promoting such a momentous day.

“I took great pride in serving as a co-chair of the Civilian Day Awards Committee, and it was a pleasure working alongside other staff to put this event together,” said O’Neill. “It was very rewarding to see the joy that this event brought to our staff and their family members. The award recipients were all truly deserving of this recognition.”

See page 4 for recipients

Inside this edition:

- » **Hispanic Heritage Month**, pg. 2
- » **Pigeonly Corrections**, pg. 3
- » **Suicide Prevention Month**, pg. 6
- » **Breast Cancer & Domestic Violence Awareness**, pg. 7

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage



The NJDOC's Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion hosted Raices Conectadas – or “Connected Roots” – in honor of **Hispanic Heritage Month**. This month of recognition is celebrated annually from September 15 to October 15, coinciding with several significant historical dates, including the start of the Mexican War of Independence from the Spanish Empire, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence of the Mexican Empire, and the independence days for Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Honduras, Nicaragua, Chile, and Belize.

Raices Conectadas, facilitated by “Master of Ceremonies” Sergeant Ruben Vargas, provided an opportunity for staff members to observe the contributions of Hispanic communities to our society through an array of diverse activities. Raices Conectadas included remarks from Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq.; Assistant Commissioner of Diversity & Legal Affairs Melinda Haley, Esq.; and Assemblyman Julio Marengo, as well as a leadership panel with longstanding and respected law enforcement and civilian employees of the Department (pictured above).

Veronica Gil of Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, Adam Cortes of the Healthcare Compliance Unit, Lieutenant Ninotchka Rodriguez of Northern State Prison, and Hector Cruz of Bayside State Prison, discussed their upbringings, inspirations, and how their Hispanic heritage and influences have positively impacted both their lives and careers.

Also during the event, Sergeant Wendoly Edwards of East Jersey State Prison moderated a Connected Roots Conversation and trivia. DEI Coordinator Clarissa Wheat hosted a demonstration of Hispanic art, and Senior Correctional Police Officer Lizette Anderson led “Rhythm of Our Roots” to actively engage attendees in an educational exploration of the historical and cultural significance of Hispanic dance (pictured below).




NJDOC to Implement New Mail-Processing Procedures

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) prioritizes the safety of the incarcerated population, staff and volunteers. To prevent the introduction of drugs into facilities, the NJDOC is implementing a mail-copying process for United States Postal mail for all correctional facilities.

Effective January 1, 2025, all non-privileged mail must be sent through regular mail to a central processing facility operated by Pigeonly Corrections. At the facility, all non-legal postal mail is opened, screened for contraband and scanned into an electronic document that closely resembles the original hardcopy, including color.

The scanned mail is then printed at a Pigeonly Corrections processing facility and shipped to the correctional facility indicated on the original envelope for distribution to the incarcerated recipients, eliminating the risk of contraband entering the facility. The scanned mail is also shared electronically with the correctional facility through a secure dashboard for further screening and review.

For more information on this new mail-scanning process, Pigeonly Corrections and relevant procedures, visit [nj.gov/corrections/pages/StayingConnected.html](https://www.nj.gov/corrections/pages/StayingConnected.html). 

NJDOC Documentary Wins Second Award and Educates Corrections Nationwide

Deputy Director of Communications Chris Carden's 2024 short documentary, "Be Not Afraid," continues to strike a chord within corrections communities.

"Be Not Afraid" follows music theory instructor Dante Coluccio and his class at Garden State Correctional Facility. Filmmaker Carden, who shot, edited, and produced the documentary, helped to illustrate the power of music and Coluccio's significance in the rehabilitative process for those incarcerated within the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC).

Following its premier at March's Garden State Film Festival, where it received the Broader Vision Award, the documentary captivated leaders of the Massachusetts Correctional Education Association (MCEA).

In September, Carden and Coluccio were invited to speak at the 2024 MCEA Fall Conference. The event offered a forum for educators and administrators working in correctional settings to train, network and discover new ideas critical to rehabilitation and reentry.

Before screening "Be Not Afraid," Carden and Coluccio discussed the lasting impact that teach-



ers have on incarcerated individuals and the role they play in rehabilitation.

In October, "Be Not Afraid" was accepted into and screened at the Queen City Film Festival. Nominated in two categories, the short documentary was honored to win the Best Jersey Film Award, marking the second accolade the film has received since its release earlier this year.

You can watch "Be Not Afraid" now on the official NJDOC YouTube page: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KWuCweGjRr4>. 

DEDICATION TO THE DEPARTMENT

Julian Craig, Maintenance, Central Office
Kimberly Flood, Office of Information Technology
Major James Forbes, Office of Information Technology (*honorary*)
James Frank, Field Services, Central Office
Thomas Justice, Office of Information Technology
Major Brian LaBonne, Office of Information Technology (*honorary*)
Gary Maholic, Office of Information Technology
Director Keith Mercantante, Office of Information Technology
Angel Negron, Office of Information Technology
William Poku, Office of Information Technology
Steve Rueda, Office of Information Technology
Atif Sattar, Office of Information Technology
Lei Shi, Office of Information Technology
Fred Snyder, Maintenance, Central Office
Terrance Washington, Office of Information Technology
Omar Williams, Office of Information Technology

DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE AWARD - SUPERVISORY

Lawrence Akins, Religious Services, East Jersey State Prison
Pamela Anderson, Healthcare Compliance Unit
Nicholas Calicchio, Division of Operations, Northern State Prison
Chanda Curtis, Human Resources, East Jersey State Prison
Melissa Johnson-Rogers, Special Investigations Division, Central Office
Christina Marrocco, Education, Bayside State Prison
Cher McCall, Community Engagement & Reentry Initiatives
Kerry Pimentel, Office of Community Programs
Kristin Valia, Classification, Mid-State Correctional Facility
Edward Volovar, DEPTCOR, South Woods State Prison
Jeffrey Weaver, Maintenance, Garden State Correctional Facility

DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE AWARD - NON-SUPERVISORY

Erica Bluestone, Social Services, Northern State Prison
Shana Gosik, Business Office, Mid-State Correctional Facility
Keith Hall, NJLEAD Unit
Bonnie Lutz, Human Resources, Central Office
Akin Oyewole, Storeroom, Adult Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Christy Ripper, DEPTCOR, Bayside State Prison
Rebecca Santiago, Social Services, New Jersey State Prison

INNOVATIVE THINKER AWARD

Krista Arnold, Classification, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility
Heather Barreto, Classification, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility
Brianna Burke, Human Resources, Central Office
Edward Haas, Office of Legal Affairs
Katrice Scott-Leonard, Office of Financial Management
Anthony Seay, Office of Financial Management
Tiffany Weis, Human Resources, Central Office

EXCELLENCE IN MENTORSHIP AWARD

Kimberly Brotzman, Human Resources, Edna Mahan Correctional Facility
Cindy China-Hart, Social Services, Adult Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Director Patrick Nogan, Division of Operations, Central Office
Glen Trahan, Food Services, Mid-State Correctional Facility

PEER-TO-PEER AWARD

Rodney Bullock, Security, Central Office
Stephanie D'Augustine, Education, South Woods State Prison
Shahida Felder, Office of Substance Abuse & Addiction Services
Wayne Lemma, Special Investigations Division, Central Office
Destiny Nardone, Education, South Woods State Prison
Wendy Ng, Equal Employment Division
Christian Porrovecchio, Education, East Jersey State Prison
Janice Rodriguez, Administration, Adult Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Patricia St. Aubyn, Division of Operations, Bayside State Prison
Raisah Thomas, Education, Northern State Prison
Sharon Trimber, Education, Garden State Correctional Facility
Mario Viera, Administration, Northern State Prison

COMMISSIONER'S ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Denise Cranmer, Division of Training, Recruitment & Professional Development
Sandra Leszczuk, Special Investigations Division, Central Office
Keristen Lloyd, Business Office, Bayside State Prison
Lasandra Orange, Division of Diversity & Legal Affairs

EMERGING LEADER AWARD

Patricia Byron, Division of Diversity & Legal Affairs
Paula Francis, Administration, Adult Diagnostic & Treatment Center
Ming Kong, Maintenance, Mid-State Correctional Facility
Emily Muller, Special Investigations Division, Central Office
Robert Smith, Human Resources, Central Office
Apha Sylla, Office of Community Programs

COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

Ashley Hughes, Classification, Bayside State Prison

MERVIN GANESH VETERAN/MILITARY SERVICE AWARD

Administrator Raymond Royce, Division of Operations, Mid-State Correctional Facility

DIVISION OF PROGRAMS & REINTEGRATION SERVICES

EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR AWARD

Esther Maurice, Chaplaincy Services, Central Office

DIVISION OF OPERATIONS ADMINISTRATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD

Marc Sim, Division of Operations, Northern State Prison

Photos from the ceremony are available on the NJDOC's official Flickr page: [tinyurl.com/CivilianDayNJDOC](https://www.flickr.com/photos/njdoc/)

Suicide Prevention Month:

Cultivating a Culture of Support to Save Lives

By Nicole Sargenti

Suicide: It's the only preventable killer, yet discussions surrounding the topic are generally shrouded in shame, secrecy and guilt. Many people speak openly about diagnoses for life-threatening diseases; however, when someone suffers from suicidal ideations, discussions appear taboo.

While suicidal ideations can be attributed to a mental-health diagnosis, oftentimes those considering suicide have no documented history of mental illness. Typically, suicidal ideations are situational in nature and appear as a result of major life events, such as financial troubles, divorce or child-custody disputes. There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to identifying who will commit suicide.



Families and friends suffer knowing a loved one is gone, questioning how they missed the signs or why their loved one couldn't talk to them, wondering what they could have done differently and feeling a sense of guilt for not being able to help. No longer should individuals suffer in silence.

In 2022 alone, nearly 50 thousand Americans lost their lives to suicide. This number is staggering, yet the risk is heightened for those working in law enforcement. Research shows that correctional staff, both custody and civilian, throughout the world are at an increased risk of self-harm compared to the general public.

Understanding the environmental factors and nature of working in a correctional setting is often one that not many can wrap their heads around. The continual fight-or-flight response that is elicited from working daily in a correctional facility can add stress and other health issues. Many correctional employees always feel "on duty," even at home.

The New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJDOC) is committed to addressing the factors that contribute to suicidal ideations and provides staff with an outlet to seek help. In 2023, Commissioner Victoria L. Kuhn, Esq., established the Self-Harm Working Group, which allows mental health and

wellness experts, both civilian and custody, to explore solutions to this ongoing crisis. The members are tasked with researching self-harm best practices as they relate to the correctional field, issuing messaging, and providing staff with the channels to seek necessary assistance. The group continues to build its repertoire to better serve this department's staff.


The NJDOC works with 4BlueNJ, a division of Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care National Call Center, to provide a confidential peer-support hotline. While the hotline is not specific to suicide and encompasses all levels of needed assistance, they can work to provide correctional staff with resources unique to the caller's situation and needs. The hotline is staffed by former correctional staff and can be used by all current and retired custody and civilian employees as well as their family members.

The Department and 4BlueNJ is in the process of developing plans to begin walking tours throughout the facilities, so as to offer staff availability to a mental health clinician or peer support on-site. In addition, the staff chaplaincy program is being reinvigorated to provide staff with an additional outlet and available presence in the institutions.



The Department continues to work tirelessly to ensure that the wellbeing of our staff is prioritized, changing the narrative and secrecy surrounding suicide. No one should fight alone in their darkest moments, and our staff remain our biggest allies.

Little moments and actions throughout our day can have monumental impacts on our colleagues' lives. Simply asking if an individual is considering self-harm or in need of assistance—and recognizing the signs associated with potential suicide risks—can make all the difference. By being verbal, vigilant and present for others, our action may be the key to saving someone's life.

Call or text **988** for the **Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**, available 24 hours a day. 

Honoring Domestic Violence Awareness and Breast Cancer Awareness

Domestic Violence Awareness Month, recognized in October, is a reminder of the injustices that can be suffered in one's own household. During the month, survivors and supporters are provided a platform to advocate for victims and to bring awareness to the dangers faced across the country. The month is represented by the color purple, symbolizing peace, courage, survival and a dedication to ending violence.

In early October, the Office of Victim and Trauma Services interlaced trees around Central Office grounds with purple bows and rooted lawn signs with purple ribbons in solidarity with survivors and those suffering. On October 17, the Department celebrated Purple Thursday or "Go Purple Day." Observed on the third Thursday of the month, this national day of action invites all to wear purple to show support for victims of domestic violence. Dedicated efforts such as this help to raise awareness, bringing us strides closer to ending this epidemic.

Tragically, communities also come together during the month to mourn the lives lost due to domestic violence. Professionals, advocates, and abuse survivors and their families take steps to enact change to prevent more senseless deaths. Through events and organized gatherings, groups committed to the cause, such as our Office of Victim and Trauma Services, can create a positive impact on millions of people—and **save lives**—both in the State of New Jersey and the entire United States of America.



The NJDOC hosted a **Breast Cancer Awareness Month** event at Central Office, featuring a presentation by Ellen Pagán Indoe, Program Director of the Rutgers Cancer Institute's Community and Outreach Engagement. She discussed the ScreenNJ Initiative as well as helpful information about breast cancer, including early detection and supporting people affected by the disease. The day also provided a platform for individuals to share their personal stories of strength and healing. Additionally, correctional facilities established informational tables and provided resources for staff on various days throughout October.

About one in eight women in the U.S. will develop invasive breast cancer, and it is the second-leading cause of cancer death in women, illustrating the poignancy of this disease. Thanks in part to awareness efforts like these, preventative action is taken early, and today there are nearly four million breast cancer survivors across the country. This is not just a figure on paper but rather representative of mothers and grandmothers who have more time with their children. Continuing to speak and provide research and resources to others is a meaningful way to ensure that our loved ones and colleagues lead happier, healthier and safer lives.

DID YOU KNOW?

Earlier this year, Saint Elizabeth University in Morristown announced its partnership with the Civil Service Commission to help State employees continue their education.

Full-time employees of the State of New Jersey are eligible for a 50-percent discount in tuition for a bachelor's degree in criminal justice.

"This partnership aims to enhance training, education and career advancement opportunities for individuals seeking to pursue an undergraduate degree, certificate or individual classes in the field of criminal justice," announced Saint Elizabeth University.

For more information on this partnership and the criminal justice program, please visit: steu.edu/academics/prof-studies/criminal-justice/ba-in-criminal-justice.html

Saint Elizabeth University
partners with
Civil Service Commission
to offer a cost-effective opportunity to State employees pursuing a criminal justice career.



Which fictional crime fighter's city is traditionally depicted as being located in New Jersey?

- A. Superman (Metropolis)
- B. Batman (Gotham City)
- C. Supergirl (National City)
- D. Blue Beetle (Palmera City)

Check back in the next edition of *Inside Corrections* for the answer!

Last edition's question: **New Jersey is the third-highest harvester of which produce?**

Answer: **Cranberries**

Follow the NJDOC online

