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Mississippi Department of Corrections Applauds Outstanding Employees and Remembers Those Who Gave Ultimate Sacrifice

The Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) honored its correctional professionals this year with two firsts. The MDOC held its inaugural Employee Recognition Luncheon in March and honored its heroes with statewide Memorial Services in May.

The MDOC presented Captain Willie Fuller, a 19-year veteran with the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Miss., the state corrections agency's signal "Employee of the Year" award. Captain Fuller received the award at a luncheon in Jackson, which also honored 117 MDOC employees recognized in 2001 for their dedication, professionalism and commitment to public safety.

"I am deeply honored to have received this recognition and tell everyone that it is a good thing to work for the Mississippi Department of Corrections," said Captain Fuller.

The awards presentation is part of MDOC's Employee Recognition Awards program initiated in July 2001, with the first awards presented in August 2001.

"I have had the extreme honor of being able to go all across the state of Mississippi telling everyone who will listen how highly skilled, dedicated and professional the employees of the MDOC are," said Commissioner Robert L. Johnson. "The public can take great pride in the state employees of the MDOC who daily place themselves between danger and public safety."

The MDOC honored four additional Employee of the Year nominees. Commander Hubert Davis of the South Mississippi Correctional Institution, Officer Vivian Frazer of the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility, Branch Director II Billy Sisk of the Central Office Training Department and Field Officer IV Bill Brand of the Community Services Division were saluted for their outstanding contributions to MDOC.

On Monday, May 6, the MDOC held memorial services at its three state institutions to honor five MDOC corrections professionals who gave their all for public safety. Morning services were held at the Mississippi State Penitentiary and at the South Mississippi Correctional Institution. A larger memorial service was held at noon at the Central Mississippi Correctional Institution in Rankin County. Governor Ronnie Musgrove was the keynote speaker.

“The work done by employees of Mississippi’s correctional institutions is not easy,” said Governor Musgrove. “They are charged with the care and control of more than 30,000 people. It is a charge they take seriously. It is a difficult job, and we honor the memory of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the completion of that job.”

The five MDOC Officers killed in the line of duty:

- Chester Tullos, a traveling Sergeant with the Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) and former Sheriff of Smith County, was shot on May 18, 1933, while transporting two inmates from Hattiesburg to MSP.
- Ammie Kendall, an Assistant Sergeant at Old Camp 5 at MSP, was shot on March 13, 1963, in a melee with five inmates attempting to escape from prison.
- James Meeks, Sergeant for Camp 11 at MSP, was shot on September 12, 1972, by an inmate who had entered his home and assaulted his wife.
- Argentra Cotton, Correctional Officer at MSP, was stabbed on July 18, 1989, in a confrontation with a maximum-security inmate who escaped his cellblock.
- Sidney Harrison, Correctional Officer at MSP, was traveling to Oxford to testify in a court trial when the vehicle he and two others were in blew a tire and flipped several times down an embankment. Officer Harrison died as a result of the accident that occurred on May 18, 1995.

“We pay tribute to those whose job exists to protect us from those society has forgotten about,” said Commissioner Johnson. “Too often we assume that when a criminal is caught and sentenced they are no longer a threat to our community or to our safety. The reality is that these men and women of corrections are confronted each day by the most dangerous individuals among us.”

The memorial services marked Correctional Employees Recognition Week, May 5 – 11.