



NEWS RELEASE

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Simpson and Forrest County Community Work Centers Receive American Correctional Association (ACA) Recommendation

Jackson—Commissioner Christopher Epps today expressed his appreciation to the staff of the Simpson County Community Work Center and the Forrest County Community Work Center for their hard work and dedication in successfully demonstrating their ability to meet nationally accepted correctional standards. Following an audit at both community work centers by American Correctional Association (ACA) auditors, the Simpson County Community Work Center in Magee and the Forrest County Community Work Center in Hattiesburg both received a recommended score of 100% on the mandatory standards and a recommended score of 100% on the non-mandatory standards.

“I commend both James Ingle and Kenneth Harrison, directors of the Simpson County and Forrest County Community Work Centers, and their staff for embracing this challenge and receiving a recommendation for ACA Accreditation,” said Commissioner Epps. “This is indeed a monumental day for the state of Mississippi and the Mississippi Department of Corrections.”

The ACA auditing team arrived at Simpson County CWC on Monday, Dec. 9, and at the Forrest County CWC on Wednesday, Dec. 11. They spent four days reviewing all MDOC policies and procedures, touring the work centers, and interviewed staff and inmates housed at the work centers. To be awarded accreditation, the community work centers must comply with 100% of the 30 mandatory standards identified by ACA and comply with at least 90% of the 214 non-mandatory standards identified by ACA.

The ACA Auditing team was comprised of two veteran correctional professionals. The ACA Auditor Chairperson, Phoebe Johnson, is a retired corrections professional from South Carolina where she was a warden at various levels of corrections, including work centers and minimum, medium and maximum-security facilities. Johnson has 26 years experience in corrections and has been an ACA Auditor since 1983, serving as an Auditor Chairperson since 1985.

“This score of 100 doesn’t happen often,” said Johnson. “Everyone is very professional. We’ve been very impressed.”

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Joining her was Robert Conley, Sr., a correctional consultant from Hornbeak, Tennessee. Conley, who retired from the Tennessee Department of Corrections after 38 years in state government, has participated in over 60 ACA audits. During the 28 years Conley spent working in corrections, he has worked in several areas ranging from recreational assistant to warden in minimum and maximum-security facilities.

“During my visit to Mississippi, I am finding that the department is thoroughly committed to the accreditation process,” said Conley. Conley also commended the communication from one community work center to another.

Simpson County CWC and Forrest County CWC are both currently in candidate status. The ACA auditing team will now report its findings to the Commission on Accreditation for Corrections (CAC), which will hold an accreditation panel hearing. At the CAC panel hearing in January 2003, it will be decided if these two CWC’s are awarded accreditation.

Individual accreditation awards last for 3 years; however, the process is designed to be continuous. Accreditation is a system to verify that correctional programs comply with national standards developed by the American Correctional Association. The ACA Standards Committee continually revises the standards based on changing practices, current case law, and correctional agency experiences. Approved standards reflect the view of correctional practitioners, architects, medical and legal experts.

The advantages and benefits of accreditation are numerous and include:

- The assessment of a facility’s strengths and weaknesses;
- The identification of obtainable goals;
- The implementation of state of the art policies and procedures;
- The establishment of specific guidelines for daily operations;
- An aid in the defense of frivolous lawsuits;
- An increase in community support; and
- A higher level of staff professionalism and morale.

The South Mississippi Correctional Institution (SMCI) received their Certificate of Accreditation Award from the American Correctional Association (ACA) in July. SMCI was the first state institution in its entirety to receive the prestigious designation. In addition, the Central Mississippi Correctional Facility (CMCF) in Pearl, Miss., received their recommendation for accreditation in September and Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Miss., received recommendation in November.

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