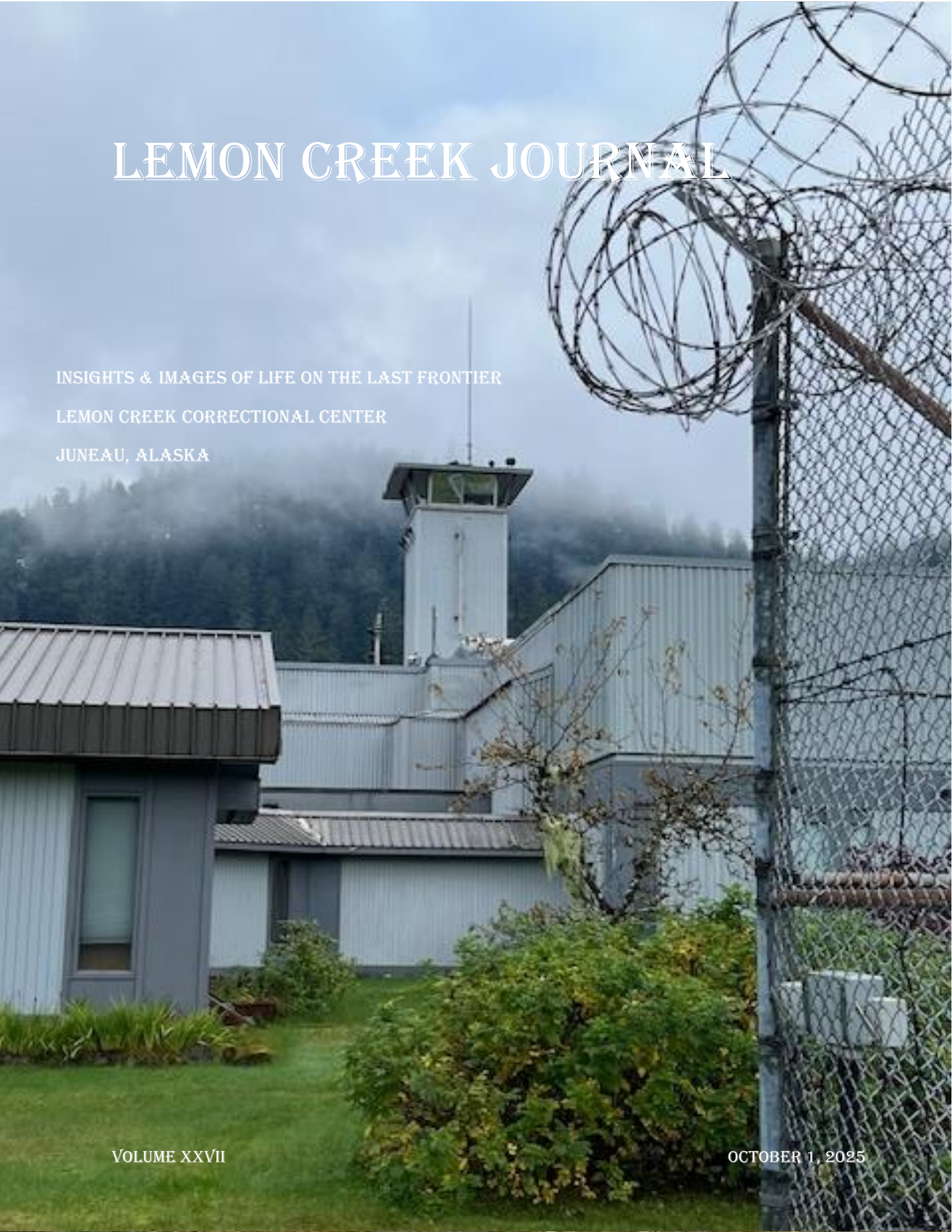


LEMON CREEK JOURNAL

The background image is a photograph of the Lemon Creek Correctional Center. In the foreground, there is a chain-link fence with several coils of barbed wire on the right side. Behind the fence, there are green bushes and a grassy area. In the middle ground, there is a large, light-colored building with a corrugated metal roof. A prominent feature is a tall, white guard tower with a dark observation deck on top. The background shows a forested hillside under a cloudy, overcast sky.

INSIGHTS & IMAGES OF LIFE ON THE LAST FRONTIER

LEMON CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER

JUNEAU, ALASKA

VOLUME XXVII

OCTOBER 1, 2025



VOLUME XXVII: CALLED TO SERVE

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To our readers:

The Lemon Creek Journal is a quarterly e-Publication of Lemon Creek Correctional Center, Juneau, Alaska. The Journal's mission is to inform, engage, and challenge Corrections professionals and the public to think critically about the challenges facing Alaska's correctional system. So that we can be more responsive to our readers, please share with us your impressions and suggestions by emailing the editor at daryl.webster@alaska.gov

Called To Serve

Welcome to Volume XXVII of the Lemon Creek Journal, where we will discuss the topic of “Service.” Some of you are veterans, and most of you know someone who has served in the Armed Forces. Those of you who have travelled the country and camped a bit are familiar with the Park Service and Forest Service. You receive your mail via the US Postal Service. The Secret Service provides security for American dignitaries. As criminal justice professionals, we are called to serve and protect the public, a term that appears in the oath of many law enforcement agencies. The common thread among these noble organizations is their dedication to Protection and Stewardship. Their members dedicate their professional lives to protecting others and managing important resources placed in their care. Many of them risk and some of them give their lives in service to others.

Protection and Stewardship are central to the work of Correctional Officers all over the state of Alaska. Citizens, many of them crime victims, look to us to keep those convicted of crimes from gaining access to new victims. At the same time, our common humanity calls upon us to feed, clothe, and protect inmates, most of whom will return to society at some point, hopefully more successfully, due to our influence. Inmates are committed to DOC’s care, and we are their stewards. In this issue, we explore what it means to serve others and why this calling is essential in a moral and humane society. Please read on.



Servant Leadership: Chances Are, You Are Probably Already Practicing It

By

Superintendent Bob Cordle

In the book, *"We Were Soldiers Once... and Young,"* Lieutenant Colonel Hal Moore, while addressing his troops before heading off to the Vietnam War stated the following in a speech to his soldiers:

"I can't promise you that I will bring you all home alive. But this I swear, before you and almighty God, that when we go into battle, I will be the first to set foot on the field, and I will be the last to step off, and I will leave no one behind. Dead or alive we will come home together."

In my mind, this is the ultimate example of servant leadership. Lieutenant Colonel Moore was a high-ranking United States Army officer who could have easily directed his troops from the safety of a command post upon a ridgetop far away from the battlefield but instead stood shoulder to shoulder with his men during the most tense moments of their young lives. His character and leadership

qualities would not allow him to do anything less.

Servant leadership is not always the best or most effective style for leading people. In fact, throughout my life, the most influential leaders I have worked under used more than one method to help me strive to reach my personal best. However, servant leadership in my opinion, is the most effective way to show appreciation for staff, gain trust and respect, and free up empowerment strategies to bring out the greatest potential in us as individuals.

You do not have to be in a position of leadership to be an example of what good servant leadership looks like. Peers and coworkers display servant leadership qualities each time they do something for the benefit of a fellow team member. I once read that a strong servant leadership foundation must be based on values and service. The message from the author was that leadership doesn't always just

come from a person placed into a position of authority, but rather organizations are strengthened through peers and coworkers who selflessly operate under the assumption that each person has the power to influence positive change in the workplace.

This article is not going to get into the key aspects, core principles, or characteristics of what servant leadership is, or what the pros and cons of its style are. Nor will I be making comparisons between traditional leadership styles and the servant approach. I am, however, going to share real life examples of what this leadership style looks like, how we benefit from it, how it helps to shape human character, and how it promotes trust, growth, and unity among us, both collectively and individually. Sometimes we aren't even aware that the principles of servant leadership are aiding us in shaping our lives and are helping to refine us into becoming our better selves.

Superintendent Dan Carothers

The culture of our facility is ultimately the reason why I chose to remain with the Alaska Department of Corrections. As a new employee, it didn't take long to see that there was something special about this small maximum security prison that sits in a little picturesque valley, almost completely out of view from the remainder of Juneau. My Journal article, "Why We Choose to Stay," from January of this year touches on the servant leadership style of former Superintendent Dan Carothers. I had only been released from my Field Training Officer for about one month when he came to my post, asked for my keys, and told me to go on break. I will not recount all the details of the story, but that was one of the first of

many times and ways Superintendent Carothers showed me that he cared tremendously about his staff. I knew he had plenty of his own work to do, but it impressed me that he went out of his way to show appreciation for the new kid on the block. This was an unusual experience for me, since the mentality of most other places I had previously worked required the new employee to prove their worth before being accepted as part of the team. His first small act of kindness toward me won me over, and I vowed never to do anything that would cause him not to trust me.

Superintendent Daryl Webster

Superintendent Daryl Webster is more than a cherished colleague to me, he is my friend. We have labored together as Superintendents for almost a full decade now. His deep commitment to the success of Lemon Creek and its devoted staff is a constant. We have held hundreds of private conversations that involve the needs of the facility. Regardless of what our work discussions are about or what decisions we make, he always takes into account how new changes will affect our staff. He is passionate about staff development and ensures that we often discuss ways to help promote team growth to aid in the overall success of our unit. He approached me in January of this year with his idea of creating an Officer Advisory Council that would include representatives from each shift to meet with both Superintendents and the Lieutenant to improve communication with staff and to enhance operations throughout the facility. He expressed his clear goal of giving all correctional officers a way to voice their opinions, through their shift representatives, who would have opportunities to make

recommendations, and to share and discuss ideas for consideration. I was sold on the idea, and we held our first meeting at the beginning of February. These regular meetings have proven to be extremely effective in the promotion of communication and have directly contributed to staff wellness.

Lt. Ed Irizarry

Our beloved retired Lieutenant Ed Irizarry was a great example of servant leadership and possessed selfless qualities that I only wish I had. During an all-time low staffing shortage period, it was common for me to come in to work at 0730 hours and find Ed once again working Rover, usually having been at it since midnight. I would start off our conversation by thanking him for helping out, to which he would respond that it was his pleasure. He would always tell me, "Anything to help out the troops sir." The conversation would then follow a familiar course. I would tell him the next time we are short and do not have enough personnel to cover all the posts, call me, you need a break. He would give me that Ed smile and say, "Will do sir."

I of course knew he was never going to call me, so one morning after finding him again in the Rover vehicle I went to visit with the on-duty shift supervisor, who happened to be Sergeant Finlayson. I told him to pass on to the other sergeants that I would come in to work a post when needed and that Ed would need some downtime from helping out. Sergeant Finlayson responded that he would. Several days later after collecting paperwork from my mailbox I found Ed working perimeter security again. I went and asked the shift supervisor if he knew why the nightshift sergeant hadn't

contacted me but called on Ed again after I had given direction not to. The shift supervisor, who will remain anonymous, replied that Lieutenant Irizarry made it very clear to all of us that I hadn't given them a direct order to call me, so he gave them a direct order *not* to call me, if that makes sense? He told them they were to let me sleep. After seeing the look on my face, the sergeant followed up with, "Sorry sir, even though you outrank Lieutenant Irizarry I would never want to cross him."

I sighed heavily and assured him that all was forgiven and that I understood. Before leaving the booking office I looked back at him and asked, "Can you imagine what it would be like to be interrogated by him?" The shift supervisor replied, "I don't even want to think about it sir."

I am sure that most correctional officers who witnessed Ed working a post thought he was making good overtime money, but Ed didn't get paid to work a post. Ed was on salary and was not overtime eligible. The many times he came in to work after hours, he worked for free, was never compensated, and he never once complained. When relieved from perimeter security, sometime in the early morning hours, he would report to his office to start his day after having worked half the night. Ed was committed to the growth and well-being of all who worked at Lemon Creek. He did his best to make sure all persons at Lemon Creek felt valued.

I mentioned earlier that a person doesn't have to be in a position of authority to benefit others with servant leadership qualities. Those qualities are the same positive attributes of a person who cares enough for others that when a need is seen, it is acted upon. You have the power

to keep Lemon Creek's culture alive and prosperous. In fact, the culture we enjoy so much here exists because of who you are and what you selflessly do for each other.

*"The best way to find yourself
is to lose yourself in the
service of others."*

Mahatma Gandhi

**THE CHRISTMAS BANQUET
IS COMING!
DECEMBER 13, 2025**

LEMON CREEK CORRECTIONAL CENTER

Employee of the Quarter – Officer Levi Chilton



Officer Levi Chilton began his career at Lemon Creek in September of 2022. Look up “Self-starter” in the dictionary and you’ll find a picture of him, taking the initiative and consistently going way above and beyond. Officer Chilton often trades his sit-down posts with other officers so that he can be on the floor to participate in shakedowns of the living units. He frequently finds contraband in locations that others would not consider searching and has developed a reputation, even among inmates, for being a bloodhound.

Officer Chilton is a charter member of the LCCC Officer Advisory Council. He actively represents officers in this role, bringing their concerns to institutional leaders and acting as a change agent. Officer Chilton has also been an active patron of the Lemon Creek Holiday Awards Banquet, crafting handmade jewelry for auction at the banquet.

Officer Chilton’s professionalism, positivity, and self-motivating energy is inspiring and infectious. We are honored to name him Employee of the Quarter.



~~The Good Cynical~~ Samaritan

By

Daryl Webster

Were I to borrow a great lyric from McCartney and Lennon and diagram the long and winding road that eventually brought me to Alaska, it would look a lot like an inverted bell curve. Born and raised in California by very outdoorsy parents, the National Parks and Forests of the Sierra Nevada Mountains were our home away from home, vast yet accessible and very nearly Alaskan in their beauty. Later, as a young adult, I pursued a career and a change of scenery all the way to Oklahoma, where the bell curve unfortunately bottomed out for 27 years.

Before any of us were born, most of Oklahoma had already been exhaustively homesteaded, subdivided, fenced, ploughed, drilled, grazed, dust-bowled, rode hard and put away wet, leaving behind a scarred and bone-tired landscape. A dispirited wallflower of a state, wedged between frumpy Kansas and the giant ogre of Texas, she is forever

last to be asked to the prom. Citizens of the Sooner State will think me a bit harsh, but bless their hearts, they just don't know any better. But ugly or not, nearly every square inch of the place is owned by somebody, even though very little of it is useful for anything. Which brings me to my story.

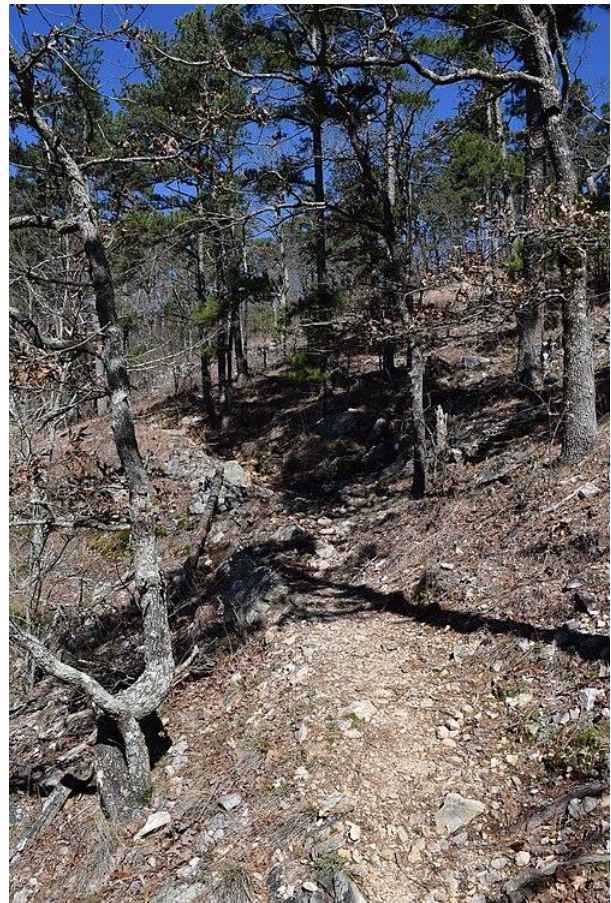
After living in Oklahoma for several years and struggling with diminished expectations, I decided to jumpstart my passion for hiking by tackling the western portion of the Ouachita Trail (pronounced **Wash-i-tah**), which runs through a modest patch of public land, between Southeast Oklahoma and Arkansas. In retrospect, I was probably searching for love in all the wrong places, but I so missed hiking in the Sierras that it was worth giving it a whirl. I was in pretty fair shape, and since what passed for mountains in that part of the world scarcely merited a second glance anywhere else, I figured to make short work of it, 2 – 3 days tops. I parked my truck at the trail terminus and arranged a shuttle to a likely put-in, cinched up my pack, and set off.

It didn't take long to realize that I had underestimated the challenge. It was early summer and already sweltering, but because Oklahoma "mountains" aren't high enough to sustain a Sierra-style snowpack, there was no runoff to feed streams along my route. Water was clearly going to be an issue. To make matters worse, whoever cut the trail wasn't into following ridgelines or even side-hilling. Instead, the route undulated in a repetitive series of 200 –300 foot ascents and descents, along the same hillsides, without rhyme or reason. From any given high point on a slope, I could look back 50 yards to the last high point I reached before the trail led me down and back up again. Look ahead and there was the next apex, just a stone's throw away, after another drop and climb. It was madness.

Come evening, I pitched a dry camp and used the remainder of my bottled water to cook and rehydrate. The next morning, I pumped filtered water from a puddle of primordial ooze in an otherwise dry stream bed and set out to repeat the previous afternoon's ordeal. Trail crews obviously hadn't visited in a while, so a confusion of blown-down branches and uprooted trees cluttered the path every hundred yards or so. By noon, I found myself in a particularly nasty tangle, clambering over one downed tree trunk after another, while overhanging branches threatened to claw the pack off my back. I was cursing a blue streak, inspired

obscurities that flowed from my tongue like free-form poetry. Suddenly I ended a stanza with, "Just what the ---- am I doing here?" And since I honestly didn't know anymore, I pointed myself uphill and climbed to the top of the ridge, where I knew I'd run into a road sooner or later. I was never so glad to see blacktop.

I still had several miles of hot, miserable trudging ahead of me to reach my truck, so I tried thumbing a ride from passing cars. And pass they did, families in sedans and mini-vans, tourists and



Dry Country Trail in the Ouachita National Forest*

locals, old and young. They all stared resolutely ahead as they left me in their slipstream. No one would stop. To be

fair, back in the real world, I worked with a vice-narcotics unit, so even when cleaned up, I looked pretty disreputable. Now, with my ratty jeans and Alice In Chains T shirt sporting a layer of sweat and grime, I wouldn't have picked me up either, certainly not on a stretch of road winding through the middle of nowhere.

I had nearly lost faith in humanity, when a young, hippy-looking couple in a beat-up hatchback stopped for me. Girlfriend smiled shyly from behind the steering wheel as boyfriend cheerfully hopped out and popped the hatch. "It's a tight fit but you're welcome to ride in the back," he said. I jumped right in. There was little conversation as we bumped and rattled down the road, but actions said it all. I barely had time to process the acrid aroma when my benefactor turned and waved a smoldering marijuana pipe in my direction. "You want a hit?" he asked.

I smiled bigly, enjoying the irony. This lovely, raggedy couple had no idea who they were offering dope to, but then, I was out of my jurisdiction and not about to spoil the mood (or the free ride) by going all legal on them. "Not right now," I said, "but that's very kind of you." They must have thought me a polite but odd sort of Raggedy Andy person to turn down free weed. Eventually, they dropped me off at my truck and I thanked them profusely. I still think of them often, and hope that they have gone on to live happy, hippy lives in whatever backwoods holler they've come to call home.

I remembered them again just a few weeks ago, as my son, Declan and I drove through Southern Montana on a father/son road trip. We stopped at a rest area not long after leaving Yellowstone, and as we stretched our legs, a 40ish man approached me from a clean but older car. He was dressed neatly enough, though a little threadbare. "Excuse me," he said. "I hate to bother you, but I've run out of money and I need nine dollars to get a room for the night." I gave him a jaded look, thinking of all the reasons why

**THE VIRTUE OF GIVING
HAS LITTLE IF ANYTHING
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I should refuse, not the least being the strategic request for “nine” dollars. A ploy perhaps, to manipulate charitable sorts into giving a tenner instead? I don’t give money to every panhandler who hits me up and I’ve never given money to a stranger without suspecting that I was being swindled. I gave him a twenty and wished him the best of luck. It just seemed like the thing to do.

I know what it’s like to ask for help and to be denied. I’ve experienced unexpected kindness from unlikely sources. I’ve helped strangers from time to time and turned others away. There’s no formula to always get it right or to glean the limits of reasonable generosity. But I’ve never said, “No” and felt entirely good about it. There’s a reason for that.

***“Defend the weak
and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of
the poor and the
oppressed.”***

This verse, from the 82nd Psalm, bespeaks a direct relationship between helping the poor and defending the weak and oppressed. It might as well have been written for criminal justice professionals, challenging us to be both generous in giving and bold in defending those in

**WHEN WE COMMIT
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need, without applying litmus tests. The virtue of giving has little to do with the value of what is given and nothing at all to do with whether generosity is deserved. Rather, it derives from cultivating within ourselves a compassionate readiness to serve others. From a Faith perspective, the willingness to serve is a moral necessity, but it also underlies the solemn oath that binds and inspires those of us in the criminal justice system, regardless of faith. When we commit ourselves to serve and protect the public, in effect, we swear to ***defend the weak from all who would oppress them.***

I’m not suggesting that you must always give money to poor people or to panhandlers, when you have qualms. But if you’re ever inclined to give or serve and find yourself wrestling with indecision over whether the person seeking help is

legit or not, consider this: we are not called to help or defend the *deserving* poor, the *legitimate* poor, or the poor who have passed a financial background investigation. We are called upon to help those in apparent need, out of generosity of spirit. Not coincidentally, our duty as criminal justice professionals requires us to serve and defend those in apparent need of our protection and help. In both cases, even if it later transpires that we have been taken advantage of, we can carry on with assurance that we did the right thing for the right reasons, as honorable people do. Honor and generosity are among the self-rewarding virtues that are nearly impossible to misuse or regret. Exercising those virtues transforms and elevates us, even more than it does the recipients of our largesse.

So, when I am challenged to give or to serve and find myself questioning whether I should, the two “Hippy Spirits Of Backpacking Past” show up to visit me in one guise or another. If our positions had been reversed on that long-ago, sunbaked road, would I have stopped and offered them a ride? Quite possibly not, and within that embarrassing admission lies the humbling answer to the question, “Should I give and serve or join with those who drive on by?”

***Ouashita National Forest Photography Courtesy of Fredlyfish4 in Wikimedia Commons Permission is granted for use under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#) (or a similar license) for this file created by the author.**

Human happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected

George Washington



Employee Profile

PO Sarah Jones

I was born and raised in Juneau but moved to Colorado with my three sons in 2002. In Colorado I worked with special needs children throughout the school district. Well, life happened and I ended up moving back to Juneau in 2012. After returning to Juneau, I figured I would continue working with students at one of the local schools, and that is what I did. Occasionally, around town I would run into a family friend that I have known my whole life. A few of you may know him, CO Randy Parker. Randy would always ask how things were and if I was looking for a job. He suggested that I apply for a Corrections position at Lemon Creek Correctional Center. I would kind of shake my head and think “I don’t think that’s a job for me!” So, I continued to work for the school district. Times were tough and money was tight, especially raising children as a single mother. I felt I needed something that could be a career, something that would allow me to raise my children and meet their needs, not

leaving me feeling like I was failing them in some way.

With CO Parker’s words ringing in the back of my mind, I thought, “What’s the worst that could happen?” So, I applied to become a CO at LCCC. I was hired in August of 2013 and here I am 12 years later, no longer a CO, but a Probation Officer. Even though I miss the comradery I had with the COs on my shift I felt I needed a change. I needed to further my knowledge of the world of Corrections. I still work with COs and interact with inmates, but just in a different capacity. As a PO I meet with inmates to discuss discretionary parole, halfway house placement and getting them to the right facility to better fit their educational or treatment needs.

Corrections can be a thankless job. Nobody really sees what it is that we do, the challenges we face every day, the many hats we wear. For inmates, we are their protectors, their disciplinarians,

their counselors, their teachers and much more. Being all these things, wearing all these different hats while sometimes being disrespected, physically and verbally attacked, and always having to be aware of surroundings, ready for the next situation, can take a toll on you.

It is important that you take care of *you*, because if you don't, no one will. Find time to decompress. Find something you enjoy, whether it is spending time with family and friends, going to the gym or on a hike, reading a book or playing sports. Whatever you choose, make sure you are doing it for you, and remember, be proud of yourself and what you do.

October is upon us. Halloween, Thanksgiving, & Christmas will arrive before we know it. Have you bought candy for the neighborhood goblins? Turkey for the goblins at home? Stocking stuffers? It is never too soon to start.

Reflections from Home

A Wife's Perspective on a Career of Service

By Jana Pierce

When my husband, Bo, began his career in corrections, neither of us could have imagined the impact it would have on our family life. We started this journey back in 1999, when we moved from Colorado to Juneau. At the time, Bo had just completed and passed the police academy. When we arrived here, he applied with both the Juneau Police Department and Lemon Creek Correctional Center.

In the end, his application for JPD didn't pan out (he narrowly missed passing the typing test). While it was disappointing at first, we soon realized that it was a blessing. Bo was hired at Lemon Creek, and over the years, the people he has worked alongside have become so much more than colleagues. Working in a maximum-security prison is no small task. It is stressful, demanding, and often heavy. But through it all, the friendships Bo has built have helped carry him. These aren't just workplace connections, they are relationships that extend into every part of our life. We've celebrated holidays together, shared vacations, and leaned on each other when the unexpected happened. Bo has hunted with friends from work, pitched in on home or car projects, and in turn, we've always felt the support of this extended family.

As a wife, I am deeply grateful. Knowing that my husband is surrounded by men and women who not only serve with him but also stand by him outside the walls of Lemon Creek brings me peace. If our family ever needs help, I know his colleagues will be there.

The life of a First Responder comes with sacrifices, but it also comes with deep bonds. For our family, those bonds have turned a demanding career into a lifelong blessing.

A Correctional Officer's Thoughts On Public Service

Editor's Note: The author of this very thoughtful article wished, out of modesty, to remain anonymous.

I haven't told too many people this, but I didn't come to work for the Department of Corrections to be a public servant. At the time, I was looking for work, and a job at Lemon Creek Correctional Center seemed to be something really different from what most people do for a paycheck. I can't say when my attitude started to change, but people I've met at work and things that have happened made me want to do better and be better.

Right away when I came to work at Lemon Creek, I noticed how tight everyone on my shift was. I've played on sports teams in school and made friends at other jobs, but this closeness is different. The officers, nurses, administrative and maintenance workers I work with are people with serious responsibilities, husbands and wives, kids who depend on them, and bills to pay in a place where it is very expensive to live. I don't mean that they never laugh or carry on, in fact they do it all the time, but they're a bunch of very responsible, self-sufficient people, who always look after each other, on duty and off. When I'm distracted, someone on my shift will always slap me on the back or talk me up. When my car is

broken down or in the shop, someone will give me a ride to work. When I have to leave town, my pets get fed. If I'm sick, someone calls to check on me. This is just the way things are done at Lemon Creek.

Officers work really odd shifts here, 7 straight 12 hour day shifts (6 am to 6 pm), 7 days off, then another 7 straight night shifts (6 pm to 6 am). Because Lemon Creek is usually short-handed, most of us work extra shifts on some of our days off. It is really hard to constantly shift gears from sleeping all night to sleeping all day and back again, and sometimes it is hard for the Sergeants to find people who have already finished a 7 day work week, who are willing to come in on days off to fill vacancies. I remember coming in to work one time and running into an officer from another shift, who was supposed to be off that week. He had family in town from out of state and they had plans together. When I asked him what he was doing at work, he told me, "They had a hard time finding someone to come in, so I did it." That's the way people are at Lemon Creek.

Probably the experience that made the biggest impression on me as a new officer was seeing how Lemon Creek officers treated inmates, especially those being

booked into the institution. It is popular in movies and tv shows to portray Correctional Officers as sadistic Nazis, which is so unfair to a group of officers who work so hard to be decent to people. Many and maybe most of the people who are booked into Lemon Creek are drug or alcohol addicted, mentally ill, sick, and even malnourished. They're often confused, angry, or just hateful to staff, but I think people outside the prison would be amazed by how rare it is for officers to let it get to them, or if it does get to them, how rarely they show it. I'll speak for my fellow officers, because by now I've been through a lot of the unpleasant things they all experience. As Correctional Officers, we all learn that it

is better to deflect the hostility that comes at us than to run into it head-on. When its time to be tactical, which happens now and then, we're up to it, but treating inmates with basic decency whenever possible, goes a long way toward keeping things under control.

I've worked at Lemon Creek for a while now. I've had opportunities to go elsewhere and there are a heck of a lot of jobs out there that are easier and less risky, but I've stayed put. Why? I'm just not sure I'll ever find a place to work where the people I work with do more to earn my respect and loyalty by taking care of each other and keeping people in Juneau safe. I guess I've become a public servant after all and I'm sort of proud of it.



Eggplant Parmesan

The Healthy-ish Holiday Dish Even Meat-Lovers Will Steal Seconds Of

Trying to keep things plant-based *and* crowd-pleasing this holiday season? This Eggplant Parmesan hits the sweet spot: cheesy and comforting enough for the skeptics but still made with real ingredients and health-conscious swaps that won't send your blood sugar on a rollercoaster.

Yes, it's breaded. Yes, there's cheese. But it's also baked-optional, packed with fiber, and full of flavor, and if you're like me, you're already calculating how to serve it with spaghetti squash or protein pasta.

Anti eggplant eaters may describe it as:

“SPONGY”, “SLIMY”, “BITTER”, or “MUSHY”

Once it's sliced, salted (important!), breaded, and baked or pan-fried to crispy perfection, then layered with robust tomato sauce and melty cheese, suddenly, it's not a vegetable anymore... it's comfort food.

This dish is the kind of sneaky healthy that makes your guests say, “Wait, this is vegetarian?” while going in for thirds.

Customize It

Gluten-Free Options

- Use GF breadcrumbs: easy swap, no compromise.
- Pair with spaghetti squash, chickpea pasta, or zucchini noodles if you want to keep it super clean.
- Grab a gluten-free garlic bread (or skip the bread and just add more eggplant, you make the rules).

Dairy-Free / Vegan Options

- Sub in quality vegan mozzarella and Parmesan; there are *actually* great ones now that melt properly and don't taste like sadness.
- Always check your breadcrumbs, some sneak in dairy.

With these tweaks, you've got a holiday main dish that actually works for your guests or yourself, and might even impress the same people who once claimed eggplant was "too weird" to eat.

Ingredients

For the Eggplant:

- 3 large eggplants (about 3–3.5 lbs. total)
- 1 tbsp salt (for sweating the eggplant)
- 2 cups breadcrumbs (Italian-style or seasoned, GF if needed)
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese (or vegan parm)
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp garlic powder (optional, but recommended)
- 2 cups of all-purpose flour (or a GF flour blend)
- 3 large eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk (any milk works here, dairy or plant-based)
- Olive oil or avocado oil (for frying or brushing if baking)

For the Tomato Sauce:

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- Splash of cooking wine (enough to coat the pan)
- 1 can (28 oz) crushed tomatoes
- Salt & pepper, to taste
- 2 tbsp fresh basil or 1 tsp dried basil or Italian seasoning
- Pinch of sugar (optional, to cut acidity, or use a splash of balsamic)

For Assembly:

- 2 cups shredded mozzarella (or a good vegan version)
 - ½ cup extra Parmesan for layering
 - Fresh basil (optional, but makes it look fancy and fresh)
-

Instructions

Step 1: Sweat the Eggplant

1. Slice eggplants into ¼-inch rounds.
2. Lay them on paper towels and lightly sprinkle with salt. Let sit for 30–45 minutes, this draws out bitterness and moisture.
3. Rinse and pat dry with fresh paper towels.

Step 2: Make the Sauce

1. In a saucepan, heat olive oil over medium.
2. Add garlic and sauté for about 2 minutes.
3. Pour in a splash of wine to deglaze the pan and let it reduce by half.
4. Stir in crushed tomatoes, basil, salt, pepper, and a pinch of sugar or balsamic if desired.
5. Simmer for 20–30 minutes. (This can be done ahead.)

Step 3: Bread the Eggplant

1. Set up your dredging station:
 - Bowl 1: Flour
 - Bowl 2: Eggs + milk, whisked
 - Bowl 3: Breadcrumbs, Parmesan, oregano, garlic powder

2. Dip each eggplant slice: flour, egg wash, breadcrumb mix. Press to coat. (*Pro tip: Use one hand for wet and one for dry to avoid the dreaded batter glove.*)

Step 4: Cook the Eggplant

Option 1: Fry (for that classic golden crunch)

- Heat ½ inch of oil in a skillet over medium-high heat.
- Fry slices in batches for 2–3 minutes per side. Drain on paper towels.

Option 2: Bake (the lighter path)

- Preheat oven to 425°F (220°C).
- Place breaded slices on a wire rack over a baking sheet.
- Lightly brush or spray with oil.
- Bake 20–25 minutes, flipping halfway. (You still get crispiness without the splatter.)

Step 5: Assemble

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce in a 9x13" dish (or use loaf pans for higher layers).
3. Layer eggplant, sauce, cheese. Repeat until you're out of ingredients.
4. Finish with a generous layer of cheese on top.

Step 6: Bake

1. Cover with foil and bake 20 minutes. The deeper dish may take a little longer.
 2. Remove foil and bake another 15–20 minutes, until bubbly and golden.
 3. Let it rest for 10–15 minutes before slicing.
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Pumpkin Gingerbread Trifle

(Serves 10-12)

Ingredients:

- 1 (14 oz) package gingerbread mix
- 1 (3 oz) package cook-and-serve vanilla pudding mix
- 1 (15 oz) can pumpkin pie mix
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cardamom *or* cinnamon
- 6 oz Cool Whip
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup gingersnaps

Instructions:

1. **Bake the gingerbread** according to the package directions and let it cool completely.
2. **Make the pudding** and set it aside to cool.
3. **Mix it up:** Stir the pumpkin pie mix, brown sugar, and your chosen spice into the pudding until smooth.
4. **Layer like you mean it:** Crumble half the gingerbread into the bottom of a trifle dish or punch bowl. Pour half the pumpkin mixture over the top, then add a generous layer of Cool Whip. Repeat with the rest of the gingerbread, pudding, and Cool Whip.
5. **Top it off:** Sprinkle crushed gingersnaps on top if desired.
6. **Chill:** Cover and refrigerate overnight. It gets even better as the flavors mingle.



Cherie Wolfe grew up in the rolling hills of Pennsylvania, where she spent 30 years running a gourmet popcorn shop that expanded to serve breakfast and lunch, soups, salads, and baked goods. She served for two years supervising 50-60 inmate kitchen workers at Pennsylvania's State Correctional Institution – Fayette, before coming to Lemon Creek Correctional Center as Food Services Supervisor. Cherie believes that home cooking should be healthy and adventurous. "Sure, I'm all about salads and nutrient-packed meals," she says, "But I believe in balance. Life's too short not to sneak in that extra cookie or indulge in a bowl of pasta now and then. After all, a cookie in hand makes everything better, don't you think?"

Spatchcock Smoked Turkey

By

SSgt. Mitch Cook

Thanksgiving is the time to thank God for the blessings of life and family that we hold dear. It has always been one of my favorite holidays, the first family gathering after Easter. When I was growing up, everyone gathered at Mema and Papa's house, to be with family not seen for months, playing with cousins down at the creek, remembering those we lost and welcoming those we gained, being thankful for everyone there and thinking of the ones who couldn't be.

Back then, "family" had a certain, exclusive definition for me, those related by blood, the family I was *born* into. After all these years that family still matters to me, but my understanding of what constitutes family has changed. It's not just about blood and genetics anymore.

I have discovered the family we choose is just as important as the family we were born into. On some levels our chosen family can sometimes be more important, because we choose to be there for one another even though we are not under any obligation to do so.

As I look around LCCC I see family everywhere. I see aunt's walking the hallways making sure everyone on shift is taken care of. I see brothers and sisters affectionately picking at one another just to make the day go by a little easier. I see loving uncles who walk by my daughter's desk every day to pick on her, just make sure she knows she is loved. Heck we even have a grumpy old Uncle who lives in the basement and growls at everyone he meets, but rest assured he would be the first in any fight that threatened one of his chosen kin.

The Family you choose is about trust and admiration. It's about who will step up to fill a need without being asked, who can be depended upon regardless of the hour or need. It is about who you are willing to bleed for and sacrifice with, and who is willing to do the same for you.

So, this Thanksgiving I will be giving thanks to God for my chosen Family, all of you. You have earned my trust and admiration and I'm proud to know such a great group of folks. I hope that you all understand what you mean to me and to each other, and that if you ever need anything I'm here.

Happy Thanksgiving.

The sense of family comes from the commitment we make to each other to work through the hard times so we can enjoy the good ones. It comes from the love that binds us; that's what makes a family.

Zach Wahls

Spatchcock Smoked Turkey Recipe

Brine Your Turkey

What is Brining? Applying salt to an uncooked turkey, either by soaking in a water solution (wet brine) or by sprinkling salt directly on the bird ([dry brine](#)) causes the meat to break down over time, becoming tender, absorbing flavors, and retaining moisture. This means that despite the moisture lost during roasting or smoking and the long cooking process, you end up with a juicy bird, and that's why we brine our turkey.

I prefer to wet brine my turkeys. Here's what you will need to get it done.

A 5 gal. bucket (I get a new one each year with a lid)

2 cups of Kosher salt or coarse sea salt

1 whole turkey

You can add any flavorings you wish, such as onions, citrus, garlic, herbs, sugars, peppercorns, white wine, Worcestershire sauce, etc. Last year Costco had a really nice brine in stock, so look for it this year.

Always start with a fully thawed turkey. Remove giblets and neck from the turkey and add to a prepared container. Dissolve 2 cups of kosher salt into 2 cups of hot water. Allow it to cool. Pour the salt solution over the turkey. Add remaining water. If the turkey is floating, use a dinner plate to weigh it down. Cover and place the container on the lowest shelf of the refrigerator so spills won't reach foods below. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours but **no longer than 24 hours**. Living in Alaska, I skip the fridge, add ice to the water, secure the lid, and set the bucket on the back porch.

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Spatchcock Your Turkey

First you will need to get some tools ready. You will need a sharp pair of kitchen shears, a sharp knife, and a cutting board.

Place the fully-brined turkey, breast-side down on the cutting board, with the legs facing you. Using kitchen shears, cut along one side of the backbone, starting from the tail and moving towards the neck. Repeat on the other side to completely remove the backbone. Keep all parts for making stock.

Once the backbone is removed, open the turkey up. Do this by taking a large knife and scoring the center of the breastbone. Then press down firmly on each side of the breastbone with your palms until you hear a crack. This will flatten out the bird.

Why Spatchcock your Turkey?

Spatchcocking reduces the cooking time significantly, allowing you to serve your turkey sooner. The flattened shape ensures that all parts of the turkey cook evenly, preventing dry breast meat and undercooked thighs. And a spatchcocked turkey is easier to carve, making serving simpler and more efficient.

After spatchcocking your turkey, pat it dry, then drizzle the whole bird with extra virgin olive oil and season liberally with salt and pepper. I highly recommend you use a good quality kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper for the best flavor.

Time to Smoke

Preheat your smoker to 275 degrees F. I use maple pellets for this particular recipe, but pecan, apple, or alder will also taste amazing! Smoke the bird for 4-4 1/2 hours. You'll know the turkey is done cooking when the internal temperature reads 165 degrees F. Make sure you're using a reliable instant read thermometer and measuring the temperature in the thickest part of the breast. The thighs will be around 175-185 degrees F.

Rest the Turkey for 10-15 minutes before carving and serving.

Herbed Cornbread Ingredients

4 boxes of jiffy corn bread mix

4 eggs

1 1/3 cup of milk

1/2 stick real butter

1/2 teaspoon dried basil

1/2 teaspoon dried sage

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

Mix cornbread as instructed on box in large bowl add remaining ingredients and mix well. Bake on large cookie sheet. Once cooled, break up bread and let it dry out overnight. Now you're ready to make stuffing.

Herbed Cornbread Stuffing

Herbed Cornbread.	1 large red bell pepper, diced
6 slices bacon, chopped	1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely diced
1 stick butter	2 cloves garlic, minced
1 large onion, diced	1/2 bunch of parsley, finely chopped
5 stalks of celery, diced	6 cups of chicken broth, plus more if needed
2 teaspoons minced fresh rosemary	Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Cut the cornbread into 1-inch cubes (about 12 cups). and leave out overnight, until it is completely dried out.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Add bacon to a skillet and sauté until cooked and almost crisp (about 7 minutes). Set aside the bacon and wipe out any grease. Melt butter in the skillet, add onion, celery and red pepper and cook, stirring for 4 to 5 minutes until they are soft. Add jalapeno and garlic and sauté for 2 more minutes. Pour in chicken broth, add parsley and rosemary, season with salt and pepper and cook for a couple of minutes, then turn off the heat.

Pour the cornbread into a bowl and spoon in some of the broth mixture. Keep adding broth, mixing as you go, until it's all mixed in. Season with salt and pepper, add the bacon and mix again. If you like your dressing extra moist, add a little more broth. Pile the dressing into a 3-quart casserole pan and bake, uncovered, 20 to 25 minutes. Serve hot.

Southern Sweet Potato Pie

Ingredients

2 Cups mashed baked Sweet Potatoes	1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 Cup Granulated Sugar	1 teaspoon nutmeg
½ Stick Melted Butter	1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
½ Cup Evaporated Milk	1 prepared pie crust (deep dish)

Baking Sweet Potatoes

In a large mixing bowl, add 2 cups of Sweet Potatoes. I like to peel the potatoes, then press them into a measuring cup to get the proper amount. Grab your potato masher, or something similar, and mash the potatoes. Add granulated sugar, evaporated Milk, Vanilla Extract, Nutmeg, Cinnamon and melted butter. Mix until whipped and fluffy.

Spoon filling into the crust (I use premade pie crust to save time during the holidays). Use a spoon to work from the center out and gently spread the filling out to the edges of the dough. I suggest you place the pie on a baking sheet. That way, if by any chance it begins to bubble over, it drops into the pan and not on the bottom of the oven. It's much easier to clean up any mess this way. (Just saying). Place the pie on the bottom rack of your oven to bake it. **START** baking at 400° and let it bake for **TEN MINUTES**. After that, **REDUCE** the heat to 350°, and let it bake until done. It should take about 25 to 30 minutes. Set a timer so you don't forget it.

After you've turned the heat down, watch the edges of the crust as the pie bakes. After about 15 minutes, if needed, cut some strips of aluminum foil about 2 inches wide and gently wrap them around the edges of the crust, then bake until done. This should prevent the edges from burning.



Ssgt. Mitch Cook serves as Training Sergeant at Lemon Creek Correctional Center, where he cooks for staff on a regular basis. His Southern dishes are workplace favorites

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