



PRESS RELEASE

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Date: March 5, 2002
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Six MDOC Mississippi State Penitentiary Employees Receive Outstanding Employee Recognition Awards

Parchman —. Six Mississippi State Penitentiary (MSP) employees at Parchman today were presented employee recognition awards by Mississippi Department of Corrections (MDOC) Commissioner Robert L. Johnson. The correctional employees were saluted for their outstanding service at the state prison.

“It is indeed a personal pleasure for me to have the honor to present these awards to each of you,” said Commissioner Johnson. “These awards signify a small token of our appreciation to each of you for your untiring public service here at the Mississippi State Penitentiary.”

Mississippi State Penitentiary employees receiving awards for February 2002 included:

Letitia Roach Drew, Miss.	Assistant Director MSP Offenders Services	Staff Employee of the Month
Maurice Foreman Carrollton, Miss.	Correctional Officer IV, Unit 32 A Building-Area IV	Correctional Officer of the Month
Linda Weeks Drew, Miss.	Special Project Officer III MSP Superintendent's Office	Extra Effort Award
Willie Bays Clarksdale, Miss.	Chaplain I - MSP Chaplain's Department	Extra Effort Award
Lee Bertha McGee Webb, Miss.	Correctional Officer IV Unit 32 E Building-Area IV	Extra Effort Award
Jo-Nathan Walker Grendora, Miss.	Correctional Officer Trainee Unit 32-C Building Area IV	Heroism Award

The 2 p.m. special awards presentation ceremony was held in MSP's Spiritual Life Center. Staff, family members and friends were in attendance as Superintendent Emmitt Sparkman announced the names of the award recipients. Corrections Commissioner Robert L. Johnson assisted with the presentations of the recognition awards. Lapel pins and certificates were presented to the honorees. Additionally, special award plaques were presented to recognize the recipients of the Staff Employee of the Month, the Correctional Officer of the Month and the Heroism award.

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In his address, Commissioner Johnson congratulated the prison staff for its outstanding effort. “We are extremely proud of each and everyone of the nearly 1,800 highly dedicated employees here at MSP for their vigilance in the name of public safety.”

Adding to Commissioner Johnson’s remarks, Superintendent Sparkman stated, “We are extremely pleased with the dedication of all our employees here at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Not only do we have the largest prison population, but we also have a highly professional staff that remains continuously vigilant in what I believe is the most difficult assignment of any of our state prisons due to MSP’s size and the nature of its classified prison population.”

The Mississippi State Penitentiary, which encompasses over 16,000 acres of rich delta farmland, is located in Sunflower County, Mississippi. It has the capacity to house 5,551 prisoners. MSP’s daily population averages nearly 5,300 inmates.

Letitia Roach, Assistant Director of Offender Services, a resident of Drew, received the Staff Employee of the Month recognition award. Ms. Roach, an 18-year veteran with the prison system, has worked in the Offender Services Department at MSP for the past 15 years. Jointly nominated by the Offender Services’ case manager staff, Ms. Roach was characterized by her co-workers as a manager’s manager; one who’s concerned with the operational procedures of the institution and who is determined to get the job done. Her supporting staff praised Ms. Roach for her confidence in their ability to carry out their assigned tasks. She further was saluted for her wealth of knowledge of each job assignment and her unwavering tenacity to meet departmental deadlines. She was praised as a great supervisor and a friend to those with whom she worked.

Maurice Foreman, Correctional Officer IV, of Carrollton, was presented the Correctional Officer of the Month award. Officer Foreman, a 9-year veteran with the Mississippi State Penitentiary, was nominated to receive the award by Area IV Correctional Supervisor Beverly Shelly. Officer Foreman was commended for both his loyalty and dedication to his job. “Officer Foreman displays a positive attitude toward all job assignments,” said Lieutenant Shelly. “His demeanor is infectious and it has an inspiring effect on those with whom he works. No job is too hard or too large for him and he works to complete all assigned tasks in a timely manner.”

Linda Weeks, Special Projects Officer III, of Drew, received the Extra Effort award. Ruth Grays-Washington, Director of MSP’s Personnel Office, nominated Ms Weeks, a 12-year employee at the Mississippi State Penitentiary to receive the employee recognition. “Ms. Weeks is a most pleasant person with whom to work,” said Mrs. Washington. “A Special Projects Officer’s job function is diverse, and suffice it to say, difficult. Ms. Weeks does an admirable job in her role as Special Projects Officer by managing MSP’s guesthouse, which serves as overnight accommodations for visitors, and staff who travel to the prison on business matters. She also plays a vital role by assisting in coordinating employee recognition ceremonies. Ms. Weeks is also responsible for overseeing the scheduling of special group tours at the prison.” Ms Weeks was praised for easy-going manner, her loyalty to her job, her willingness to assist others and for always having a positive attitude in dealing with employees and the general public alike.

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Willie Bays, Chaplain I, of Clarksdale, received the Extra Effort award. An eight-year veteran with the prison system's Chaplains Department, Chaplain Bays was nominated by Chaplain Eugene Wigglesworth Director of the MDOC's Religious Programs to receive the special recognition award. Chaplain Wigglesworth commended Chaplain Bays for his dedicated ministry to offenders at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. "The role of a prison chaplain is a most difficult one," said Chaplain Wigglesworth. "Chaplain Bays is an exemplary spiritual leader," said Chaplain Wigglesworth. "He has played a principal role in the continued enhancement of religious programs at the Mississippi State Penitentiary." Chaplain Bays was commended for his responsiveness recently in locating the next of kin in the case of the death of an inmate by natural causes at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. "Chaplain Bays was unrelentless in his efforts to locate and notify a family member about the death of the inmate when there was little for him to go on from the inmate's visitor list," said Chaplain Wigglesworth. "Thanks to his persistence, a family member was finally located and thus prevented the inmate from being buried in the prison's pauper cemetery."

Lee Bertha McGee, Correctional Officer IV, of Webb, was presented the Extra Effort award. Officer McGee, a 12-year veteran at MSP, is currently assigned to Unit 32 – E Building, a 1000-bed maximum-security facility at the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Captain James Brewer, Correctional Commander nominated Officer McGee to receive the special employee recognition award. "Officer McGee works in a professional manner to ensure that her post is always in proper order. She is courteous to others and is a very self-motivated employee who is highly dependable. She completes each assignment on schedule." Officer McGee was praised for her team-player attitude and her willingness to volunteer her assistance whenever it was needed.

Jo-Nathan Walker, Correctional Officer Trainee, of Glendora, received the prestigious Heroism award on the first anniversary of his employment with the Mississippi State Penitentiary. Nominated by Captain Larry Harris, Correctional Commander at Unit 32-C Building, Officer Walker was described as being extremely brave on January 28, 2002 by stepping in between two inmates and using his protective shield to prevent one inmate from assaulting a fellow offender with a sharp instrument. "It was potentially a very dangerous situation," said Captain Harris. "However, Officer Walker literally put his life in peril. He used the skills from his academy training and he prevented the assault from taking place. He not only managed to protect the offender from being assaulted but he also ushered the prisoner to his cell unharmed." The homemade weapon was confiscated and the other inmate was disciplined for his role in the incident." Officer Walker was commended for his attentive nature and his quick response in preventing serious harm to the offenders as well as himself.

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Media Note: If you would like a digital photograph of the service award recipients, e-mail bgreenleaf@mdoc.state.ms.us or phone him at (601) 359-5646.