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Veteran corrections employee takes over community corrections

HELENA – Pam Bunke, with 26 years of experience in the corrections field, is the new administrator of the Adult Community Corrections Division in the Montana Department of Corrections. She had been regional administrator of probation and parole in Billings since 1998.

Bunke, who grew up in Miles City, replaces Mike Ferriter, who became director of the Corrections Department on July 1 after a decade as community corrections administrator.

Bunke's promotion comes at a time when the department is putting greater emphasis on placing more offenders in community supervision rather than in prison. Currently, about 77 percent all offenders in Montana are on probation or parole and living in communities across Montana.

"The biggest challenge is the numbers coming at us in the community as we try to stay ahead of the growth with creative placements and specialized caseloads," Bunke said.

The division is developing more probation and parole officers with training to deal more effectively with certain offenders, such as those with drug and alcohol addictions, sexual offenses, mental health problems, and American Indians confronting cultural barriers. In addition, officers are relying more heavily on treatment programs in the community to aid in keeping offenders out of prison and restoring them to productive lives.

Bunke, 51, said meshing the appropriate level of supervision with the necessary amount of treatment is critical. "They have to go hand in hand, and that requires improved communication between officers and treatment providers," she said.

She said the growing workload in community corrections will require additional officers and more training so they can handle a manageable number of cases. The department has 105 officers and about 9,500 offenders in various community corrections programs, including 8,200 on probation or parole.

"Pam brings a wealth of experience to her new job," Ferriter said. "During her years of dealing with offenders in the field, Pam has demonstrated a desire to be innovative in her approach to supervision. She is the perfect fit to head the division."

The division is responsible for a variety of programs, including probation and parole, prerelease centers, interstate compact, assessment and sanction centers in Missoula and Billings, the boot camp for men, DUI and drug dependency treatment programs, and the new meth treatment centers in Boulder and Lewistown.

Bunke, who starts her new job Sept. 5, will be paid \$73,500 a year.

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