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Agency News

Executive director's update

By Bryan Collier



As this issue of *Connections* is being finalized, the Texas Department of Criminal Justice is responding to the destruction and flooding caused by Hurricane Harvey. The Ramsey, Stringfellow and Terrell units have been evacuated, evacuations of the Vance and Jester III facilities are underway and the evacuation of additional units remains a possibility. None of the agency's secure correctional facilities has sustained substantial damage, but several remain on generator power pending restoration of electricity. The District Parole Office in Victoria has sustained significant damage, and a number of other parole offices in the areas affected by hurricane Harvey are closed due to road closures and flooding. Several contract residential facilities housing parolees and probationers have also suffered heavy damage.

While there have been varying degrees of physical damage to buildings, the vital public safety functions of this agency have continued uninterrupted despite the devastation caused by Harvey. That is a tribute to the dedicated men and women of TDCJ who are responsible for incarceration, supervision and all the support functions that assist front line staff. While the flooding caused by Hur-

ricane Harvey is far from over, I remain confident we will continue meeting every challenge. I cannot thank the employees of TDCJ enough for once again going above beyond the call of duty in response to a natural disaster. Ongoing updates regarding Hurricane Harvey will be provided via various means of communication, to include the TDCJ website and social media.

In regards to other matters, pursuant to the decisions made by the 85th Texas Legislature, TDCJ has closed four correctional facilities during the last three months: the Ware Transfer Facility, Bartlett State Jail, West Texas Intermediate Sanction Facility and Bridgeport Pre-Parole Transfer Facility.

Employees of the Ware Unit were offered positions at the neighboring Wallace Unit and other nearby facilities, and I am pleased to say that almost every employee chose to continue working for the agency. In addition, recruiters with the TDCJ Human Resources Division were onsite at the other three facilities to offer displaced private sector staff an opportunity to fill existing correctional officer vacancies. Thirty men and women who had been working for the contract vendors were hired through this outreach effort.

The special session of the legislature, which began on July 18 and ended on August 15, was convened to address a number of specific issues identified by Governor Abbott. With few exceptions, those issues did not involve the Texas Department of Criminal Justice or the criminal justice system, consequently no action was taken during the special session that will impact the agency or our workforce.

At this time it is unclear if another special session will occur, but this agency will continue to monitor any meetings of the legislature and inform you of decisions impacting the TDCJ or our employees.

Finally, the 2017 State Employee Charitable Campaign is now underway, so let me once again thank you for your continued support. The generosity of TDCJ employees provides much needed assistance to men, women and children in times of need, and there are perhaps more Texans in need now than ever before. Those in need of assistance will include staff members who live and work in the path of Hurricane Harvey, so in addition to the SECC we will be providing information about fundraising efforts specifically dedicated to TDCJ employees. Your support is deeply appreciated, as is your public service. ●