

# NEWSRELEASE

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **20-year corrections veteran named Montana State Prison warden**

Leroy Kirkegard, who has 20 years experience in corrections, is the new warden of Montana Prison.

Montana Department of Corrections Director Mike Ferriter said Tuesday that Kirkegard was selected from among three finalists for the job who had been pared from almost 60 applicants. Kirkegard, 52, succeeds Mike Mahoney, who retired in August after 16 years as warden.

A native of Circle, Montana, Kirkegard has had a two-decade career with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department's Detention Services Division where he began as a correctional officer in January 1992. He held that job for five years before being promoted to sergeant. Four years later, he became a lieutenant and was promoted to captain in 2004.

Three years later, he was named deputy chief of the department's Detention Services Division, which is responsible for more than 3,400 inmates and has a budget of \$174 million and 1,200 employees, making it one of the largest jail systems in the nation. Currently holding the rank of captain, Kirkegard manages the Staff Operations Bureau, which is responsible for inmate classification and court transports, and serves as the liaison to the Nevada Department of Corrections.

He graduated from Circle High School in 1977. Before joining the Las Vegas Police Department, Kirkegard spend 10½ years in the U.S. Air Force. He attended Montana State University for a time, later earning an associate's degree in criminal justice from New Mexico State University in 1990 and a bachelors' degree in criminal justice from the University of Nevada-Las Vegas in 1999.

"The process for selecting a new warden was extensive because we wanted to ensure we found an experienced, effective and quality leader," Ferriter said. "I am confident we have found such a person in Mr. Kirkegard. He brings a working knowledge of corrections that makes him an asset to our state, this agency and Montana State Prison."

(more)

Kirkegard, who starts his new job Nov. 14, plans to move to Deer Lodge early next month. He will oversee the state's male prison system, which has about 2,300 inmates housed in four facilities: Montana State Prison at Deer Lodge, Crossroads Correctional Center in Shelby, Cascade County Regional Prison in Great Falls, and Dawson County Regional Prison in Glendive. Montana State Prison, which will be under Kirkegard's direct supervision, has almost 1,500 inmates and a staff of more than 600.

Kirkegard, who grew up on an eastern Montana farm, said he has several family members living in Montana and is looking forward to returning to the state. "I can't be more excited," he said. "The whole 30 years I've been gone, I have always gone home for vacations. Montana is such a great state; once you step across the borders of Montana, you feel like you're home."

In addition to his extensive correctional experience, Kirkegard said he brings to the wardens' job a clear understanding of the commitment made by Gov. Brian Schweitzer, Director Ferriter and all department employees to maintain 80 percent of offenders outside prison walls.

"That's a lofty goal, but the interest generated across the state to get offenders ready to go back into the community is great," he said.

The other two finalists were from Florida: Paige A. Augustine, warden at the Federal Correctional Institution and Prison Camp in Marianna, Fla., and Karen L. Cann, who has worked in the juvenile justice system and as a county jail administrator, regional chief of detention services in Florida and a superintendent, warden and unit manager for the state of New Hampshire.

All three candidates underwent extensive background checks, formal interviews by a six-member panel on Sept. 30 in Deer Lodge, and tours and a less-formal interview at the prison.

Kirkegard's salary will be \$85,509 a year. Kirkegard is married and has two adult children.

*Pronouncer: Kirk-EE-ghard*

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