A report by COMMISSIONER JOE SCHMIDT
Alaska Department of Corrections
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WELCOME TO THE COMMISSIONER’S CORNER:
Thanks for continuing to check in with this column. If you have ideas, issues or suggestions from institutions or field offices for the Commissioner’s Corner, please submit them to richard.schmitz@alaska.gov

DEPARTMENT COMPLETES MOVE TO NEW HUDSON, CO. FACILITY:

Commissioner Joe Schmidt, second from right, prepares for the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Hudson Correctional Facility in Colorado. Others in the photo are, from left: Don Marostica, Colorado director for economic development, Warden Rick Veach, Cornell Chairman and CEO James Hyman, Hudson Mayor Neil Pontius, the commissioner, and Ari Zavares, director of the Colorado Department
of Corrections. The department completed moving inmates from Red Rock Correctional Center in Arizona on Sunday, December 20. Between 850-1,000 Alaska inmates will remain at Hudson until Goose Creek opens in 2012. Below: Alaska inmates begin to settle in at Hudson Correctional Facility.
MUSIC CLASSROOMS AT HMCC DEDICATED TO VOLUNTEER:

Long-time volunteer Natalie Brooks was honored with the dedication of two classrooms at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center. Brooks first established a prison ministry and choir at the state’s women’s facility in 1975 and was active until her recent passing. Brooks was charter member of Hiland Mountain Citizens Advisory Committee and served as Chugiak community choir director, pianist and organist for three decades. An informal dedication ceremony was led by Rep. Bill Stoltze, Shirley Mauldin with the Chugiak-Eagle River Historical Society and HMCC superintendent Dean Marshall. A photo of the plaque can be seen HERE.

(photo, above: Rep. Stoltze and Sup’t. Marshall positions the memorial plaque on the wall between the two classrooms at HMCC.)

Holiday Activities

ANNUAL ADOPT-A-VILLAGE GIVING FILLS WALL AT HMCC GYM:
Each year the inmates’ Native Culture Club raises funds to purchase gifts for a rural community selected by the club members. This year the inmates raised over $10,000 for the communities of Tetlin (pop. 136) and Elim (pop. 341). Among the items purchased are new uniforms for school basketball and volleyball teams.

POINT MAC FARM INMATES RAISE $1,500 FOR TOYS FOR TOTS:

It has been a tradition at Pt. Mackenzie for the prisoners to donate hand made toys to the Toys for Tots program for delivery to area children. This year they decided to do something different, they wanted to make a cash donation in the amount of $1500. Arrangements were made with the local Marine detachment to come to the farm and pick up the check. After the check was presented, Marine Sgt. Versyp and Marine LCpl. Keber went to each of the ten prisoners present and thanked them individually for the donation. The monies will be used to provide toys to children in Alaska.

-- Lt. Bernie Kohut

HMCC STRING ORCHESTRA CONCERT DRAWS RECORD CROWD:

On December 5 close to 250 spectators filled the gymnasium at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center for the 6th-annual String Orchestra Concert. Likely unique in the United States, the prison orchestra is comprised of about 20 inmates in beginning, intermediate and advanced sections. Gabrielle Willis, who is a high school orchestra instructor, is director along with volunteers Kiersten Hollar and Joy Sharpe. The program, which receives no state funds, gets support from Arts on the Edge, which also sponsored the concert. The HMCC women were joined by a half-dozen guest artists led by cellist Armen Ksajikian. Besides being an artist with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Ksajikian has appeared in a few motion pictures such as True Lies (as a Uzi-toting chauffeur) and My Big Fat Greek Wedding (cellist).
HMCC Orchestra Concert: ABOVE: A crowd of close to 250 fills the HMCC gym for the 6th-annual Holiday concert. BELOW: Guest artist Armen Ksajikian takes a classic pose in front of the HMCC orchestra, guest musicians and (right) Superintendent Dean Marshall.
CREW FROM PCC CLEANS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PERIMETER:
In mid-October, a fire in a homeless camp turned into a brush fire that briefly threatened Tyson Elementary School in Anchorage’s Mountain View neighborhood. Answering a call for help from the Anchorage Police Department, a Community Work Service crew from Palmer Correctional Center spent part of two weekends clearing debris and cutting brush. The result was a clean and safe green belt around the school. Work of the CWS crew drew kudos from the APD. Below are before and after photos:

Before (above) and After (below)
YOST NAMED GOOSE CREEK MAINTENANCE SUPERINTENDENT:
John E. Yost has been named Maintenance Superintendent for Goose Creek Correctional Center. “Mr. Yost brings to his new position years of construction and maintenance experience both with the department and in private industry,” said Cory Pianko, the facility's assistant superintendent, and first staff member.

McCLOUD PROMOTED TO ASSISTANT SUP’T AT WILDWOOD CC:
Wildwood Correctional Center announced the promotion of Probation Officer III Shannon McCloud to Assistant Superintendent. McCloud begins her new job with close to 20 years experience in the department as a correctional officer, probation officer, and probation officer supervisor, and has worked at Spring Creek, the Arizona Unit, and Wildwood.

KING NEW CRIMINAL JUSTICE PLANNER FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE:
The Department has named Steven King as Criminal Justice Planner for Substance Abuse. Previously, Kings worked for the Division of Behavioral Health, where he provided oversight, supervision, training and technical assistance to Substance Abuse and Mental Health agencies throughout the state. King has also worked as the Program manager of the Therapeutic Court program and as a Residential/Assessment Counselor for Clithroe Center. He has a Masters of Public Administration and a Bachelors degree in Psychology and English. “King will be an excellent addition to our program staff,” said Deputy Director Bryan Brandenburg. King will work out of the 18th floor of the Atwood Building.

DEPARTMENT RAISES $14,975 FOR ANNUAL SHARE CAMPAIGN:
The 2009 SHARE CAMPAIGN has wrapped up with a pledge total of $404,559. The Department of Corrections was responsible for nearly $15,000 in pledges from 37 individuals. Spring Creek led the way with $4,760 in pledges, Anchorage was second with $2,168 while Kenai pledged $2,105.