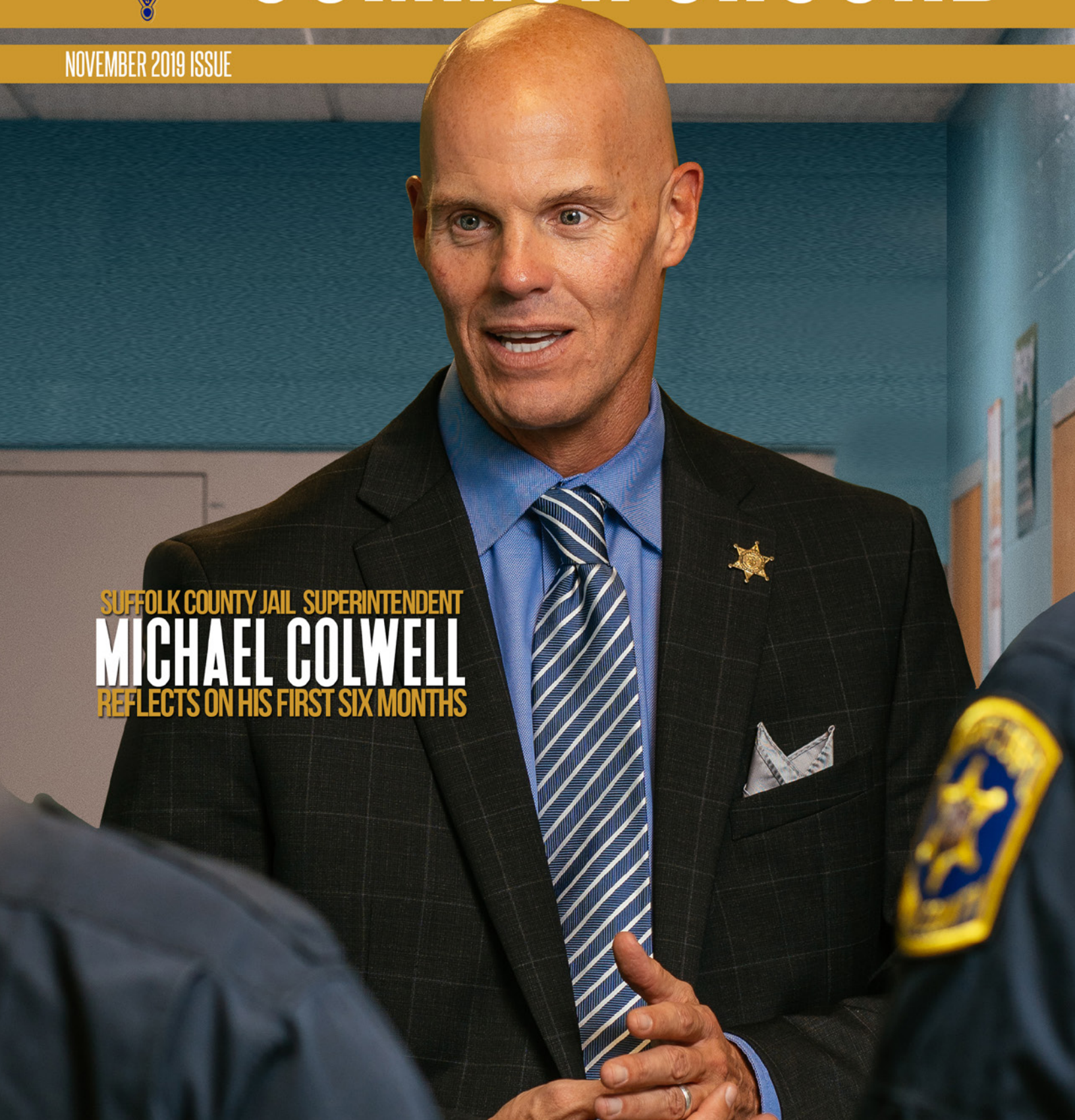




COMMON GROUND

NOVEMBER 2019 ISSUE

SUFFOLK COUNTY JAIL SUPERINTENDENT
MICHAEL COLWELL
REFLECTS ON HIS FIRST SIX MONTHS



Sheriff's Statement



At the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, our mandate is for the care and custody of the men and women remanded to our facilities by the courts. In addition to our mandate, our mission is to provide the kinds of programs and services that can help the people in our charge to develop the skills and coping mechanisms necessary to become successful and productive people who are better equipped to care for themselves and their families once they return home.

In order to achieve this kind of success externally, it is absolutely critical that those citizens who are returning to our communities have access to sustainable employment, affordable housing and comprehensive healthcare that includes addiction recovery and mental health services. Quality education is also a key, particularly as a preventive measure against initial involvement in the criminal justice system, but also as it relates to the prevention of recidivism.

In this issue of the Common Ground newsletter, we present to you just a few of the initiatives that we at the Sheriff's Department have undertaken to help us realize our mission to change the lives of those in our facilities and transform the communities into which they return. As you turn the following pages, you'll read about our most recent graduation of the students in our HiSET classes; the reopening of the Suffolk County Jail's Education Unit and its new "I-Can Academy;" our collaboration with the City of Boston's Office of Returning Citizens, Suffolk County District Attorney's Office and MassHire Career Center to hold a CORI-Friendly Job and Resource Fair; and much more.

-Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins

COMMON GROUND NEWSLETTER

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JAIL SUPT. COLWELL REFLECTS ON JOB, EDUCATION, SCSD'S FUTURE

SCSD Suffolk County Jail Superintendent Michael Colwell reflects on his first six months at the helm of the Jail, the recently revived Education Division and future programming at the SCJ.



SCSD COLLABORATION BRINGS CORI-FRIENDLY JOB FAIR TO ROXBURY

The SCSD joined with the City of Boston's Office of Returning Citizens, the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office and MassHire Boston to offer job seekers a CORI-Friendly Job and Resource Fair at the Ray and Joan Kroc Center in Roxbury.



FAMILY, FRIENDS WELCOMED TO HOUSE OF CORRECTION FOR HISET PROGRAM GRADUATION

The SCSD Education Division held a graduation for participants in the Department's HiSET program with family and friends there to offer support and congratulations.

INTENSIFIED FOCUS ON FEMALE POPULATION ENDS DEPARTMENT'S RELATIONSHIP WITH ICE

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department has terminated its contract with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in order to intensify its focus on the provision of care, custody and rehabilitative services to what will soon be an expanded population of women entering the Suffolk County House of Correction.

Announced in early October, as part of a new agreement with other county sheriffs' offices, the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department began receiving pretrial and sentenced women from Plymouth, Essex, and Norfolk counties. This arrangement was reached in an effort to achieve greater regionalization and delivery of critical services for what has become the fastest-growing incarcerated population in the country. Several recent reports have revealed that, despite an overall decline in prison populations across the United States, the number of women incarcerated or involved in the criminal justice system has continued to rise.



The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department stands uniquely positioned to care for this demographic with its specialized, gender-sensitive programming, including the CREW Program (Community Re-Entry for Women), which has been recognized nationally for its work. Women arriving to the House of Correction are immediately classified and enrolled into Women's Program Services, which allows them to partake in these essential services. This increased focus by Women's Program Services on an expanding population, however, necessitated the diversion of resources from other areas.

"We are ending our contract with ICE to reallocate our resources towards helping local women to address long-standing issues that have contributed to their involvement in the criminal justice system," said Sheriff Tompkins. "Our gender-specific programming, which is among the best in the country, allows us to address these issues, which include domestic violence, sexual exploitation and substance use disorders, to name a few."

"We take pride in the services that we have been able to provide to ICE detainees," Sheriff Tompkins continued, "but we are elated about this new opportunity to expand our services across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to reach more women with our dedicated programming so that we can begin to work on their recovery, address some the issues that first led them into the system, and return them to society better able to care for themselves and their families."



Women's Program Services delivers gender-specific and individualized reintegration programming to women who have been remanded to the Suffolk County House of Correction. Every woman is enrolled in a three-phase program model that helps address the psychological and educational barriers that have hindered their success in order to better prepare them for reentry.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which first signed its contract with the Department back in 2003, completed its relocation of detainees from the House of Correction just days after receiving its 60-day "Notice to Quit."



Superintendent Colwell

Speaks About His Enthusiasm For Change, Transformation At Suffolk County Jail

Just over six months ago, Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins appointed Michael Colwell to his new position as the Superintendent of Suffolk County Jail. With more than 28 years of experience and dedication to the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department, Superintendent Colwell began his service in 1991 as a jail officer, rising steadily through the ranks from Sergeant to Lieutenant, Captain and Shift Commander.

Speaking about his experiences over the past half-year, Supt. Colwell also talked about some of the changes that have occurred at the Jail, his future plans and his appreciation for his SCSD coworkers.

"I want people to understand that the Department is bigger than just a public agency," said Supt. Colwell. "We are also public servants to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There was a time when jails and houses of correction were considered warehouses for people awaiting trial and for those who were sentenced. It sometimes seemed that they would lock anyone away for doing something bad or being charged with doing something bad. However, Sheriff Tompkins and his team have long been moving into to a more progressive, productive approach, which focuses on true rehabilitation and true re-entry for the men and women in our care and custody."

Supt. Colwell is also a strong advocate for elevating and empowering people on staff who he knows will help to put things into perspective and bring forth innovative ideas. Supt. Colwell also said that the most rewarding part of his job thus far, has been the large amount of changes that have occurred in such a short amount of time. He truly enjoys working with and including the staff at the Suffolk County Jail.

He also talked about the I-Can Academy, part of the new Education Division at the Jail that recently celebrated its grand opening after years of making referrals of detainees to the House of Correction for educational opportunities. Supt. Colwell spoke about his appreciation for all of the hard work that staff members put into clearing out the rooms that hold the new academy, which entailed scanning and reorganizing all of the files before they were moved to another storage area.

Superintendent Colwell also stated that: "Education is the key to freedom from poverty. Education gives you the ability to communicate, and it gives you power." He said that having the I-Can Academy has truly changed the men who participate in the program, in the most positive ways. "They no longer see themselves as prisoners in an institutionalized environment; instead, they feel like scholars and that is quite rewarding to us all."

Asked about his future plans for the Jail, Colwell responded that he'd like to open a P.E.A.C.E. (Positive Energy Always Creates Elevation) Unit similar to the one currently running at the House of Correction, which, though recently established, has already shown great results and positive change within the 18-to-25 year-old population that it serves. As studies have shown, a young person's brain does not reach full maturation until the age of twenty-five and beyond. Having a unit dedicated to emerging adults allows for a more intense focus on honing their decision-making skills, controlling their impulsivity, and improving their ability to handle conflict in a more mature way that does not lend to criminal behavior. While spending time at the P.E.A.C.E. Unit at the House of Correction, Superintendent Colwell reaffirmed his belief in the importance of capturing this audience's attention while they are impressionable and nurturing their leadership skills in an effort to help them to make better decisions while they are incarcerated and even more so when they return to their communities.

Enthusiastically, Supt. Colwell underlined the importance he places on his work as an ambassador of change for the Department, finding new training opportunities, collaborating with community partners and being engaged both internally and externally on behalf of the Department.

CORI-FRIENDLY JOB FAIR OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES, SECOND CHANCES FOR RETURNING CITIZENS

The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department recently collaborated with the City of Boston's Office of Returning Citizens, the Suffolk County District Attorney's Office, and the MassHire Downtown Boston Career Center to create a CORI-Friendly Job and Resource Fair that was open to anyone and everyone looking for employment. The Salvation Army's Ray and Joan Kroc Corps Community Center was the host site for the fair.

Along with the Department and its core collaborators, the fair featured 43 employers and employment partners who saw more than 160 job-seekers over the duration of this event. In addition to providing attendees access to a wide variety of industries and levels of employment opportunities, the Department also offered prospective employees the opportunity to have free professional headshots taken for use in online employment profiles and job searches.

Employment, coupled with access to affordable housing and health care, has long been a part of the Department's efforts to break the cycle of incarceration and recidivism experienced by the men and women in Department care and custody. Internally, the Department provides a vast array of programs and services that are designed to not only assist those in its charge with addiction recovery and rehabilitation, but also train people to develop the kinds of skills and practical abilities that will prepare them to better care for themselves and their families upon release. Job fairs like this one are just one part of the Department's external outreach programming involving community partnerships and collaborative agencies.

"We are very grateful to all of the partners who came together to make the CORI-Friendly Job and Resource Fair a success," said Sheriff Tompkins. "We work mightily to ensure that the men and women who are with us receive the kinds of rehabilitative services and training that they'll need to return home successfully and that includes working with partners to provide more and better opportunities for employment once they leave us."



Maia Porter, the Workforce Development Manager at the House of Correction who was one of the main coordinators of this event, concurred.

"The Suffolk County Sheriff's Department is committed to changing the community's perspective on corrections," said Porter. "By changing the mindset on corrections, it will ultimately change our community itself. We're showing our constituents that 'yes, there may be many barriers in life, but the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department is here to help them overcome these challenges by assisting our returning citizens and their families with employment opportunities and resources to give them the support and guidance that they need to claim their places in our community.'"

Former House of Correction resident Israel Montez attended the job fair ready to take advantage of all that it had to offer. Since Israel's release, he has been outspoken about how he has changed his life around for the better. While he was incarcerated, Montez said, he participated in the Department's Family Matters, a voluntary program under the Reintegration Services Division at the House of Correction. Family Matters works with inmates and their families to strive for positive relationships that strengthen the family unit, reunify inmates with their children while incarcerated, and connect families to support services where needed. Israel said that Family Matters is one of the reasons why he is where he is today. Not only has he been able to reconnect with his family, he also recently completed a men's residential program. Today, Israel is three years sober and hopes to become a substance abuse recovery coach one day.

"I want to be able to give back to my community in the same way that it was given back to me," Israel said. He later went on to talk about how excited and grateful he was for the opportunity to attend the job fair.

"The community really needed this; I hope there are more to come."



PRIDE, POTENTIAL ABOUND AT HOUSE OF CORRECTION HISET PROGRAM GRADUATION

At the House of Correction, the Adult Secondary Education/High School Equivalency Program prepares students with an 8th grade reading level or higher to earn their high school equivalency diploma or HiSET, the equivalent to the former GED (General Education Diploma). Students study for the five areas of the HiSET: language arts, reading, science, social sciences and mathematics.

On October 30, 2019, a graduation was held for 27 students who worked diligently to pass their HiSET. The men and women in the program proudly wore their caps and gowns while receiving their diplomas from Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins, Superintendent/Special Sheriff Yolanda Smith and keynote speaker Senior Vice President and General Counsel for the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers and former NAACP President Michael Curry, Esq.

During the ceremony, Mr. Curry delivered an exceptional speech that left many students and visitors feeling inspired. He talked about his experiences facing many of the same issues that the men and women in the audience had. He spoke about growing up in a single parent household in Roxbury, where he dealt with poverty and witnessed violence and crime at a young age. He explained to the Class of 2019 that it was not his degrees or accomplishments that he is most proud of. Instead, it is being able to overcome all of those shared obstacles that served as commonalities between him and the day's graduates. Curry's speech centered around a quote from Fredrick Douglas that read, "You are not judged

by the height you have risen, but from the depth you have climbed."

Before ending his speech, Curry left the graduates with some tips that might ultimately prove themselves universally useful to everyone in attendance.

- **"Take inventory of yourselves, take accountability for yourselves," Curry said. "Know what your challenges and weaknesses are so that you can figure out how to overcome them."**

- **"Plan, do not ever trip through life. The best way to be successful is to plan it."**

- **"Anticipate your roadblocks, everything is predictable. Start to think about all of your challenges, and then begin to plan, plan to win."**

The graduation would not have been possible without the leadership and guidance of Suffolk County Sheriff's Department Director of Education Jim Dizio and the entire Education Division. They worked tirelessly with the men and women in the program to prepare themselves to earn their High School Equivalency certificates and High School Diplomas. Although the day was truly about the graduates, it was also a day of joy and happiness for their friends and family members who were in attendance.

AROUND SUFFOLK COUNTY

COMMISSIONER GROSS, DA ROLLINS, COUNCILOR JANEY AND REVEREND GERALD TALK CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WITH SHERIFF TOMPKINS

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins and the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department held another installment of the Department's ongoing community forum series, "Directions for Corrections" at Roxbury Community College. With a panel that featured Boston Police Department Commissioner William Gross, Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins, Boston City Councilor Kim Janey and Reverend Arthur Gerald, Jr. of Twelfth Baptist Church, a lively and informative discussion was had around the topic of "Effecting Positive Change through Community Engagement."



STATE REPRESENTATIVE TYLER TOURS HOUSE OF CORRECTION

Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins and Superintendent/Special Sheriff Yolanda Smith welcomed State Representative Chynah Tyler to the House of Correction for a tour that highlighted programming, visits (for the men and women) and a robust conversation about community support. Rep. Tyler visited the P.E.A.C.E. (Positive Energy Always Creates Elevation) Unit for emerging adults, the O.A.S.I.S. (Opioid Addiction Services Inside South Bay) Unit, the Culinary Arts kitchen, the Common Ground Institute, and the Education Division, among other key locations.



SCSD WELCOMES HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND MASS INC. FOR VISIT TO HOUSE OF CORRECTION

Suffolk County Sheriff Steven W. Tompkins and the Suffolk County Sheriff's Department hosted a group tour of the Suffolk County House of Correction for students of Harvard University's Visiting Lecturer on Sociology, Ira Jackson. Members of the Department, including Special Sheriff and House of Correction Superintendent Yolanda Smith and Assistant Deputy Superintendent Rachelle Steinberg, led the group on a tour of several key stations within the facility before sitting down for a discussion about comprehensive criminal justice reform with Sheriff Tompkins and MassINC.'s Ben Forman.





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