



## Quarterly Update | Fall Edition 2024

Creating A Safer Montana Through Accountability, Rehabilitation & Empowerment

### *Congratulations!* DOC's 2024 Governor's Award for Excellence in Performance recipients

Governor Greg Gianforte presented the Governor's Awards for Excellence to honor and recognize exceptional state employees on Sept. 30. Congratulations to the members of the Secure Care Contracts Bureau and the Restrictive Housing Unit Change Team, DOC's recipients for 2024! Thank you for your hard work and dedication.

#### **Secure Care Contracts Bureau**

Pat Smith, Chris Conell, Heidi Crowe, Carla Strutzel.

Overcrowding at DOC facilities has been an ongoing concern for the DOC, with all facilities operating above capacity. In early 2024, the Secure Care Contracts Bureau was given the task of overseeing the movement of 120 inmates from Montana to a contracted prison in Arizona to help alleviate the pressure being placed on Montana State Prison, and ultimately, county detention centers.

This was no easy task given the specific population, coordination, logistics, research, transportation, and collaboration with colleagues throughout the DOC and with external partners. The team conducted this work not only while maintaining the daily operations of the regional and private prisons in Montana, but also taking on new job duties related to managing Interstate Compact activities for the department.

Team members' initiative, commitment, dedication, and professionalism should be recognized as a model for effective, efficient, and productive state government operations.



**Secure Care Contracts Bureau Team**



**Restrictive Housing Unit Change Team**

**Governor's Award, Page 7**



## St. Vincent Mobile Mammography Team provides outreach to MWP

Shannon Lamere received a scare earlier this year when she learned that her routine breast screening revealed a problem. She was provided prompt treatment and is healthy today.

Lamere, an inmate at Montana Women's Prison, is one of many women at the facility who have benefitted from the Montana Department of Corrections' partnership with Intermountain Health St. Vincent Regional Hospital Mobile Mammography team.

"I went through all these emotions because I was scared of the unknown," she said during an interview with members of the media in August. "I had great support in here from Nurse Carly (May), some of the other nurses, and a lot of the staff as well. And I'm grateful for that. Although I'm incarcerated, I had support in prison."

The DOC provides a wide range of care to inmates in-house and is thankful to its partnerships with health care providers in the community when it comes to delivering specialized care.

St. Vincent Regional Hospital has provided mammograms to inmates at the prison quarterly since 2016. The mobile mammography bus offers access to 3-D mammography screening for breast cancer using the latest mammography screening technology in a confidential, comfortable environment.

"The department is proud that we've been able to provide this medical service onsite to the women at MWP since 2016 in partnership with St. Vincent," DOC Deputy Director Cynthia Wolken said. "We appreciate the kindness and care of our DOC medical staff and the St. Vincent medical staff who make this a seamless experience for the women receiving this important preventative care."

"It is part of our mission to ensure that all women have access to screening for breast cancer because we know that early detection saves lives," said Pam Kaufman, manager of the St. Vincent Mobile Mammography program. "The women are so grateful for our team for



Photo by Isabel Spartz, MTN News

bringing the care to the prison and we are proud to provide service."

MWP Medical Services Manager Carly May explains that, for many women at the facility, it is the first time they have had access to this level of medical care.

"Educating people on the importance of seeking routine, preventative healthcare is a necessary component to maintaining a healthy lifestyle," May said. "Having the mobile mammography bus and their team come to the prison to provide this service has literally been life changing for those directly affected and those around them. In the arena of breast health and science, technology today is helping us at MWP to ensure that every woman is provided the most up to date care and education."

The Montana Women's Prison houses about 240 women.



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**~MWP Medical Services Manager Carly May**





# Former NFL quarterback visits students in The Last Mile program at MSP

In July, Great Falls native and former NFL quarterback Ryan Leaf spoke with students in The Last Mile (TLM) computer coding program at Montana State Prison. It was the first time Leaf had been at a DOC secure facility since his release in 2014.

“At the DOC, we want inmates to leave us with the skills to attain careers, not just jobs,” said Montana Department of Corrections Director Brian Gootkin. “The Last Mile coding program prepares these students for exactly that. Hearing from folks who have achieved success after their release from prison, like Ryan Leaf, demonstrates that they can be successful when they leave here. We’d like to extend our thanks to Mr. Leaf for sharing that message of hope with this cohort of TLM students.”

The Last Mile prepares incarcerated individuals for successful reentry through business and technology training. Students in the program learn different aspects of software development training in two 6-month sections. They learn web development fundamentals like HTML and Javascript, and in the second half, they learn Mongo Express React Node, or the server side of coding. The Last Mile program at Montana State Prison began in the Fall of 2022.



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“Seeing Ryan all these years later and knowing him from before, it was pretty inspirational to see how far he’s come along.”

~Student Bill Rose

After his NFL career ended, Leaf struggled with substance abuse that eventually led to his incarceration for burglary and drug offenses in Montana. Today, Leaf is the CEO of RAM Consultant, Inc. and a college and NFL football game analyst for Westwood One Sports. He travels and speaks in communities nationwide, addressing mental health and substance abuse.

“When I walked out of here 10 years ago, I didn’t have anything, I mean, nothing,” Leaf said. “So, they (the inmates) have to

Former NFL quarterback visits students, Page 7



## Montana DOC hosts correctional leaders conference

Correctional leaders from across the Western U.S. flocked to Montana in July for the Correctional Leaders Association (CLA) Western Regional Meeting in Whitefish, Mont.

“We were excited to host our DOC counterparts in Montana this summer to spark important conversations on corrections,” DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. “It was great to connect with others and share ideas on issues that we’re all running into. Plus, it gave us an opportunity to show off our great state.”

The CLA is an association comprised of correctional CEOs from across the U.S. The members lead more than 400,000

correctional employees that oversee more than 8 million inmates, parolees and probationers.

The July conference boasted 204 people in attendance, the largest registration for a regional CLA conference. Over two days, attendees heard from a variety of panels on topics that included medical parole,

recruitment and retention and a staff-led restrictive housing project at Montana State Prison.

Attendees also had the opportunity to enjoy some Montana-specific activities including a bus ride over the Going-to-the-Sun Road, ATV rides, and more.

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*“The 2024 CLA Western Region Meeting, hosted by Montana DOC, was a fantastic gathering for our leaders. Western region DOC state directors came together, swapped insights, tackled critical issues, and shared best practices. Montana proved to be an exceptional host—and wow, what a stunning backdrop for some serious collaboration!”*

**~CLA Executive Director Kevin Kempf**



## Traveling welding trailer brings educational opportunities to MWP

This summer the Montana Department of Corrections debuted its new traveling welding trailer. The effort was a partnership among the DOC, Helena College, Great Falls College MSU, and the Montana Department of Labor & Industry to bring additional educational opportunities to inmates in secure facilities. The four-week welding course will give students a foot up in the workforce once they leave DOC supervision. Congrats to the students who have successfully completed the program!





## Welcome, Mitch Couture! DOC's Indigenous Programming Liaison

Last month, the DOC welcomed Mitch Couture to its team as Indigenous Programming liaison.

Couture comes to this position from the Billings Probation and Parole Office, in addition to a 20-year career with U.S. Navy.

He grew up on the Flathead Reservation and is an enrolled member of the Northern Arapaho tribe.

Couture will help deliver programming and cultural services to the state's Indigenous inmate population

along with help ensure positive, productive relationships with Montana tribes.

"In this position, my goal is to connect the DOC with community resources to support rehabilitation through cultural practices at DOC facilities and nurture awareness and understanding for our Indigenous people," he said.

Couture can be reached at [Mitchell.Couture@mt.gov](mailto:Mitchell.Couture@mt.gov) or (406) 459-2217.



## COMPASS: Hitting the ground running

The DOC kicked off its offender management system (OMS) replacement project – Compass – this fall with special events at the department's Central Office, Montana State Prison, and Montana Women's Prison.

Members of the department's dedicated OMS team, BerryDunn (consultants), and Mi-Case (vendor) traveled throughout the state to inform DOC employees about what to expect over the next two years as the system is implemented and answer questions.

"This project touches not only every part of our agency, but our partners as well," said DOC Director Brian Gootkin. "This

system will make our operations more efficient and will bring our partners together to share data to help us enhance public safety."

The OMS replacement project resulted from a decision by the 2023 Montana Legislature to allocate \$17.7 million in House Bill 5 to allow the DOC to procure and implement a new OMS.

The department's existing OMS was developed in house and has been in use since 2008. While it served the department



**MOLT - Modernization, Oversight and Leadership Team :** John Daugherty, Katie Donath, Natalie Smitham, Kathy Ralston, John Olson, Sam Jovanovich, and Kristy Cobban.

well for almost two decades, its technology is antiquated.

A BerryDunn identified 115 challenges related to the system which will be corrected in the new OMS.



BerryDunn team



Mi-Case team



MWP presentation





## Representing the DOC with honor

When Cassie Breker isn't working as a contract manager with the DOC, she serves as a reserve officer with the Lewis and Clark County Sheriff's Department participating in its honor guard. So, when DOC Director Brian Gootkin raised the idea of starting an honor guard at the DOC, Breker was happy to get involved.

"I decided to join the Montana Department of Corrections' Honor Guard as the anthem singer because I love serving as the anthem singer on the LCSO Honor Guard," she said. "I am passionate about the work law enforcement does and I am honored to serve my community. Honoring fallen law enforcement officers, first responders, and corrections officers is a big passion of mine."

Honor guards perform a variety of duties including participating in military honors, ceremonial support, flag displays, or funeral honors.

The DOC's initial honor guard cohort includes seven members from throughout the department. The members were nominated by their supervisors.

In July, the group held its first practice in Helena and worked with the Lewis and Clark honor guard to run through the drills.

"It's important for the department to have an honor guard team because the honor guard's ceremonial duties display to the public that we are committed to providing safety and security to Montanans," said Jason Ness, who coordinates the team. "We exhibit the high standards and discipline required to do this and represent corrections professionals."



The group will initially focus its attention on DOC activities, but could eventually perform at a variety of events.

"I'm excited we were able to get a group of dedicated individuals together to build the DOC's first honor guard," DOC Director Brian Gootkin said. "As a military veteran myself, I know the importance of having a quality honor guard. I can't wait to see how our group grows and for it to perform at DOC and community events."

DOC employees who are interested in participating in the honor guard should reach out to Jason Ness at [JNess@mt.gov](mailto:JNess@mt.gov) for more information.



**Governor's Award, Page 1****Restrictive Housing Unit Change Team**

Scott McNeil, Beau Baltezar, Don Christensen, Mike Franks, Cassie Hindman, Sam Jovanovich, Brian Leighton, Sara Smathers.

This multi-disciplinary team joined with the Crime and Justice Institute to develop new Restrictive Housing processes for use at Montana State Prison. Previously, these processes were mandated through legislation and did not incorporate feedback from the people who worked in this unit with its unique population.

This staff-led effort identified concerns with the previous processes which ultimately were not sufficiently incentivizing positive

behavior by inmates, including the desire to return to general population. The goal of the effort is to make the prison safer for both inmates and staff via positive behavioral intervention driven by the people who work most closely with the inmates on a daily basis.

The department believes the result of this collaboration will be improved offender outcomes, in addition to greater cooperation among members of the DOC team.

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understand and know that it's been a day-by-day trial and error until we've gotten to this place."

During his visit, Leaf inspired students by sharing his journey through the DOC system and how he found success post-incarceration. One of the students listening in the class was Bill Rose. Rose is also a Great Falls native and was in high school during the same time as Leaf.

"Seeing Ryan all these years later and knowing him from before, it was pretty inspirational to see how far he's come along," Rose said. "He's changed a lot. And that was – it was very uplifting to hear his story. We're working so hard to do this for ourselves, to get out and show our communities that when we come back, we're going to be able to take off and thrive again, that we're going to leave this behind us and take off again. And he's done that and that's amazing."

