



Impact Georgia

January 2015 Newsletter

In This Issue

Pg. 2

Farewell to Division Director of Administration
Becky East



Pg. 3

Rutledge Veterans Reentry Program holds Stand Down

Pg.4

Around the Agency

Have a great story Idea?

Send to

Lisa

Rodriguez-Presley

rodri100@dcor.state.ga.us

High school classes begin at Lee Arrendale SP

Mountain Education Center Charter School brings opportunity to earn diplomas to offenders

Story and photo By Lisa Rodriguez-Presley

The teacher begins by taking attendance and as each name is called, the students reply, "here." Under ordinary circumstances, there is nothing remarkable about this daily ritual, but this is no ordinary classroom and these are not your average high school students. They are offenders at Lee Arrendale State Prison, and this is their first day of regular high school courses.

Classes began at the facility on January 4, and there are currently 33 offenders enrolled who are working toward their diplomas. Until now, even if they were only a few credits shy of gaining their high school diploma, the only option available for offenders was to obtain a General Education Diploma (GED). Through a partnership



Mountain Charter School began the first day of high school classes for 33 offenders on Jan. 4.

with Mountain Education Center Charter School, which operates at 11 sites in North Georgia, these women will now have

the chance to finish high school, and improve their chances of getting into college and getting (See High School Pg. 2)

Around the Perimeter with Tom McMurry

Story by Susan Megahee

Public Affairs sat down with recently hired Office of Information Technology Director, Tom McMurry who began his career with the Department on October 16, 2014. As Director, McMurry will oversee all activities related to systems development and implementation for the agency. Let's take a trip around the perimeter to learn about our newest leader in central office!

Q: Educational background: Bachelors degree in Business Administration from Georgia State.

Q: Previous positions: McMurry began his career working for Arthur Andersen LLP as an intern while a sophomore in college. Upon graduating from college, McMurry was promoted to Manager at Arthur Anderson and worked his way up through the ranks to Regional Manager of (See McMurry Pg. 3)



Calendar Events

Thursday, January 15
Board of Corrections Meeting

Monday, January 19
HOLIDAY
MLK Jr. Day

Tuesday, January 20-21
Ware State Prison Comprehensive Audit

Thursday, January 22
Forsyth/Monroe County Annual Meeting & Dinner

Tuesday, January 27
GDC Quarterly Awards Ceremony

Augusta DRC Commencement Ceremony

Thursday, January 29
Military Career Fair
Fort Gordon, Augusta

Rouse DRC Commencement Ceremony

(High School from Pg. 1)
a job upon their release.

Although a GED was designed to be a substitute for high school graduation, the two diplomas don't necessarily offer the exact same benefits, especially when it comes to getting into college. The GED Testing Service reports that 95 percent of colleges will accept a GED diploma, but this doesn't mean that a GED certificate will help you as much as graduating high school, particularly if you're applying to a competitive college. Having a high school diploma also gives offenders an edge in terms of employment.

"Having a high school diploma versus a GED makes a lot of difference to employers," said Arrendale's Chief Counselor Lori Fogle. "Obtaining their high school diploma shows employers that they were willing to go the extra mile to complete their education."

An experienced staff of teachers is working with the students and combines regular course instruction with online coursework. The classes are self-paced, and each student has an individual study plan designed to maximize their learning. A curriculum team constantly evaluates the content of each course, ensuring that the students are getting the most up-to-date information.

The offenders are in various stages of completing their diploma requirements. Some lack a few courses, while others only need to pass the Georgia High School Graduation Test. Dikeisha Thomas only had to pass the social studies por-

tion of the high school graduation test and within an hour of the first class beginning, had successfully completed it, overcoming the final hurdle in obtaining her diploma.

"Getting my diploma has been a dream and I really feel accomplished," she said. I have spent the last month studying and using flash cards to get ready for the test, and to finally finish it makes me feel wonderful."

Dikeshia plans to go to college and become a counselor for troubled teens. She has walked a mile in their shoes, and feels that her experiences will help her connect with them. Having her high school diploma brings her one step closer to being able to attend college and making that dream a reality.

"My mom and stepdad are really excited for me," she said. "They have supported me the whole time and are going to be at my graduation in the Spring. As the first graduate of the program, I will get to address the class. I just picture it being a wonderful day."

Dikeshia's excitement is shared by fellow students and Dr. Richard Behrens, Superintendent of Mountain Education Center Charter School.

"We are excited about helping these young people," he said. "Everyone involved with bringing this program to the Department of Corrections has been supportive and we think that this partnership will have a positive impact for many young men and women who are incarcerated and want to complete their high school education."

Staff bids farewell to Administration Division Director Becky East

On Jan. 6, the Department hosted a Farewell Celebration for Division Director of Administration, Becky East. The celebration was filled with many laughs as guests shared their memories of Becky.

Whether it was Assistant Commissioner Timothy C. Ward's story about the tilapia farm, General Counsel Rob Jones' trick about renaming a building on campus in her honor, or Mitzi Kellum's gift of a gold entitled parking space cone, the chapel was in a constant state of laughs and happiness.

Becky leaves the Department with eight years of faithful service to the agency and 26 years of faithful service to the state of Georgia. She will continue to serve the state in the capacity of the new Chief Financial Officer for the Georgia Department of Revenue.

GDC wishes you the very best!



(McMurry from Pg. 1)

Network and Server Operations during his 17 years with the company. McMurry then became the Vice President of Information Technology with Banker's Bank, serving for two years before accepting the position of Vice President of Information Technology with Lane Company. In his most recent position, McMurry served for seven years as the Chief Information Officer for the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS), where he was responsible for systems planning and effectiveness, the alignment of information technology with the agency strategic plan, and the establishment of department standards for hardware and application systems development.

Q: Why did you want to pursue a career in a correctional setting? I desired the challenge of a larger, more complex agency.

Q: What do you find most rewarding about working in Corrections? "IT is a portable unit...", McMurry explains that every sector, company, agency has an IT unit, and what is most rewarding about working in Corrections is that there is so much va-

riety in the divisions within the Department, each offering a unique and different challenge in the IT space.

Q: Proudest accomplishment? McMurry was CIO over an extensive, collaborative project at DDS that overhauled an archaic system to parallel four programs into one, while adhering to a specific deadline. The 18-month project met the completion deadline and the result was unprecedented, as the paralleled programs expedited the processing of driver's licenses, and offered a cohesive experience for the customers.

Q: What are some of your goals as the Director or OIT? Ensure IT aligns with the business strategic plan while adding value to the Department.

Q: What are some of the major challenges facing our Department, and or OIT? Change management, encouraging employees to embrace the change by demonstrating how the change can make their job more effective.

Q: What do you look forward to most working in this new role? Delivering on projects that are most important.

Q: What is your favorite quote? "Live as

if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever." -Mahatma Gandhi

Q: Do you have any hobbies? I enjoy any outdoor activity and being with my family.

Q: What is your favorite movie? "Remember the Titans"

Q: What music/artists are on your iPod? I like a variety of music: Bruno Mars, Luke Bryan, Maroon 5 and Carrie Underwood.

Q: What was the first concert you attended? Boston

Q: What was the first record you owned? Eagles-Hotel California LP

Q: What's your favorite website? As an IT guy, favorite site on IT news: cnet.com

Q: What's your favorite app? Flipboard

Q: What's your favorite book? The Bible and the Harry Potter series

Q: If you could be a fictional character, which one would it be and why? Indiana Jones...I'm always looking for an adventure!

Q: Do you have a celebrity look-a-like? ...struggling with this one...who do you think is my celebrity look alike??

Stand Down helps veterans back up, out into community

Content contributed by Rutledge Deputy Warden of Care and Treatment Ruthie Shelton

In times of war, exhausted combat units needing time to rest and recuperate were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative safety and shelter. Known as a "stand down," troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive letters, and en-

joy the camaraderie of friends in a safe environment. It afforded battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health, and overall sense of well-being.

Rutledge State Prison afforded the same opportunity to homeless veterans, veterans in need and veterans transitioning to the

community from the legal system during their own veterans reentry stand down on Dec. 5.

Many homeless veterans and veterans in need have experienced years of chronic or recurring readjustment issues since ending their military service. These issues are often inadequately addressed by traditional services to assist veterans. This is due in part to a lack of organized and effective collaboration among agencies, compelling veterans to go from one agency to another in efforts to access the different resources they need.

This lack of efficient support has led to veterans' frustration with the very government agencies and large institutions created to support them. A "Stand Down" brings these resources and service providers together in one place to offer a comprehensive system that inspires and assists homeless veterans and veterans in need to overcome their distrust and

feelings of isolation with the knowledge that they can address multiple problems at one time and place. It offers a safe environment where they can connect with people who have shared experiences and cultivate hope that they can rebuild their lives.

Veterans, who will be homeless at time of release from the legal system or in need of various services to successfully transition to the community, were able to benefit from obtaining information from subject matter experts (volunteers and professionals) that addressed their unique needs concerning, housing, employment, education, general benefit counseling, medical and behavior health services, financial assistance, and substance abuse services.

By empowering each veteran with information about services available in the community the Department is promoting a successful transition to the community and to reduce recidivism in the criminal justice system.



Veterans at Rutledge State Prison had the opportunity to speak with a variety of veterans' service providers during the Veterans Reentry "Stand Down," Dec. 5.

Around the Agency...



Officer Lance Ward's goal was to become a Firearm Adjunct with the Georgia Department of Corrections. The week before Thanksgiving, Officer Ward passed the 38 Revolver, Rifle and Shotgun classes. A score of 90% or better on all weapons was required to enter the Firearms Instructor Program. After acceptance into program, Officer Ward trained for two weeks on all weapons and the Meggitt Simulator. As a result, Officer Ward is now a Certified Firearms Adjunct Instructor and was awarded the TOPGUN Award. Congratulations Officer Ward!



On Dec. 19, Probation Officer Chavonne Battle of the Cordele Probation Office assisted the Cordele Police Department in "Shop with a Cop" day in Cordele. Officers from the Cordele and Crisp County Law Enforcement community went to local businesses to assist children in shopping for Christmas presents. Officer Battle assisted four children with their Christmas shopping.



The Columbus Day Reporting Center celebrated their eighth commencement ceremony on Dec. 16. The ceremony was held at Fourth Street Baptist Church. Columbus Day Reporting Center honored 20 graduates. The keynote speaker for this wonderful occasion was the Honorable John D. Allen, retired Senior Superior Court Judge of the Chattahoochee Judicial Circuit. Judge Allen gave words of encouragement to the graduates as he encouraged them to continue to take positive control of their lives.



Marquez Penamon was a 12 For Life student with the Georgia Department of Corrections during his senior year (2013-2014) at the Monroe County Achievement Center. He worked in the Office of Health Services (OHS) performing a variety of administrative functions. During his tenure in OHS, Marquez excelled in the performance of his work assignments. Prior to graduation, Marquez enlisted in the United States Army. After graduation, he went through Basic Training at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He received orders to report to Fort Huachuca in Sierra Vista, Arizona for Advanced Individual Training (AIT). He is receiving specialized training in Military Intelligence and scheduled to complete his AIT training on Feb. 12.

Like us on Facebook Check out our YouTube channel at [GACorrections](#) Tweet us at [@GA_Corrections](#)

MISSION

The Department of Corrections creates a safer Georgia by effectively managing offenders and providing opportunities for positive change.

VISION

To be recognized as the best corrections organization in the nation.



BRIAN OWENS
Commissioner

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Joan Heath
Director

Gwendolyn Hogan Managing Editor Lisa Rodriguez-Presley Editor/PA Specialist Susan Megahee PA Specialist