



# GRAPEVINE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF NAAWS



Those That Help Us Cope.....	2	Claudette Edwards Named Warden.....	4
President’s Report.....	3	Executive Director’s Report.....	7

## NAAWS ANNUAL TRAINING CONFERENCE

### August 30-September 2, 2021 • Daytona Beach, Florida

The Shores Resort & Spa

After last year’s cancellation and this year’s postponement, we are now getting ready to host our annual training conference in Daytona, Florida. For the duffers there will be a golf tournament. Florida Department of Corrections Secretary, Mark Inch will welcome us and Major General Dave Glaser, Deputy Commanding General JFLCC, US Army North (NORTHCOM) will be our opening speaker. Outstanding presentations and programs will be held. Our annual Warden of the Year Banquet will be on the evening of August 31st, where we will honor not only the 2021 Warden of the year and Medal of Valor recipients, but also the 2020 Warden of the Year and Medal of Valor recipients, since we

were unable to hold a banquet last year. There will be a Florida Correctional Facility tour on September 2nd. As usual our business partners will be there with us displaying and presenting the latest in technology and products.

This is an excellent opportunity to network with your peers!

Our conference hotel is The Shores Beach Resort and Spa which is right on the beach. Please reserve your room early as the 3 types of rooms available to attendees are the same price. Details can be found on our website [naawsonline.org](http://naawsonline.org). Hope to see you all there!



THE SHORES RESORT & SPA

# SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE WHO HELP US COPE: Honor Guard, Reverend Outreach, Human Resources, and Peer Support

by: Sheriff Thomas J. Dart, Cook County, Illinois

The battle against the invisible and highly contagious COVID-19 virus has tested all of us in the corrections community in unimaginable ways. The loss of five Cook County Sheriff's Office employees to complications from the coronavirus shakes me to the core. The depth of grief is beyond measure and it spreads far beyond immediate families and co-workers to extended family, friends, associates, and communities.

I am fiercely proud of the resilience and dedication of the entire Cook County Sheriff's Office throughout the pandemic. My entire staff has gone above and beyond their call of duty to help others.

In one case, a correctional officer who recovered from COVID-19 returned to work when he got word that one of his training academy classmates -- a friend of 20 years -- lost his battle against the coronavirus. The officer, who is married with two young children, survived COVID-19, only to be blindsided by a mental health breakdown that he never could have expected. He was experiencing survivor's guilt. Fortunately, he was able to participate in the Sheriff's Office Peer Support program and is feeling well enough to be back on the job.

Research conducted by the Center for Disease Control found that the protocols we put in place dramatically reduced the number of COVID-19 cases among detainees and employees. Before we had the first confirmed case, we developed our multi-disciplinary approach centered around testing and social distancing. We followed science and incorporated thoughtful concepts to improve social distancing such as reopening a former boot camp to create a medical unit. We were the first U.S. jail to test all individuals booked into the jail. Through a partnership with the New Roseland Community Hospital, we created a mobile testing site for employees on the jail campus.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, 1,161 employees tested positive for COVID-19. The pandemic has taken a toll on everyone, those who have battled it, those who have stepped up for others on the job, and those whose job it is to support others throughout our office.

Our fearless frontline workers, particularly staff working inside the jail, were faced with overwhelming stress and anxiety that led to a spike in cries for help. It is important to recognize the people who honor the fallen, support grieving families, and reach out to offer a helping hand to employees who are struggling. I am referring specifically to the Honor Guard, the reverends on our staff who connect the Honor Guard with families, the Department of Human Resources, and members of our Peer Support team.

## Honor Guard

Our Honor Guard stands ready at all times to salute staff who pay the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty, but never have they been called upon with such frequency nor within such a short burst of time. During the past year, more and more men and women have come forward to volunteer in the Honor Guard.



**continued on page 5**

# NAAWS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by: Russell Washburn,  
President, NAAWS

I would like to start by extending my sincere gratitude to our Executive Director, Officers, and Board Members. This team has performed well during these unprecedented times, and has developed programs to allow NAAWS the ability to continue to serve and support correctional agencies across the United States.

The team made the difficult decision to postpone our annual conference that was originally scheduled for April 2021, and is now rescheduled for the week of August 29, 2021, in Daytona Beach, Florida. This decision was not easy, but was made to afford more corrections professionals the opportunity to attend, that may not have previously been able to attend due to state or agency travel restrictions. A special thank you goes out to our NAAWS team who worked with the hotel, business partners, and NAAWS members to coordinate this change.

I would also like to thank all of the corrections professionals across the country for your unwavering commitment, dedication, and professionalism during these unprecedented times. Collectively, our industries has adapted, and overcome obstacles that have never been presented in history.

May 2nd, 2021 to May 8th, 2021, is National Correctional Officers week, and I hope all agency leaders will join me in celebrating all of the correctional professionals across the country for all of their hard work, and dedication to our profession.

Thank you again, and I hope to see you in Daytona Beach, Florida in August 2021, during the NAAWS Annual Conference.



THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE OF SERVICE  
DURING THESE CHALLENGING TIMES.



Keefe Group extends its sincere thanks to the people who keep our nation's correctional system moving forward each day—every person, at every level, working in and supporting our industry. We truly appreciate your hard work and dedication and are proud to assist you every step of the way.

[keefegroup.com](http://keefegroup.com)

*Join NAAWS in August 2021!*

## 2021 Annual NAAWS Conference

Daytona Beach, FL  
August 30 – September 2, 2021

**REGISTER TODAY**

[www.naawsonline.org](http://www.naawsonline.org)

## CLAUDETTE EDWARDS NAMED WARDEN AT NORTH CAROLINA CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION FOR WOMEN

**RALEIGH** — The Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice has named Claudette Edwards as the new warden of the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh.

Edwards had been the interim warden at the prison since August 2020.

“Warden Edwards is a truly remarkable leader with a hands-on approach to managing a large, complex prison and hawk-like attention to detail,” said Todd Ishee, Commissioner of Prisons. “She has decades of experience, including a stint as warden at another prison. She is an outstanding correctional professional and I look forward to the impact of her transformational leadership at the prison.”

In her new position, Edwards is responsible for all operations at NCCIW, a sprawling prison complex that houses more than 1,000 women. It is one of the largest prisons in the state.



WARDEN CLAUDETTE EDWARDS

The campus-style facility dates back to the 1930s and houses offenders of all custody levels and control statuses, including death row, medium, minimum and safekeepers. The prison provides the primary medical, mental and alcohol and chemical dependency treatment for female offenders.

The facility operates a diagnostic center that serves as the point of entry into the prison system for women. Upon arrival, offenders undergo a series of diagnostic evaluations that will determine future prison assignments.

Some of the programs available to NCCIW offenders include a license tag plant, dental lab, travel and tourism information call center, high school equivalency preparation and testing, cosmetology classes, and a variety of self-help initiatives, for issues such as alcohol abuse.

She said she believes in leading by example and in the importance of preparing staff for the next level of advancement.

A veteran employee to state government, Edwards began her career as a correctional officer at the now-closed Odom Correctional Institution in 1992.

She was promoted to sergeant at the prison, then to lieutenant before she was promoted to captain in 2007, and transferred to Caledonia Correctional Institution. She also served as the assistant superintendent for custody and operations at Tillery Correctional Center, which was closed in 2014, and consolidated with Caledonia Correctional.

In 2013, Edwards was promoted to superintendent at Odom Correctional Institution.

A Halifax County native, Edwards holds an Advanced Certificate in Corrections and is certified by the North Carolina Criminal Justice Standards as a General Instructor. She is also a graduate of the Correctional Leadership Development Program and is a former member of Prisons’ Hostage Negotiation Team.

She enjoys reading and traveling.

## SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE WHO HELP US COPE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

When an employee dies in the line of service, the first point of contact with families is made by two staff members, Reverend and Director of Community Outreach, Paris Williams and Reverend and Director of Peer Support, Rashanda Carroll. They are tasked with making challenging and heart-wrenching phone and house calls that at times are met with angry and frustrated families trying to grasp their loss. They communicate family requests to the Honor Guard and connect the families to the Sheriff's Office for information and resources. They are present and available for assistance throughout the planning and performing of funeral services and beyond. The pair helps families with their needs going forward and remain their contact with the office as long as necessary. They assist with a wide range of services from grief counseling to financial support regarding educational costs for dependents of the fallen hero.

Chief of Public Safety Leo Schmitz oversees the Honor Guard. Schmitz wears many hats by assisting the team with planning, financial assistance, transportation and literally whatever else families need while organizing funerals.

The team plans processions from the funeral homes to places of worship and to the cemeteries. When the unexpected sometimes happens along the route, everyone works together to revise plans and keeps things moving smoothly.

"Members of the Honor Guard put forth tireless efforts to honor their fallen comrades," Schmitz said. "Their voluntary service begins with standing guard at the casket in dress uniform and continues until the individual is laid to rest. They don't consider it work. They are humbled to serve and respect their colleagues and their families."

To recognize the selfless acts of these men and women in the Honor Guard, we held a ceremony on Oct. 21, 2020. A Sheriff's police officer sang the national anthem and a DOC Sergeant who



is also a certified minister served as the master of ceremonies as staff sat socially distant from one another in a college auditorium. I spoke to the group of 30 before Chief Schmitz presented them with Honorable Service Award certificates and blue-and-black ribbon bars to display proudly on their uniforms.

As I stood in front of this incredible group of compassionate men and women, it was difficult to come up with words of appreciation. To say thank you is completely inadequate. I conveyed what I heard from grieving families as I attended their loved ones funerals. While members of the Honor Guard were present, they didn't hear from the families themselves, but I did. With deep grief visible on their faces, I also saw heartfelt appreciation in these families' eyes as they thanked us for the professionalism and humble salute to their loved ones. It means more than words can say to these families in their time of tragedy. I saw and felt firsthand how much the tributes mattered, that families members know that their loved one mattered.

### Human Resources

There is an unsung hero in the battle against COVID-19. It is the team that supports the team through expanded hours, well-being

**continued on page 6**

# SHINING A SPOTLIGHT ON THOSE WHO HELP US COPE

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

calls, tracking illnesses and absenteeism, and offering information and support. Human Resources departments nationwide faced unprecedented challenges throughout the pandemic. The department responsible for managing our most important asset was required to pivot into a central triage unit.

Our HR department offered care for our staff with the same dedication the Honor Guard gave to the families of the fallen. Interaction with staff went far beyond scheduling and policy distribution. Unfortunately, many staff lost colleagues, family members, or friends to complications from COVID-19. And those who remained healthy had to cover for the hundreds who were absent. Referrals to programs to assist employees with grief, anxiety, depression, and stress increased during the pandemic.

A care center set up by HR made and received thousands of calls throughout the crisis. Approximately 5,500 well-being calls have been made to staff since March. The callers expressed gratitude and appreciation and offered referrals to the Employee Assistance Program and Peer Support should staff be struggling emotionally.

For employees returning to work, HR assured they were compliant with CDC and other local health agency guidelines.

Any time employees traveled during the pandemic, HR tracked the travel and provided protocols for reporting and documenting each trip. If trips mandated a quarantine upon return, HR offered an explanation of benefits and ensured that no one returned to work until it was safe.

Supporting mental health during the pandemic was a critical concern for front-line employees and individuals working in the jail. HR referrals to programs to treat employees with conditions such as grief, anxiety, depression, and stress increased by 23% during the pandemic.

### The Peer Support Program

The Peer Support Program is an intervention program for CCSO employees facing a professional or personal crisis. We started the program in 2008, and expanded it in 2012, to include a neutral site for employees to come for counseling, resources, and services when they need help in a private and confidential setting. We have almost 100

hospital-trained volunteer peer members across all CCSO locations.

The correctional officer I mentioned earlier as having lost a cherished colleague knew it was normal to be sad, but he was surprised and confused that he couldn't shake reoccurring questions in his mind. He and his friend were the same age, they had children the same ages, they both exercised and took good care of themselves, but why was he still here and his friend is gone? It all seemed so unfair.

When the feelings got worse, he reached out to the Peer Support Program. At first he was reluctant to ask for help, but once he did he began feeling better. After multiple sessions, he was able to reach a healthy state of mind.

Throughout the pandemic, the No. 1 reason employees contacted Peer Support was for matters of grief and loss, and health and anxiety were the next highest categories for 2020. While there wasn't a steep increase in the number of contacts, there was a shift to a more predominant theme related to the pandemic.

Members of the Peer Support team proactively engaged in outreach to employees for matters specific to the pandemic ranging from bereavement care, including death notifications and funeral attendance and escorts, to individual, group, family, and couple's marital counseling. In 2020, members of the program reached out to 2,088 employees.

### Grateful

We still grieve and will never forget our five fallen heroes for their bravery and ultimate sacrifice. We are proud of the service provided by our Honor Guard. The compassion shown by our Peer Support team is unmatched in helping families when their lives are shattered. The HR team continues to surpass expectations with countless well-being checks and around-the-clock care. The support by these teams helps our staff and their families to hold their heads high and successfully take on each challenging day.

We have faced unprecedented challenges with fortitude, strength and resilience. I am grateful beyond words for our team and their perseverance. In the toughest of times, we stood tall together. As we turn the corner in this pandemic we wish all of you in the corrections community godspeed.

# FROM THE DESK OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

by: Mel Williams, Executive Director, NAAWS

It finally looks like we are turning the corner on the pandemic. So many lives lost, so many people have had their finances destroyed. Our prayers reach out to all the brave corrections people who put their lives on the line during this terrible time. Many have given all they had including their lives; we will not forget them.

As Gary Mohr is fond of saying, corrections staff are first responders and as such they put their lives on the line, each and every day. I join our President, Rusty Washburn, in hoping that correctional facilities everywhere will bring a special celebration to National Corrections Officer Week, the first week of May, in acknowledging the service of all correctional staff.

NAAWS has continued to be busy during this terrible pandemic. We have continued to host Zoom meetings on varied correctional topics suggested by members. NAAWS members are now using our eblasts to seek help and information from other

members. Members simply ask a question, and we send it out to membership. Wardens and Correctional Administrators have been very helpful in answering the questions by stating what they do in their facility or agency.

It was a sad day when we had to reschedule our annual training conference. We feel however, that the new date will allow a much broader range of participants and we will be able to conduct it in a safer manner. The Shores Resort at Daytona Beach, Florida will be a great spot for our conference. Initial details on are our website, naawsonline.org and final details will follow.

NAAWS is your organization and your voice. Do you have ideas, a project that you want to work on, or learn more about? Do you have operational questions, or need someone to bounce a concept off? Let NAAWS help you network with your peers from around North America. Our strength is in you and your willingness to reach out to other members. We are all in it together!

The Correctional Management Institute of Texas in partnership with NAAWS



*Network • Explore • Identify • Discuss • Prepare*

*Upcoming Session*  
**MAY 17-20, 2021**  
**HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS**

Contact Ashley Koonce at [koonce@shsu.edu](mailto:koonce@shsu.edu) or 936-294-1706  
**Apply at [www.cmitonline.org](http://www.cmitonline.org)**

## CONTACT NAAWS

.....  
**Executive Director** Mel Williams  
[MWilliams@naaws.net](mailto:MWilliams@naaws.net)  
.....

**President** Russell "Rusty" Washburn  
[Russell.Washburn@corecivic.com](mailto:Russell.Washburn@corecivic.com)  
.....

**Executive Treasurer** Jeff Norman  
.....

**The Grapevine** Ashley Koonce  
[koonce@shsu.edu](mailto:koonce@shsu.edu)

### HAVE NEWS FOR THE GRAPEVINE?

Any announcements that would be of interest to wardens or superintendents are gladly accepted for consideration!  
Contact **ASHLEY KOONCE** for questions or for submission consideration.