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## Agency News

### TDCJ staff presentations at 2017 ACA Winter Conference

In January, the American Correctional Association held its 2017 Winter Conference in San Antonio. More than 90 workshops and panel presentations led by recognized experts in their fields, to include a number of TDCJ's senior staff, offered educational and networking opportunities for criminal justice professionals from around the nation.

Health Services director and newly appointed ACA President Dr. Lannette Linthicum described the agency's Baby and Mother Bonding Initiative (BAMBI), which provides eligible female offenders the opportunity to bond with their newborn baby, if the child was delivered during the course of their sentence. Linthicum told the assembled group "We want to break the cycle of incarceration that can plague a family. The BAMBI program helps address that need."

TDCJ Victim Services Division Director Angie McCown, along with other victim services experts from around the nation, spoke about the need to ensure that crime victims' voices are heard and addressed by the criminal justice system. McCown underscored the system's responsibility to crime victims, saying



"It is important to remember that for every offender incarcerated for a violent crime there is at least one direct violent crime victim and many more secondary victims. We must all work together to meet the needs of those harmed by violent crime and to raise awareness of victims' statutory rights." The victim services panel explored and explained complex issues such as notification procedures, no-contact orders and the Victim Offender Mediation/Dialogue program.

Representatives from TDCJ's Reentry and Integration Division, Parole Division, Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Division, and the Windham School District led panel discussions explaining how the agency works to reduce recidivism by preparing offenders for successful reentry into the com-

munity. "Our goal is to have a seamless system that prepares and equips the offender for success upon return to the community. TDCJ has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the country," said April Zamora, director of the Reentry and Integration Division. "We want to continue to drive down that number."

Parole Division Director Pamela Thielke added "The offender's educational and vocational accomplishments are a reflection of the collaboration that happens across all agency divisions. Once released to parole supervision, parole officers continue to support the offender's success by discussing community resources and job opportunities."

Bobby Lumpkin, director of TDCJ's Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics Di-

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vision, pointed out that one of the biggest barriers for offenders is finding employment and explained how TDCJ helps offenders overcome that obstacle. "Offenders can learn a number of different trades and can leave TDCJ with a documented work history. Employers know they're getting someone who has received on-the-job training and is ready to start working immediately." Manufacturing, Agribusiness and Logistics and the Windham School District provide numerous programs which help releasing offenders secure post-release employment.

April Zamora and Carey Welebob, director of TDCJ's Community Justice Assistance Division, spoke to an ACA assembly about the benefits of the new Texas Risk Assessment System (TRAS), an offender-specific risk assessment tool. TRAS interprets an offender's criminal history and criminogenic needs, allowing criminal justice professionals to devise the most effective and efficient case plans possible. This enables the agency to carefully allocate supervision resources and, in turn, reduce offender recidivism rates and increase public safety. ●



*ACA Winter Conference attendees saw two TDCJ correctional officers honored for their heroic actions following an offender-transport bus accident in Gustine, Texas on February 19, 2016. After the accident, both officers maintained custody of the offenders while providing assistance to emergency medical services and Department of Public Safety staff until additional TDCJ staff arrived. Only after all the offenders had been accounted for and transported from the accident scene did officers Terry Kilpatrick (left) and Billy Faries seek medical attention for their injuries. Correctional Institutions Division Director Lorie Davis praised both officers, saying "Their actions were nothing short of heroic. These officers never lost sight of the agency's mission nor their commitment to it. I could not be prouder of them."*