

# An Interview with NJC Jails Division Chief

## Virginia Hutchinson

*Earlier this year, the NIC Jails Division was relocated from Longmont, Colorado, to join NIC's other program divisions in Washington, D.C. The NIC Academy Division was moved from Longmont to Aurora, Colorado, where it now shares facilities with the Federal Bureau of Prisons's Management and Specialty Training Center. LJN Exchange editor Connie Clem talked with Virginia Hutchinson about the move and future directions for the Jails Division.*

**CONNIE CLEM:** Now that the Jails Division is getting settled in its new location in D.C., how do you look back on the process of moving?

**VIRGINIA HUTCHINSON:** We went through a tremendous amount of change. I can't say enough about the commitment of the staff and all the ways they carried through to make sure our services weren't interrupted.

**Were there staffing changes in connection with the move?**

We did lose most of our staff. I have to say, it was very difficult for each of them to make the decision to leave, and of course we were very sorry to lose them. Kris Keller, Alan Richardson, and Richard Geather all have been extremely dedicated to NIC and their work with the Jails Division, and yet, ultimately, personal factors had to prevail. In the same period, we also lost Vicci Persons through the conclusion of her IPA (intergovernmental personnel agreement) term from Sonoma County. And we lost three fantastic support staff, Betsy Matten, Evelyn Holland, and Derrick Houska. Fortunately, Richard and Betsy are now working with the Academy Division in Aurora, so we haven't lost touch. In fact, they have both been invaluable to us since they have continued to help us out during the transition period.

Three Jails Division staff did move to D.C.—Jim Barbee, Fran Zandi, and me. Fran and Jim have worked incredibly hard to maintain services through this adjustment both in the workplace and in their personal lives. Our programs have

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continued on track throughout the summer and fall, and I'm so proud and grateful that there has been no decrease in services despite the transitions we've faced.

I'd say we're in a rebuilding phase now. As hard as it was to lose those colleagues, we are really excited about the three new staff who have come on board. All of them have worked in jails and have a lot of passion for NIC's work based on their past experiences and knowledge of NIC. They are excited about being part of rebuilding our division. Their recent field experience is going to be critical to NIC as we regain our momentum and move ahead from our new base.

Cheryl Paul has a strong jail background through her work in Sonoma County, California, and that experience includes work with direct supervision, planning the transition to a new jail, and management information systems. For many years, Cheryl also provided consultant services for NIC to jails nationwide in making the transition to a new jail.

Robbye Braxton-Mintz is from the jail in Arlington County, Virginia. She was the inmate services manager there when she left and, before that, she was the special assistant to the director, Mike Pinson. She has worked with jail accreditation, classification, and inmate programs.

Mike Jackson is a former jail administrator from Fairfax County, Virginia. Most recently, he was a training manager for the National Sheriffs' Association, where he managed training programs, updated NSA's correspondence courses for jail officers and first-line supervisors, and served as NSA's representative on all jail-related matters.

Once they have their feet on the ground, we'll be able to fully benefit from their field experience and fresh perspectives on our work. We look forward to having a good balance—a mix of experienced staff who are well grounded in NIC's and the division's history, purpose, philosophy, and services plus new staff who can give us new insights into all we do. It really opens up exciting possibilities for us, and I think it'll be a powerful combination. Once we're a bit more settled, we'll also be filling an IPA position, and that'll bring us up to a full staff again.

### **What's ahead for Jails Division programs?**

Right now, honestly, we are working hard to maintain our current services. Recently, though, we awarded cooperative agreements to develop new tools on staffing analysis and jail vulnerability assessments. This work will enhance our overall services in jail administration.

All our services related to new jail planning will continue, and most of that work has undergone fairly significant updates and revisions over the last several years. Also, this coming year, we should be ready to publish new documents on risk management in jails, emergency preparedness for jails, and jail population forecasting. We also plan to publish updated editions of our documents on jail operations and the constitution and on data collection and analysis.

We also are continuing our work on inmate behavior management to help jails operate more safely and securely, along with our services related to direct supervision. Our jail standards and inspection initiative just released three new

publications that provide a good resource for people working in that area. The National Sheriffs' Institute will continue, and we're also participating in the broader NIC initiative that focuses on helping inmates make the transition from the jail to the community.

### **So it's "business as usual" then?**

We're doing our best. I really can't overemphasize the value of our former staff who made the difficult choice to leave, but who have also offered to be a resource for the new staff to help in their transition, and that's wonderful. We thank them.

We also appreciate all the support we received from within NIC and from Harley Lappin, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. We got a tremendous boost from Mr. Lappin and his vocal commitment to the Jails Division and NIC's services to jails. He was very responsive to concerns from jails, when the field was expressing trepidation that the Jails Division might change or actually even disappear—there were fears about not just NIC services for jails but the existence of the division itself. Harley was kind enough to speak at the American Jail Association and the National Sheriffs' Association conferences to reinforce NIC's commitment to jails. He fully supported the idea that the division will remain intact. This was very well received by people in jails nationwide, and it made a big difference in terms of people's confidence in NIC.

### **What's ahead for the Large Jail Network?**

Richard Geaither has chosen to stay with NIC in the Academy Division, and this means changes for the LJN. Mike Jackson will be taking on coordination of the group, and Richard will serve as an advisor for at least the next year. Richard is very supportive of Mike and will do all he can to ensure the continued success of this network. I know, though, that it will be difficult for Richard to finally give up his responsibilities for the network. He has managed it for many years, has formed valuable relationships with the jail administrators, and has such a strong sense of the challenges these jails face. In the Jails Division, we relied a lot on Richard's knowledge of large jails as we developed our services. Mike, though, is an excellent choice to take on the coordination of the network. He has experienced the network meetings both as a jail practitioner and as a representative of NSA. He knows first-hand the importance of the network and has a passion for it.

### **How does it feel to be part of NIC-D.C.? What's different now?**

Tom Beauclair, NIC's new Deputy Director, has brought a fresh perspective to our management team, and he will be making a difference in the agency. I think with the Jails Division's move, there's real potential for the executive team and the program divisions to relate to and support each other in new ways. It will be interesting to see how that plays out as NIC continues to evolve. ■

#### **For more information:**

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