



Impact Georgia

February 2015 Newsletter

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Have a great story Idea?

Send to

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Governor Deal nominates new GDC Commissioner

DNR's Homer Bryson to assume command, Brian Owens heads to Board Of Pardons and Paroles

Gov. Nathan Deal announced on Feb. 2, that he has appointed former Department of Corrections Commissioner Brian Owens to the state Board of Pardons and Paroles, and nominated Georgia Department of Natural Resources Deputy Commissioner Homer Bryson to succeed Owens as Commissioner of Corrections. The nomination was approved by the Board of Corrections during the monthly board meeting Feb. 5. Owens will fill the Pardons and Paroles seat vacated by James E. Donald.

Bryson has served as the deputy commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources for the past four years. Prior to his current role, Bryson served as colonel of the DNR Law Enforcement Section, working his way up from conservation ranger. Bryson currently serves on the Georgia State Indemnification Commission, the Peace Officers' Annuity and Benefit Fund and the Peace Officers Association of Georgia, for which he is the legislative chair. He earned a bachelor's degree from Valdosta State College and a master's degree in Public Administration from Columbus State University.



Department of Natural Resources Assistant Commissioner Homer Bryson

First Lady shows support for GDC prison charter school



Mrs. Sandra Deal, First Lady of Georgia, takes time to talk to the first group of students to attend the new Mountain Charter High School at Lee Arrendale State Prison Jan. 28. She stressed the importance of this opportunity and encouraged them to work hard to complete their high school diplomas.

Story by Lisa Rodriguez-Presley

Sandra Deal, First Lady of Georgia, Commissioner Brian Owens, Assistant Commissioners Timothy Ward, Greg Dozier and Dr. L.C "Buster" Evans along with community leaders and educators officially opened the Mountain Charter High School in Lee Arrendale State Prison with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Jan. 28.

The ceremony marks another milestone in criminal justice reforms begun by Governor Nathan Deal, and as a former educator, Mrs. Deal voiced her

(See First Lady Pg. 3)

Calendar Events

Thursday, February 5
Board of Corrections
Meeting

Tuesday, February 10
Tifton DRC Commencement
Ceremony

Thursday, February 14
Valentine's Day

Thursday, February 19
Corrections Leadership
Institute Graduation

Military Career Fair
Moody AFB, Valdosta, GA

**Wednesday, February
25-27**
GPA Winter Conference

Thursday, February 26
Military Career Fair
Fort Gordon, Augusta, GA

DRC administrator makes a difference one "starfish" at a time

Story by Susan Megahee

As a child, Maria Stephenson, always wanted to be in the helping field and today she is doing just that, serving as the Center Administrator of the Macon Day Reporting Center (DRC), a non-resident program that targets high-need/high-risk offenders where drug dependency is the true underlying factor for their criminal activity. Responsible for the overall operation of the center, Stephenson's ultimate goal is helping people with getting their life back on track.

"There is nothing like the reward of seeing a probationer succeed and having them come back to say 'thank-you' for helping {them} get their life back."

Stephenson is not only passionate for the participants, in the DRC program, she is also passionate about her staff, "It is truly rewarding for me to see my staff take pride in the product of their work. I truly enjoy seeing my staff smile at their successes after working with difficult participants," said Stephenson.

In fact one of Stephenson's goals as Center Administrator is to provide great leadership to her staff, and for her staff to have success throughout their careers. And success in her career path is how Stephenson landed where she is today.

Stephenson started her professional career in 2005 serving as a Program Assistant with the Department of Juvenile of Juvenile Justice. In 2006, she accepted a transfer promotion with the Secretary of State as an Investigative Assistant and in 2007, she began her career with the Department of Corrections, serving as a Probation Officer with the Macon Probation Office. As a Probation Officer, she supervised probationers under Max, High, and Standard levels of supervision and also handled special caseloads serving also as the Substance Abuse Aftercare Services Officer and the Community Service Work Coordinator.

It was while she was an Aftercare Officer that she began first assisting the Macon DRC, knowing that the participants, upon successful completion of the program, would soon be on her caseload. As she assisted at the DRC, her interest in Substance Abuse increased which led to her decision to transfer and serve as a Probation Officer at the Macon DRC in September 2011. At the DRC, Stephenson also served as a Field Training Officer for the Macon Judicial Circuit. On October 1, 2012, Stephenson was promoted to Center Administrator of the Macon

DRC, the role she currently serves.

In this position she is responsible for the success of the facility and managing daily operations. She oversees 12 staff members and over 100 participants. "It is my responsibility to ensure participants receive individualized programming according to their assessed needs in an effort for participants to enter recovery and reduce recidivism."

One way that Stephenson is concerting efforts toward reducing recidivism is through her desire for the Macon DRC to increase GED completions. Stephenson is working with her staff to enhance methods in which participants achieve hours toward their GED; making use of online programs and reaching out to various employers in the community to gain partnerships for the participants.

The rewards of helping others are countless for Stephenson. "The most rewarding part of my job is seeing the participants succeed. The look on the face of some participants when they walk across the stage during commencement is priceless. This is sometimes the only time these participants have completed a task, achieved a goal, wore a graduation cap and gown, or had family members and friends cheer them on for something positive. To see that we saved at least

one 'starfish' is a reward," said Stephenson.

One "starfish" story Stephenson recalls is that of a DRC graduate who was on her Aftercare caseload. "This participant went through the DRC program a few times because she couldn't get it right. I saw a lot more in her than she saw in herself," Stephenson recalls. "She was a success waiting to continue flourishing."

Stephenson continued working with the girl and once the girl got it right, she didn't look back. "There are times where all a person may need is for someone to be dedicated in helping them get back something they have lost along the way."

This participant now comes back to the program to help others. She speaks for commencements, Recovery Month, intakes, sharing her testimony. She is successfully employed, married, and now has custody of her children. "I am so proud of her and her successes," Stephenson said. She is one of many reasons why Stephenson is passionate about what she does; helping others to get their life back on track, one starfish at a time.





(First Lady from Pg. 1)

support for the newly established Mountain Education Charter School at Lee Arrendale State Prison.

“Reforming the criminal justice system has been a major priority for my husband, Nathan Deal,” she said. “I am proud to support programs such as Lee Arrendale State Prison’s new Charter School venture that will promote public safety by giving inmates job skills, which is critical to preventing recidivism. I want to thank the Georgia Department of Corrections, Mountain Education Center, and Warden Kennedy for exploring new options for criminal justice reform.”

The school currently has 33 students in various stages of completion of their high school diploma. The goal, according to Assistant Commissioner Dr. Buster Evans, is to graduate 20 students each year from the program and eventually, expand to other facilities.



Sandra Deal, First Lady of Georgia, Commissioner Brian Owens, Assistant Commissioners Timothy Ward, Greg Dozier and L.C. “Buster” Evans, Wardens Kathleen Kennedy and Brooks Benton, FOM Kathy Seabolt, Chaplain Kemmie McNeese, Mountain Charter School Superintendent Dr. Richard Behrens and Dikeisha Thomas, the first graduate of the Mountain Charter High School at Lee Arrendale State Prison, celebrate the official opening of the program with a ribbon cutting ceremony held at the prison on Jan. 28.



GDC’s Col. Arnold Smith, U.S. Army (Ret.) spoke with military members about the many careers available in corrections during the Military Career Fair at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Ga, Jan. 29.

GDC’s Military Career Fairs continue throughout Georgia

Story by Lisa Rodriguez Presley
Photo contributed by Masha White

The Georgia Department of Corrections is hiring! As part of our ongoing commitment to our veterans and our community, GDC is holding Military Career Fairs at locations throughout the state, twice monthly. The most recent occurred at Fort Gordon in Augusta, Ga. and as a result, five individuals were hired on the spot with several more beginning the hiring process.

In some locations, the access

is limited to personnel who have access to the base, but many locations allow entry to the base by the public to attend.

Dates and locations are posted on the department’s Facebook page and updated on both the Department of Corrections’ website and GDCjobs.com.

If you know a veteran who is seeking a new career in law enforcement, there are hundreds of jobs available in various GDC facilities throughout Georgia.

UPCOMING MILITARY CAREER FAIRS	
FEBRUARY 19	FEBRUARY 26
MOODY AIR FORCE BASE	FORT GORDON
VALDOSTA, GA	AUGUSTA, GA
10 AM - 2 PM	10 AM - 2 PM



Around the Agency...



*GDC is preparing to launch our **Pinterest** page! Stay tuned to Facebook, Twitter and Captiva for more details!*



Remember that photo of your co-worker with the 1980's hair? How about the officer, who is now your boss, sporting a Tom Selleck mustache? We want your throwback photos for Facebook! Every Thursday is Throwback Thursday and we are looking for pictures of days gone by here at GDC. Photos can be emailed to Public Affairs at: smegah00@dcor.state.ga.us

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.



Homer Bryson
Commissioner

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