

THE RESOURCE

A Publication Of The Mississippi Department Of Corrections
Christopher Epps, Commissioner



Volume 11
Issue 4
April 2009

SPECIAL EDITION

**Always do
more than
is required
of you.**

Chris Epps

**CHRISTOPHER B. EPPS
NOW THE LONGEST SERVING COMMISSIONER IN
MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS HISTORY**

TO MY MDOC FAMILY - THANK YOU, AGAIN

The Commissioner's Corner

In October, 2008, I used this column to say thank you for your efforts to achieve the ACA Golden Eagle Award. Now I have another milestone to thank you for, but this time it's a personal one. On February 17, 2009, I became the longest serving commissioner in MDOC's history.

Since I have been employed with the agency, I have served under ten commissioners and interim commissioners. Each of them had their merits and took the agency in different directions based on their experience and the philosophies of the administrations that appointed them. Regardless of the differences in the various commissioners, they have all had one thing in common. They were dependent on the MDOC staff for their successes. Likewise, I have been, and continue to be, dependent on you for my successes.

When I began my career in 1982 as a correctional officer at the Mississippi State Penitentiary, MSP was Mississippi's only prison. There were 5,229 inmates. The agency budget was \$33,790,377. Correctional officers' salaries were \$11,024.04. And, Morris Thigpen was the Commissioner. In those early days I, like all new officers, needed and received the support of my fellow officers and superiors. They were there to ensure that I had a safe workplace, the resources to do the job and experienced people to guide me through the mine field that is corrections.

During my time with the agency between the time I was a CO and when I became commissioner, I held a variety of posts, including various security ranks, Case Manager, Deputy Superintendent of Security, Director of Records and Classification, Chief of Staff, Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections, and Deputy Commissioner of Institutions. Each time I entered a new post, a whole new learning experience would begin and the staff around me would be there to ensure that I got the correct information and background to be successful. Each new post was a reaffirmation that success in the MDOC is bred from support.

When I was Superintendent of Security at Parchman I was responsible for a 16,000 acre prison complex with 26 housing units and support structures. Let me repeat, 16,000 acres and make it real clear that no single individual can even simply patrol that much land, much less examine it for security problems. This one obvious fact serves as testimony to the tremendous support I received from all of the security personnel, ERT, K-9 and the institution at large. It was the combined effort of all staff that ensured an orderly running institution.

As Chief of Staff, I oversaw public information, planning, and the agency's legal staff. My primary responsibilities were the overhaul of agency policies and procedures and to develop a positive public relations strategy. We needed policy documents that effectively communicated the will of the administration without unnecessarily burdening staff with pointless regulations. The result was fewer lawsuits with a higher percentage won by the agency. People see policies with signatures of the commissioner and attorney but they probably never know the number of eyes that read the documents before they are signed. The reason we were able to turn out such good product during those days is that we had superintendents, wardens and a host of other staff reviewing them for effectiveness before they ever went to the executive staff.

Understanding the need to bolster morale, I implemented a system to ensure positive stories were continually before the press to demonstrate the contributions and professionalism of agency staff. As it is today, this effort could only be successful with the full

support of staff across the state. People responded, the word got out of MDOC's benefit to the state and policy makers came through with the larger support we needed.

Prior to my becoming Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections (DCCC), field officers used their personal weapons and vehicles on the job. They incurred damaged property, reduced morale and the dangers associated with being ill-equipped. Bullet-proof vests were the material of fantasies. Upon my assuming the post, staff were open with me regarding the problems they faced on the job and they readily made suggestions. Through their ideas and support, we were able to ensure that officers were provided with vehicles, weapons, vests and other personal protective equipment. Staff also received training in the use of these new aids. Staff responded to the new equipment by using it responsibly and increasing productivity, thereby encouraging policy makers to continue funding these resources.

As Deputy Commissioner of Institutions, I was responsible for a prison system far different than when I began my career. I inherited three state prisons, a network of private prisons and regional jails, and multiple release programs. Staff worked with me to ensure proper implementation of the state-of-the-art OffenderTrak and Caseload Explorer systems for more efficient data entry and retrieval by staff. The implementation of these new systems was a burden to all involved but staff maintained the vision of the improvements that were possible if we all stuck to the plan. Consequently, staff today have better tools for doing their jobs.

During my term as commissioner, the agency has continued to move forward with improved classification tools, better inmate phone monitoring, cost cutting measures and other performance enhancing programs. All of this has occurred while the agency continued its accreditation effort in pursuit of ACA's Golden Eagle Award. Throughout all of this, staff ranging from deputy commissioners to line level officers have been supportive and seen to it that all of these efforts succeeded.

As you can see, there is a single thread that has existed throughout my career. That thread is the support of my fellow MDOC employees. Each of you have in your own way sought to support me and guide me. You have sacrificed to redouble your efforts when we were implementing new systems. You continually provided the necessary information for better decision making and for seeking support from elected policy makers. You have used the resources gained in responsible ways. You have been positive in your attitude and in your public words about the agency. You have recognized that good outcomes require hard work. And, you have made my years a success.

For this support I will never be able to fully thank you, but I can at least put the words to the reality and let you know that I recognize your efforts and that, in great part, I owe my successes to you. Regardless of what further positions I may hold here or abroad, I will always hold the staff of the Mississippi Department of Corrections in the highest regard.

Thank you



Christopher B. Epps
Commissioner
Mississippi Department of Corrections

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Mississippi Department of Corrections Commissioners Chronologically Listed

2002 August 31	Christopher Epps	Currently Serving
2000 April 1	Robert Johnson	2002 August 30
1997 July 1	James Anderson	2000 March 31
1995 March 7	Steve Puckett	1997 August 31
1994 September	Stewart Murphy	1995 March 6
1992 April 1	Eddie Lucas	1994 September 20
1989 January 4	Leroy Black	1992 June 30
1988 July 1	Charles Jackson	1989 January 3
1987 July 7	Gene Scroggy	1988 June 30
1987 March 1	Don Cabana	1987 July 6
1980 September 1	Morris Thigpen	1987 February 28
1977 August 1	John Watkins	1980 August 31
1977 January 1	Allen Ault	1977 July 31
1976 July 1	Ellis McDougle	1976 December 31

National Longevity Ranking For Corrections Commissioners

Commissioner Christopher B. Epps is the fifth longest serving corrections commissioner currently in office in the United States: as follows:

15.2 years	Arkansas	Larry Norris
9.0 years	Rhode Island	A.T. Wall
8.0 years	Pennsylvania	Jeff Beard
7.7 years	West Virginia	Jim Rubenstein
6.5 years	Mississippi	Christopher Epps

Brief Overview

Christopher B. Epps was appointed Commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) by former Governor Ronnie Musgrove, August 30, 2002. He was reappointed to the post on January 13, 2004 by Governor Haley R. Barbour.

Commissioner Epps started his career with the Mississippi Department of Corrections in 1982 as a correctional officer at the Mississippi State Penitentiary.

Having served in the armed forces since 1984, Commissioner Epps received an honorable discharge from the Mississippi Army National Guard after attaining the rank Lieutenant Colonel.

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From Correctional Officer To Commissioner - MDOC Positions Held By Commissioner Epps

February 1982	Correctional Officer	June 1985
January 1985	Disciplinary Hearing Officer/Investigator	June 1985
July 1985	Correctional Case Manager	September 1988
October 1987	Corrections Case Management Supervisor	November 1988
January 1988	Director of Treatment Services	August 1988
December 1988	Deputy Superintendent/ Chief of Security	July 1992
August 1992	Director of Offender Services/Treatment	March 1995
September 1994	Director of Records	March 1995
April 1995	Chief, Special Staff	August 1995
September 1995	Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections	July 2000
July 2000	Deputy Commissioner of Institutions	August 2002
August 2002	Commissioner	Present

Memorable Achievements As Commissioner of Corrections

Over the course of his tenure as Commissioner, Christopher Epps has successfully implemented numerous programs enhancing the agency’s objectives. Thus far, his impression on the correctional profession has made a major positive impact on policies implemented and cost saving mechanisms. The revamping of the agency through various reforms highlights his vision for public safety, cost efficiency and his tireless commitment and dedication to public service.

On August 11, 2008, the American Correctional Association (ACA) presented its highest honor for commitment to excellence – the EAGLE AWARD – to the Mississippi Department of Corrections. MDOC was only the 14th state correctional system in the nation to claim this accomplishment.

In January 2008, MDOC Field Services Division of Community Corrections became the 15th Field Services Division in the world to be ACA accredited.

In 2005 all three (3) state prisons achieved accreditation by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care for meeting correctional healthcare standards and for providing quality healthcare to offenders.

During FY 2005, MDOC achieved a \$27 million cost savings for the state of Mississippi as a result of the agency’s effort to streamline day-to-day operations in reference to HB 1279. As the only state agency to be removed from State Personnel Board overview for one year, MDOC established cost avoidance measures that included a reduction of 600 staff persons, elimination of positions, and agency reorganization. The agency was streamlined down to bare necessities.

Commissioner Epps announced the appointment of the first woman Deputy Commissioner of Corrections in the history of the agency in October of 2002, and in December of 2004, the state’s first woman superintendent for a state prison institution in Mississippi was appointed.

RECEPTION GIVEN TO HONOR COMMISSIONER EPPS

On Monday, March 9, 2009, the MDOC executive staff honored Christopher B. Epps by organizing and hosting a reception to commemorate his becoming the longest serving Mississippi Department of Corrections commissioner. The reception was held at the Fairview Inn located off of State Street in Jackson. Guests were treated to hors d'oeuvres and assorted desserts. The list of attendees was short but distinguished, including Governor Haley Barbour, members of the house and senate corrections and appropriations committees, members of the commissioner's family, a few of the commissioner's close personal friends, former MDOC commissioners and the current MDOC executive staff.



Governor Haley Barbour (right) raises a toast to Christopher B. Epps (left) for having become Mississippi's longest serving commissioner of corrections during a celebration honoring the commissioner's service on March 9, 2009.

Deputy Commissioner of Community Corrections Lora Cole was the first speaker to address the gathering. Ms. Cole recapped a variety of Commissioner Epps' previous posts, accomplishments as commissioner, and expressed the sentiments of the executive staff regarding his tenure as head of the MDOC.

The former longest serving MDOC Commissioner, Morris Thigpen, who is currently director of the National Institute of Corrections spoke regarding his tenure with the MDOC, the environment in the MDOC when Commissioner Epps began his career, Commissioner Epps' performance and the national recognition he has received. His speech ended by presenting Commissioner Epps with a plaque commemorating his becoming the longest serving MDOC commissioner.



Senate Corrections Committee Chairman Willie Simmons (Left) and House Corrections Committee Chairman Bennet Malone (Right) join with Commissioner Epps (Center) in commemorating Epps becoming the longest serving corrections commissioner in Mississippi history.



Corrections Commissioner Christopher B. Epps (Left) is joined by former longest serving MDOC commissioner Morris Thigpen (Right) to help commemorate Epps becoming the current longest serving MDOC Commissioner.

Morris Thigpen was followed by the keynote speaker, Governor Haley Barbour. Governor Barbour provided a humor-laced presentation of his time with Commissioner Epps. He addressed the decision to hold him over from the Musgrove administration, the advancement of the agency under his administration and the need for strong, fiscally responsible management in the upcoming years. Governor Barbour concluded by offering a toast to Commissioner Epps for his service to the state of Mississippi.

Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Finance Rick McCarty followed Governor Barbour to present Commissioner Epps with a portrait painted by Jackson artist Tony Davenport. Mr. McCarty reiterated sentiments expressed by former speakers and expressed his appreciation for the job Commissioner Epps has done.



Dr. Fannye Love (Left) joins son Christopher B. Epps (Right) in commemorating his becoming the longest serving corrections commissioner in Mississippi history. Centered between them is the commemorative painting presented to Commissioner Epps by the MDOC Executive Staff.

Lastly, Commissioner Epps addressed the group, expressing appreciation to Governor Barbour, assembled members of the Mississippi Legislature, former MDOC Commissioners, family and friends. He spoke of the importance of the diligence, competence and professionalism of agency staff and ensured the group that MDOC has the finest employees of the state agencies. He took the opportunity to present his wife, Catherlean, with a bouquet of red roses for her years of steadfast support.



THE RESOURCE

CAREER PROFILES Commissioner Christopher B. Epps

Resource:

What was your initial reason for seeking employment with the Mississippi Department of Corrections?

Commissioner Epps:

I was a school teacher in Drew and was engaged to be married. Due to an application I had completed during career day at Mississippi Valley State University, I was contacted by the administration at Parchman and they discussed the various shifts they had that would allow me to work at the penitentiary and keep my teaching job.

I kept getting calls to ask if I would take the job. With the need to provide a home and the desire to start a family, I decided that I would need more income. This led me to accept the job that was offered at Parchman, working at Unit 29.

It worked out that I was making more as a correctional officer than as a teacher. I worked first and third watch while I continued to teach until 1985. In 1985, I began to look at the upward mobility the MDOC offered and decided to make a career out of corrections.

Resource:

What opportunities have you passed up pursuing this career?

Commissioner Epps:

Early on in my career, again due to an application I had completed during career day at Mississippi Valley State University, I started getting calls from the officials at the federal prison in Memphis asking me to take a position with them. I came close to going to work for them, more than once. Each time Colonel Wayne Flemming, who was widely respected at Parchman, would talk to me and persuade me to stay. A couple of those efforts to get me to stay resulted in promotions.

In 1997, the federal prison in Yazoo City was interested in hiring me. They made a good offer but it wasn't enough for me to give up what I had with MDOC.

Probably the biggest opportunity came in 2000 when I was offered the post of commissioner for the California Department of Corrections. For a corrections professional, it was a golden opportunity. I seriously looked at that situation but two things made me stay with the MDOC. First, the CDOC has a union that is highly involved and I decided that adding that to the usual mix of interest (state circuit courts, legislative pressures, ACLU, budgets, the agenda of the governor's office and federal courts) would be more stress than I wanted. Secondly, I am a Mississippian. I serve the state of Mississippi and am happy to do so. I wasn't looking to leave.

Since I was appointed commissioner I have had a number of opportunities to become a consultant; however, I am where I want to be.

Resource:

How have your career intentions been changed by opportunities with the MDOC?

Commissioner Epps:

First and probably the biggest change is that I went to college and earned a degree with the intention of being a teacher and later left the field to pursue a career that was based on a job that I had gotten to supplement my teaching income.

As far as ambitions are concerned, I had always wanted to be an FBI agent and even applied for the job in 1983. There were 894 of us that tested. I passed the test, but wasn't selected during the interview process. As time passed and I thought about pursuing the FBI again, my career in corrections was developing to a point that I lost interest.

Resource:

Looking back, if the interview had gone differently, do you think you would have had the same success with the FBI as in corrections?

Commissioner Epps:

No. It would have been a challenge and would have been rewarding, but I don't think that career would have ever matched what I have had with the MDOC. My time in this agency has been great and I wouldn't want to trade it for another career.

Resource:

What was the biggest hurdle in your career and how did you overcome it?

Commissioner Epps:

Over 27 years of service, a person can rack up a number of hurdles. On the whole I have enjoyed my career but a few definite hurdles come to mind.

My biggest hurdle was the little cliques. There have always been those groups that think they are in the know or are bonded through some negativity and they will always exist. A person has to be diligent and not get drawn into this type of situation. Associating with the wrong group can hurt more than a career; it can hurt your attitude and reputation. At the same time, by avoiding the different cliques, I didn't build some of the associations that could have benefited me when seeking promotion. Overall, even with any dampening of my advancement, avoiding those situations was the right decision.



CAREER PROFILES

Commissioner Christopher B. Epps

As odd as this might sound, one of my earliest hurdles was having a degree. We used to have policy manuals that filled two three inch binders. We called them the green books because the binders and paper in them were green. As a new officer, I wanted to see the policy books to learn as much about the job as I could. My sergeant became intimidated by this and made sure to let me know he was unhappy. He eventually retired as a lieutenant.

Of course I have also faced some politics. When I applied for case manager supervisor I had to go through three interview processes before I got the job. The politics was so open and bold that I was actually told that I was the number one candidate and had the best interview so I needed to withdraw my name so the job could go to someone that was using political connections. The third interview was conducted by executive staff level personnel from headquarters and nobody asked me to withdraw that time. This same kind of politics later cost me an appointment as a superintendent. Looking back, I still came out of it OK. If I had moved that far, that fast, I might have placed myself in a bad position. Having to wait, helped eliminate any perception of being too young when I began to be considered for executive level posts.

At one point, I had a commissioner who thought the superintendent (Steve Puckett) and I were after his job. We weren't, but that didn't stop him from causing a lot of serious problems for both of us, and a number of others that got in his way.

While overcoming all of these problems, I worked to learn patience and let God take care of it. There were some times that I would want to walk away from everything, but I would discuss the situation with my family and let cooler heads prevail. I always try to remain humble. We all have someone to answer to. President Obama just got the stimulus bill through congress. Whether or not a person likes this president or believes in the bill, the point is, even the president has someone he still has to answer to. When a person keeps his role in perspective, it is easy to remain humble, even when being told you're the best, but the job isn't yours.

Resource:

What steps have you taken to ensure success in your career?

Commissioner Epps:

I get asked to give speeches all over the place these days. I entitled one of the speeches I like the best "The Road To Success Is Always Under Construction." I think this is the perfect analogy. Just look at the road construction around Jackson and the state. The destinations don't change but the

means of getting there do. They continually improve to make the journey safer, faster and more pleasant. The same thing holds true for us and our own roads to success.

I always keep improving my education and training. It pays to try different things, because all types of knowledge build upon each other. The benefits of some educational experience or training may not be immediate but later, down the road, it will pay off.

I used to take special details with no additional compensation, and sometimes at my own expense, just for the experience. Again, it all eventually pays off.

Don't burn bridges; you may need them again one day. If you want to be respected, be respectful of others.

Regardless of your political leanings, don't align yourself with any politics or party. Your professional responsibility is to the job. That said, keep your priorities right: God is first, family is second and the job is third. I have been fortunate to have success and it is based on these priorities.

Be loyal to your supervisor. Prospective supervisors interviewing you will take into account whether or not they think you can be trusted not to undercut them. Word gets around when an employee is speaking against his chain of command.

Words like honesty, integrity, morality and values are ones upon which a life should be built. These words all relate to the most important aspect of all, have faith in a supreme being; mine is God.

Resource:

At what point in your career did you realize your path was leading to a high office in the agency?

Commissioner Epps:

In 1985 I was pulled from the ranks to serve as a disciplinary hearing officer. I knew that there were a lot of other people that could have served that purpose but I was chosen, so someone had to be noticing me. Then, in 1988, I received a call from Governor Ray Mabus, while he was out of the country, asking me if I would serve in the number two spot at Parchman. The post was Deputy Superintendent of Treatment and Security. The post was over everything except the Superintendent and the Administration and Finance area. At that time, appointments within the agency were being screened and seconded by the Commissioner of Public Safety. This left no doubt that I had gotten the attention of the right people.



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CAREER PROFILES Commissioner Christopher B. Epps

Resource:

What was the biggest step in your career and how did you prepare for the change?

Commissioner Epps:

With a grin that says 'you must be joking', Becoming Commissioner. I had gone back to school to complete my masters and completed Command and General Staff College in the military. Beyond that, I supported Commissioner Johnson. As with all seated commissioners, paying attention to the successes and failures of others provides an idea of the most prudent ways to accomplish goals.

Resource:

Which of the posts that you have held would you say was the most difficult?

Commissioner Epps:

The most difficult job I've had was easily as the deputy superintendent at Parchman. When I became deputy superintendent at Parchman, it was **the** state penitentiary. There were 5,781 inmates and 1,800 staff. The institution had 56 lockdown beds so we often had to take an offender out of lockdown before he had completed his disciplinary days to make room to place another inmate. With a lack of management beds and a prison at its capacity, the management of problem offenders was difficult. On top of that, the governor at that time, Ray Mabus, was dedicating all available resources to education so we were not a priority.

Some of the pressure eased in January 1989 with the opening of the South Mississippi Correctional Institution. Then on September 5, 1990, Unit 32 opened. With 1000 lock down cells, we finally had an effective tool for segregating the most disruptive offenders. Even with these new resources it was still a difficult job. There was one afternoon I remember when my wife told me she wanted me to go shopping with her. I tried to get out of it until she informed me that it had been six months since I had been off the grounds of Parchman. I conceded and went. The job kept me so busy that I had no idea of how much time had passed.

The other difficulty was that there were security employees that had been there for years before I was initially employed. To see this young black officer rise at the pace I was rising was disturbing to them and they weren't real anxious to follow my directives. Some of the employees resigned. With time these feelings began to fall away and ultimately we were all stronger, having proven ourselves to each other.

Resource:

What do you consider the best benefits of your career to date?

Commissioner Epps:

I currently have approximately 31 years toward state retirement. Twenty-seven of these years are with MDOC and over three years are a combination of personal and medical leave. Without getting into actual dollar figures, I will have a great retirement. It will get even better when my military retirement kicks in at age sixty.

I have always strived to maintain humility in my life and to remember the people who helped me along the way, but I have to be honest and say the national recognition I have received is very rewarding. I serve on the executive board of the American Correctional Association as its treasurer. I am the vice president of the Southern States Correctional Association, which places me on the SSCA Executive Board. The position I have achieved with MDOC has also resulted in my serving on a variety of national boards. It is always nice to have achievement recognized by your peers. More importantly, my family is proud of me, and my grandmother would have been even prouder.

I'm a person that likes to keep a historical perspective. It makes me proud to have several accomplishments of historical note. I had the honor of appointing the first two females to executive level positions within the agency. My administration managed to get back-to-back realignments for over eighty percent of the agency's employees. In 2005, each of the three state run institutions were accredited through the National Commission on Correctional Health Care. And, we received the ACA Eagle Award.

There is a freedom that comes with being 48 years old and having options for the future. I have had an increase in quality of life that is very rewarding. I am able to experience, and provide for my family, higher quality material possessions than I could have otherwise.

Mostly though, my greatest reward is in the experience I have had. In hindsight, my experiences have been so informative and rewarding, I would have done most of the jobs free.

Resource:

What were your initial reactions about leaving Parchman and moving to Jackson?

Commissioner Epps:

I didn't want to leave. I was director of records and classification and had the offices running well. My wife was, and still is, vice president of Mid-Delta Home Health and Hospice. We lived on the grounds of Parchman paying \$106.50 a month in rent, with no utilities. I had a state vehicle assigned to me, but was able to walk across the street to my



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Commissioner Christopher B. Epps

office. And, my kids were in school with a stable routine. My life was good. My family was set and to move meant disrupting everything.

My opposition ran into a brick wall named Governor Kirk Fordice. Governor Fordice addressed me in a manner that can only be understood by people who had a chance to talk to him. He let me have it. He said that I professed to want to serve the state of Mississippi and that the new job in Jackson was where my service was needed.

The governor, and the raise he offered, did the trick and, after talking it over with my family, I decided to move. I lived with a cousin that had a home in west Jackson. In 1996, we built a home and I moved my family here. If it hadn't been for the spirited conversation I had with Governor Fordice, I would still be working at Parchman.

Resource:

What advice do you have for new employees starting a career with the MDOC?

Commissioner Epps:

People need to know their own strengths and weaknesses, then work from your strengths and work on your weaknesses. Be at work – don't call in sick, unless you are absolutely sick. Don't lay low and go slow. Set goals and work toward them. When opportunities arise that fit in with your goals, take them but stay the course. Be the first to arrive and the last to leave: be available. Do your job. Do the right thing: if you can't say you're doing the right thing, don't do it. Continue your education and training. Remember your support system and be humble. People are going to help you to grow; it is your responsibility to help others. Do these things and you will advance.

It pays to present yourself in the proper manner. Even though it takes more effort and maybe money, keep your uniforms clean and pressed. It might mean spending more time maintaining them. It might also mean spending money to have a cleaner to wash and press them. Also, make sure the pride you show in the uniform is complete by keeping your footwear highly polished. In the end, those crisp clean uniforms demonstrate respect for yourself and pride in your job. When others see your respect and pride, they will respect you more and consider you more seriously for promotion. As a part of this presentation, maintaining and showing a positive attitude is very important. If you have a negative attitude, people can see it in you and they will respond negatively to you. The same idea holds true for a positive attitude. If you have a positive attitude, people can see it in you and they will respond positively to you.

All of the things I have to say to new employees are the things I have practiced. Currently, I have approximately 11,000 hours of compensatory time on the books; more than any other person in state government. I made up my mind long ago that since I have to work, I might as well work as diligently as I can to make as much as I can while I am at it. If you are going to give up eight hours a day at work, why not work your hardest, prove yourself and make as much money as you can for your time. This is nothing but common sense.

It's good to make yourself available. And, you have to make your desire for promotion known to the administration. Sometimes, to get promoted you have to promote yourself to the higher ranks. But know that it is possible to promote yourself out of a job. Pushing is OK but too much pushing is not.

Resource:

What resources do you think are most valuable for new employees?

Commissioner Epps:

Mentors are very important in our profession, so I tell all new employees to find a mentor. Next, new employees need to read and understand the documents that govern their jobs; policies, standard operating procedures, post orders and directives. Knowing these will explain how to do the job and why it is done the way it is.

Study correctional practices in other states. You may find a practice that can be used in our system to make your own job safer and more efficient. This type of study also shows the chain of command that you are dedicated and have the kind of drive that can be promoted.

Become a member of professional organizations. These can increase your knowledge and provide a sense of belonging.

Resource:

You've mentioned professional organizations a couple of times. How did you get involved with them, and how have you benefitted from them?

Commissioner Epps:

Early in my career, my desire to continue educating myself in the field of corrections led me to join professional organizations. These organizations provide publications that tell about innovations in other states, legal issues and provide a wealth of information on other topics. They also provide training conferences with courses relating directly to corrections. Lastly, with ongoing participation and involvement, you get recognized and move up in them. All of



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them are looking for dedicated hard workers to lead them. I mentioned earlier about being the treasurer of the ACA, but I didn't mention how that occurred. I was nominated by the Association of State Correctional Administrators to run for the Commission on Accreditation. I won! Then I was placed on the executive board. As a result of this exposure, I was nominated to serve as treasurer of the ACA.

The SSCA vice presidency came about due to the outcome of the 2003 conference held on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. I was asked if I would be interested in serving and said yes. Then I had to appear before an interview panel. The bylaws of the SSCA call for the vice president to rotate into the presidency for the next term. This means that in 2010, I will hold the presidency of the organization.

I am also regularly invited to the conferences held by the Correctional Peace Officers Foundation and remain involved in the National Guard Association. Also, we have a great state association, MAPC, that you should join.

I cannot say enough about the learning, networking, ideas and friendship that can be had through these organizations.

Resource:

What would you say to a new employee who is thinking of leaving?

Commissioner Epps:

Take a second look at what you are throwing away before making the decision. There is a lot to be said for the benefits of a position in the MDOC. Talk with family, your supervisor or even me before quitting. Once you quit in good standing, even though you can return, your hire date will be affected and your record will show a break in service.

A lot of people that have quit previously want to come back now. Look at the economy. This is not a time to leave a job that provides secure employment. This is a time when a check and benefits are important.

By the way, I'm not just talking when I say they can call me. If an employee thinks there is a real problem with the job, I will listen and try to help find some resolution.

Resource:

The Mississippi Department of Corrections was established in 1976. You are now the longest serving commissioner in the agency's history. That must give you a great sense of accomplishment.

Commissioner Epps:

I consider it an honor and a privilege to have been appointed

in the first place. To have been able to oversee the agency that provided me with such a rewarding career for this length of time is especially meaningful. I like to think that my length of time in this office is a testimony to my having led the agency in a proper manner on the correct path. It is also meaningful because a person can't hold this position for long without support from the governor, the legislature, outside law enforcement officials and the MDOC staff. There is a balancing act that has to be performed in this office and I think it can only be successfully performed if a person keeps his eyes on God and the best interest of the people of the state, including staff.

As for its meaning to the agency, I have been with the MDOC for 27 years. In that time I have seen commissioners stay for 3 months. Regardless of what you might think of the merits of each of them, one fact remains; the longer they serve the more stability the agency has. No organization this size can develop and respond as it needs to without consistency at the top. When commissioners change, people tend to go into a holding pattern and wait for the new direction to come. With the stability of a long term commissioner, we are able to move ahead more quickly.

Resource:

What are your goals at this point in your career?

Commissioner Epps:

I am considering running for the presidency of the American Correctional Association in 2010. I am completely committed to the organization and to the benefit ACA accreditation brings to correctional agencies.

I think sometimes about running for political office at some level. Part of my motivation for my career is to be of service to my state and my fellow man, as well as my God. I think that the calling to elected office, for the right purposes, is one of the highest callings a person can have.

For now, my career goals revolve around improving the MDOC and life in Mississippi through public speaking, mentoring, consulting and maybe even lobbying. I also intend to continue spending more time with my family.

Beyond these things, I intend to continue seizing opportunities as they arise and make the most out of them.

"Excellence is not a singular act, but a habit. You are what you repeatedly do."
Shaquille O'Neal

THE RESOURCE



MDOC EMPLOYEES ACTIVATED FOR MILITARY DUTY

Provided By Human Resources

The MDOC currently has 21 of its family activated for military duty (11 from MSP, 5 from CMCF, 2 from Headquarters/Community Corrections and 3 from SMCI). The agency is thankful for the safe return of 48 fellow employees from active service. Below are the names of those currently activated and those that have returned to us. Please keep each of them in your thoughts and prayers. Those wishing to provide support to individuals that are activated can do so through a variety of resources. The Department of Defense operates <http://www.americasupportsyou.mil> for this purpose.

MISSISSIPPI STATE PENITENTIARY

Activated		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Alexander, Donnell	COT	1/15/2009
Coleman, Edward	COT	6/1/2007
Davis, Clyde	CO IV	3/1/2009
Golden, Jermenica	COT	12/29/2008
Green, Cedric	CO I	3/1/2009
Hale, Chanita	COT	2/10/2009
Henderson, Richard	CO IV	1/22/2003
Khon, Odiss	COT	3/1/2009
Lewis, Daryl	COIV	10/13/2008
Ruffin, David	Corr. Case Mgr.	6/2/2004
Thompson, Domanique	COT	5/2/2007

Returned			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Reactivated</u>	<u>Returned</u>
Taylor, Carol	10/6/03		
Irving, Norris	12/3/03		
Hilson, Melvin	5/17/04	8/27/05	10/24/05
Cashaw, Timothy	7/15/04		
Moore, Calvin	6/3/05	9/6/05	9/13/05
Hicks, Carlester	9/13/05		
Lewis, Roger	1/17/06		
Love, Von	5/20/06		
Thomas, Henderson	8/15/06		
Smith, Edwin	9/5/06		
Coleman, Edward	4/3/07		
Green, Cedric	11/2/0		
Pruitt, Darron	12/3/07		
Winters, James	8/1/08		
Timothy Morris	4/30/04		

CENTRAL OFFICE \ COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

Activated			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Young, Arthur	Yazoo P/P	FO III	11/1/2005
Erkhart, Vicky	George P/P	FO I	2/26/2009

Returned			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Reactivated</u>	<u>Returned</u>
Thomas, Clarence	11/5/03		
Young, Arthur	1/4/04	11/1/05	
Garrison, Steve	8/30/04		
Smith, Arthur	10/25/04		
McCray, Clintis	1/12/05	9/6/05	10/20/05
		4/23/08	5/12/08
Little, Marvin	3/1/05	9/6/05	9/19/05
Bailey, Otis	10/19/05		
Woods, Roy	1/1/06	1/1/08	
Brown, Keith	3/27/06		
Cathey, Max	5/1/08		
Woods, Roy	9/19/08		
William Calvin	4/18/05	9/6/05	9/13/05

CENTRAL MISSISSIPPI CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

Activated		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Dean, Peter	Corr. Supv.	11/18/2005
Harvey, Ray	CO I	4/21/2008
Henson, Eric	COT	2/1/2005
Kennedy, Norris	Corr. Comm.	9/5/2005
Newsome, Marcus	CO III	4/21/2008

Returned			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Reactivated</u>	<u>Returned</u>
Willis, Joseph	9/27/03		
Greer, Willie	5/12/04		
Kennedy, Norris	10/1/03	9/5/05	
Thomas, Ronnie	6/28/04		
Lyles, Marcus	7/25/04		
Cole, Larry	1/24/05	8/29/05	10/19/05
Smith, Melvin N.	4/30/06		
Smith, Melvin	10/18/05		
Newsome, Marcus	7/4/06		
Roach, Curtis	7/12/06		
Washington, Alvin	11/16/06		
Marvin Little	3/1/05	9/6/05	9/19/05

SOUTH MISSISSIPPI CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION

Activated		
<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Date</u>
Bounds, Stevon A.	Chaplain II	7/1/2008
Crews, Sidney	CO II	8/25/08
Mills, Andrew C.	Corr. Supv.	3/1/2009

Returned			
<u>Name</u>	<u>Returned</u>	<u>Reactivated</u>	<u>Returned</u>
Roberts, John	10/1/03		
Crews, Sidney	10/29/03	6/2/04	
Hoeflich, Albert	6/14/04	9/6/05	12/5/05
Keys, Adrian	3/15/05	9/6/05	9/21/05
Bounds, Stevon	6/1/06		
Scarborough, Charles	8/30/04	1/3/05	5/16/06
Lee, Earnest	8/8/08		
Mills, Andrew	10/16/08		
Eduardo Diaz	1/27/09		



THE RESOURCE

CONGRATULATIONS FROM COLLEAGUES

I formally met Chris Epps through Wayne Fleming shortly after he was hired as a correctional officer trainee at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. I had a more in-depth meeting with him later on when Wayne again brought him to my office to discuss promoting him to the position of Case Manger. Mr. Fleming was so high on Mr. Epps that it appeared that a real mentoring and coaching relationship had developed between the two long before the ideas of mentoring and coaching became popularized within the agency. What Commissioner Epps probably didn't know is that every time Wayne Fleming had the opportunity to speak of a shining star within the correctional officers ranks, Chris Epps would be the person mentioned. I recommended the promotion of Officer Epps to that of Case Manager. Mr. Fleming always said that "this young man is going to have a bright future with the penitentiary system." He was right.

As Christopher Epps progressed within his career, he came to the point of being asked to serve as the Deputy Superintendent under Superintendent Steve Puckett. Commissioner, I've had this recollection in my mind a long time; did you know that your momma tried to get me to talk you out of accepting the challenge? I wasn't supposed to tell you but it doesn't make any difference anymore. They didn't use her baby up and throw him away as were her words.

One thing for sure, I've worked with every Commissioner of the Department of Corrections and without a doubt, Commissioner Christopher Epps has moved this agency farther and to the greatest professional plateau than most imagined possible.

Dwight Presley
Director of Training

Reflecting back to the year 2002, we remember how proud and excited everyone was over the selection of Mr. Epps becoming our next commissioner. Mr. Epps was indeed the employees' choice. He could relate to all staff because he had walked a mile in all their shoes! For the past 20 years that we have personally known him, he has always been a fair, impartial, and firm Team Leader in addition to a very close friend. When Mr. Epps was Director of Records, & my immediate supervisor, I was always amazed that he would take time to call me while traveling and ask if I needed anything or if he could do anything for me. That special effort always stood out in my mind and made me feel that I was important to the Department. Ronnie also appreciates how he is still never to busy to talk even if only a few words. We are only two employees; Mr. Epps has a way of making all employees feel special.

Everyone holds Mr. Epps in highest regards and as the perfect example of how someone can achieve their goals in a professional career. It is always encouraging to staff when he speaks about how he started in corrections as a correctional officer, worked his way up through the ranks, and finally achieving the position of commissioner. Becoming commissioner has probably been his most difficult but rewarding challenge. Mr. Epps' vision for MDOC has become a reality through his dedication and determination. Through his leadership, we have seen Mr. Epps transform MDOC from being just another state agency to an agency which is recognized on a national level of excellence.

Charles Ronnie and Pat Dobbins,
Division Director and ACA Manager
SMCI





CONGRATULATIONS FROM COLLEAGUES

Commissioner Epps has achieved greatness as a leader through plain old fashioned hard work, a “don’t quit” attitude, and by being a visionary corrections practitioner. He has demonstrated commitment throughout his career by personally investing untold efforts in order to accomplish his professional goals as well as the goals of this agency. He is truly a one of a kind leader and I salute him on becoming the longest serving Commissioner of Corrections in the MDOC’s history!

Lora Cole
Deputy Commissioner
Community Corrections

I would first like to congratulate Commissioner Epps, as the longest serving commissioner in MDOC’s history. This is quite a feat and could only be accomplished by an individual who is well known and respected both in and outside Mississippi in the field of corrections. Commissioner Epps can best be described as a man “of the people”. When an employee rises through the ranks, it affords them wisdom that can only come from experiences learned over the years. To other employees this individual is a “real person” who knows the challenges and frustrations of every day work in corrections and can relate to employees on their level. Regardless of the venue; Commissioner Epps is always the same man. Whether he is talking with legislators, fellow commissioners, or cadets in a training class, he is friendly, jovial and always willing to listen. The commissioner always has a joke or a humorous story to lighten the mood, however I have learned over the years that his down to earth approach to life and its challenges comes in part from the wisdom imparted by honest, hard working parents and grandparents. The commissioner has many sayings that we are all accustomed to hearing; and I remember the first time I heard, “there’s a dead cat on the line.” The Commissioner and I were talking about a particular situation and when he said; “there’s a dead cat on the line,” I was unsure how to respond as I had never heard that expression. I prayed my response of “yes sir” was appropriate and when he continued with the conversation, I was reassured yet vowed to immediately learn what that meant. Commissioner Epps is proud of his hometown of Tchula and is proud of his roots. A man who can appreciate and always remember where he came from will achieve much in life. I am proud to be one of the over 3000 employees working for the Ms Department of Corrections and Commissioner Epps.

Christy Gutherz
CCD Region II

Chris Epps has the rare ability to interact with everyone on any socio-economic level from governors, to inmates, and everyone in between. In each instance, he is always gracious, personable and humorous. He has a genuine concern for people, a quality which becomes apparent to anyone he meets. I have known him for over twenty-five years, and regardless to the lofty positions he attained or notable accomplishments, he has remained the same, a very hardworking and humble man.

Lawrence Kelly
Superintendent, MSP

I met Officer Epps through Colonel Wayne Fleming, former colonel at Unit 29. At the time Colonel Fleming stopped by my office at Parchman to discuss the future of a very intelligent, hard working officer by the name of Chris Epps. He stated he was a very impressionable young man and he did not want him held back. He thought with his educational background and work experience a case manager position would be an appropriate next step. That was my introduction to Chris Epps.

After meeting Officer Epps, I notice how neatly dressed he was and how proudly he wore his uniform, other than the colors, you could not distinguish his dress from the way a highway patrolman dresses. He wore his uniform with distinction. After he was promoted to Deputy Supt. I on occasions would go out with him on nightly rounds, they were all night rounds, he made security checks and I discussed personnel issues with officers. After returning around 5:30 A.M. he would remind me to be at his staff meeting for an eight o’clock briefing.

Although I was impressed with the way he carried himself, I did not see Commissioner written on his uniform but I am so glad I was nice to him and we all know why he eventually became the agency commissioner.

Jesse Smith
Director of H/R

Congratulations! Seven years is a tremendous milestone, especially in such a challenging field as corrections. You are truly an inspiration and have set the benchmark for me and other directors to follow. I commend you on your success and commitment to public safety and service.

Justin Jones
Director, Oklahoma DOC

When I met Commissioner Epps in June 1989 he was the Chief of Security at MSP. Even then it was clear that he was going to be the commissioner someday. His hard work and knowledge of corrections has made him not only the longest serving but the most effective commissioner in MDOC history. All those who directly report to Commissioner Epps have become better managers and supervisors by following the example he sets every day.

Rick McCarty
Deputy Commissioner
Admin. and Finance

I have been with MDOC for 6 ½ years. There has not been one instance that the commissioner hasn’t said hello, shaken my hand and given me a hug. He treats staff with respect and is personable with everyone he encounters. He has never forgotten where he started in corrections and that is something I will always admire about him. Congratulations Commissioner!

Ginny Squires
CSA, Flowood CWC/Restitution



THE RESOURCE

ASSOCIATIONS FOR CORRECTIONAL PROFESSIONALS

At the Commissioner's Quarterly Meetings, in *The Resource*, during re-accreditations and throughout the year at numerous training venues we hear of the importance of professional organizations and the need to join them.

In keeping with this issue's focus on Commissioner Epps, and his views and contributions, we will focus on the associations that are influential among the staff of the MDOC.

CORRECTIONAL PEACE OFFICERS FOUNDATION

The Correctional Peace Officers (CPO) Foundation is a national, non-profit charitable organization created in 1984. Its primary function is to preserve and support the surviving families of correctional officers who lose their lives in pursuit of their chosen profession of protecting the public from those remanded to correctional custody and supervision in the nation's prisons and jails.

The CPO Foundation is not a political action group or committee of any kind, nor is it affiliated with any political action group or committee of any kind, nor is it involved in any collective bargaining issues with any employee groups, associations and/or administrations.

The purpose of the Correctional Peace Officers (CPO)

You are encouraged, if not a member of a professional association, to review the following information, talk to fellow staff who are members and join those that you believe most valuable to you in your career.

The MDOC has always been influential in these organizations, with MDOC having large memberships. As you learn more about each, pay attention to how many leaders come from the MDOC.

Foundation, Inc. is to operate and maintain a general fund for the perpetuation of the memory of those Correctional Peace Officers killed in the line of duty; to provide for their spouses, children or other beneficiaries; and to promote and project a positive image of the Corrections profession, both internally and to the general public.

The Correctional Peace Officers Foundation is the only national charity in existence of, by and for the professional Correctional Peace Officer and Family. You can be a Supporting Member by donating as little as \$5.00 per month.

If you are interested in joining, would like more information, the CPOF website, including a registration form, may be found at <http://www.cpof.org>.

NORTH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF WARDENS AND SUPERINTENDENTS

The North American Association of Wardens & Superintendents (NAAWS) is committed to setting goals and achieving results that make a difference when it comes to jail and prison operations.

We believe we must respond aggressively to the needs of the men and women who run the jails/prisons of North America, by providing them with:

Communication- A regular newsletter shares insights gained by wardens with years of institutional experience as well as information relevant to prisons and jails.

Networking- Hospitality suites and meetings at the ACA conferences provide opportunities to meet and exchange information.

Training- In conjunction with NIC, Eastern Kentucky University and other professional organizations, NAAWS has offered workshops on issues such as Managing Change and Diversity in the Workforce.

Recognition- The annual Warden of the Year Banquet permits peers to salute outstanding wardens.

Our significant activities include Warden of the Year Award, "A View from the Trenches" , and Supporters & Promoters of American Correctional Association (ACA)'s Certification Program.

For more information on the NAAWS, membership, conferences and awards that can be received, please visit the NAAWS website at <http://naaws.corrections.com>.

AMERICAN PROBATION AND PAROLE ASSOCIATION

Mission Statement - To serve, challenge and empower our members and constituents by educating, communicating and training; advocating and influencing; acting as a resource and conduit for information, ideas and support; developing standards and models; and collaborating with other disciplines.

The American Probation and Parole Association is an international association composed of members from the United States, Canada and other countries actively involved with probation, parole and community-based corrections, in both adult and juvenile sectors. All levels of government including local, state/provincial, legislative, executive, judicial, and federal agencies are counted among its constituents. By taking the initiative, APPA has grown to become the voice for thousands of probation and parole practitioners including line staff, supervisors and administrators. Educators, volunteers and concerned

citizens with an interest in criminal and juvenile justice are also among APPA's members. APPA will continue to effectively provide services to its constituents. The association represents a strong, unified voice for the field of community corrections.

The American Probation and Parole Association develops position statements on numerous subjects facing the field of community corrections. Position statements represent the unified stand or opinion of APPA members on a national level, usually on a matter that will have longevity. Any active member of APPA may submit a position statement to the Issues, Positions and Resolutions Committee for review.

For more information on the APPA, membership, conferences and awards that can be received, please visit the APPA website at <http://www.appa-net.org>.

THE RESOURCE



AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION

The American Correctional Association is the oldest and largest international correctional association in the world. ACA serves all disciplines within the corrections profession and is dedicated to excellence in every aspect of the field. From professional development and certification to standards and accreditation, from networking and consulting to research and publication, and from conferences and exhibits to technology and testing. ACA is your resource and world-wide authority in corrections.

You now have the opportunity to become part of a growing team of dedicated professionals. ACA membership is open to corrections professionals, students, retired persons, interested citizens, organizations/institutions and corporations. There are many benefits to becoming a member of ACA including a one-year subscription to our Corrections Today magazine and

On the Line newsletter, a 20% discount on selected publications and correspondence courses, ACA directories and discounted rates on our Winter Conference and Summer Congress of Correction. Please take a few minutes to peruse our Web pages. Make the right choice; join ACA today!

The American Correctional Association provides a professional organization for all individuals and groups, both public and private that share a common goal of improving the justice system.

Mississippi is an ACA Golden Eagle Award winner and MDOC Commissioner Christopher Epps serves as treasurer.

For more information, contact us at 800-222-5646, ext. 0129. The ACA can be found on the internet at <http://www.aca.org/>.

SOUTHERN STATES CORRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION

The Southern States Correctional Association is a "family" of professionals from 14 states representing virtually every type of corrections agency - youth and adult services, probation and parole, counselors, teachers, administrators, and volunteers. The membership also includes law enforcement officers and others interested in corrections.

SSCA's greatest asset is the combined knowledge, experience, and dedication of approximately 1,200 members. Nowhere will you find another group of people more willing to share both their ideas and their friendship. SSCA offers you an opportunity for networking with the best corrections personnel in the country and training unsurpassed by any other correctional organization.

With membership, you receive a quarterly corrections journal, The Southern Concourse. This publication will allow you to keep

abreast of topics of concern for corrections. Corrections professionals share information about innovative programs and accomplishments as well as issues and concerns in their states.

As a member you will have the opportunity to attend an annual training conference in one of the 14 states that comprise SSCA. These conferences are centered around a training program that is second to none. Not only do we learn about offender programs, needs, and programs; we acknowledge the problems and needs of correctional workers and provide training that will address our concerns as well as motivate and stimulate us to do our jobs well.

For more information on the SSCA, membership, conferences and awards that can be received, please visit the SSCA website at <http://www.sscaweb.com>.

MISSISSIPPI ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONALS IN CORRECTIONS

The Mississippi Association of Professionals in Corrections (MAPC) was established in 1983 as a result of a round table discussion in an attempt to create unity throughout Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC). MAPC, governed by its Constitution and By-laws, has basis in the principals of the purpose, goals, and objectives established by its members.

MAPC provides annual training through a mini-conference in the spring and annual training conference in September. With

approximately 400 members statewide, MAPC continues to grow and provide services through out the state with various events geared toward fundraising and assisting those in communities in which they live.

Scholarship opportunities are available through membership which is offered to any MDOC employee, state, federal or local law enforcement employee in the state.

MINDLEADERS MARCH MADNESS

We are very excited to announce the MindLeaders and MDOC March Madness Contest!

From 3/30 - 4/30 you will receive one entry into the contest for every course accessed.

The more courses you take the more you can win!!!

Winners will be drawn on Friday afternoon for that week and Angela Taylor will announce the winner.

Prizes will be a \$25 gift card to a restaurant or store.

This is a win/win for everyone to get your mandatory training hours completed early, pick up some new skills and win great prizes!

Need help getting logged on for the first time; contact your respective managers to schedule a brief orientation.

Recognitions for top performers will be made the week of May 4th.



THE RESOURCE

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

April 15 - 17	MAPC Mini Conference Silver Star Casino - Philadelphia, MS
April 24 - May 3	National Crime Victim's Rights Week
May 7	Commissioner's Annual Statewide Meeting

NOTICE

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

NOTICE

The MDOC Human Resources Department has been notified that some changes have been made to St. Dominic Behavioral Health Associates, as follows:

Please note that our name has been changed, effective immediately, to St. Dominic Psychiatric Associates.

Also, as of April 6, we will be in our new location in the St. Dominic Centre, 3500 1-55 North (frontage road), Suite 102, Jackson, MS 39211.

The phone numbers will remain the same, 601-200-3100 and 601-200-3110. Our fax number is 601-200-3109.

FROM THE EDITOR

When the responsibility of The Resource was assigned to me, I was aware of a few people that liked to quip that the whole publication was about the commissioner. Such quips were generally made without the ability to cite any specifics or any other content knowledge regarding The Resource. As if the lack of substantiation hadn't let me know otherwise; having served as a proof reader for the previous editor, I was definitely aware that the quips were wrong.

Knowing the inaccuracy of the quips, I still made a decision that, other than the mailbox and commissioner's corner, references to, and stories about, the commissioner would be limited to only the most notable occurrences. I have held to this since August of 2008.

This issue, however, is different. Well over half of it has been dedicated to the commissioner. More to the point, it has been dedicated to Christopher Epps. I have been employed with the agency for nearly twenty years and have served under seven commissioners. Some held the office, while others held the office with distinction. This commissioner is in the latter group. To have done so for six and a half years is the most notable accomplishment I have seen during my time in the MDOC.

To serve as long as he has requires support from the governor,

legislators, executive staff and all staff at all other levels. It also requires support from sheriffs, district attorneys, judges and the public. One does not garner and hold all of the support necessary to continue in the post, and to succeed in it, without outstanding character, an unparalleled knowledge of the field and a superior understanding of the minds with whom he must work. This commissioner has demonstrated all of these assets.

In the career profile, he references a speech he gives entitled "The Road To Success Is Always under Construction." I would hope that newer staff would read this issue and see it as a map for that road. Then, put it away somewhere to be referenced later when challenges arise. Whether the challenge is a conflict with fellow employees, a wavering in one's ethics or simply a discouraged spirit that cannot see the possibilities the job offers, when the challenge arises, pull the copy back out, read it again and remember: He has been where you are and is now the commissioner. You also have that possibility in your future.

Lastly, I just want to say:

CONGRATULATIONS COMMISSIONER

