



BULLETIN

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OFFICER VIKAS VIJ HONORED AS 2021 MDOC OFFICER OF THE YEAR



Vikas Vij, a corrections officer at Thumb Correctional Facility, has been named the 2021 Michigan

Department of Corrections Officer of the Year.

Officer Vij is known for his positivity and his interpersonal skills. In his nine years with MDOC, he has worked at three facilities and as a Field Training Officer at the Training Academy.

He has proven to be an asset to the safety and security of his facility. For example, he once stopped a visitor from bringing \$1,200 cash and a lighter into Thumb. He has received the Warden's Coin more than once for finding contraband, he said.

CO Vij immigrated to the United States from India in 1995 when he was 8 years old. He is the first person in his family to earn a bachelor's degree or to choose a career in public service, he said.

"I love being a corrections officer," Vij said.

He holds a political science degree from Oakland University, where he volunteered translating documents to Hindi.

CO Vij has also helped raise thousands of dollars for Special Olympics and volunteers with WATCH D.O.G.S at his child's school.

Ray Sholtz, who represents corrections officers on the Officer of the Year selection committee and is the Chief of

Staff at Michigan Corrections Organization, said all the finalists for the award this year were phenomenal.

"Congratulations to CO Vij and the finalists for MDOC Officer of the Year," Sholtz said. "Officer Vij had a great application and an excellent interview."

Finalists for Officer of the Year: Jeffrey Vining, MBP

Officer Vining keeps his head and shows professionalism in stressful situations.

For example, he acted fast to stop an 11-man yard fight on the Level V yard last fall.

"His quick reaction to this very serious situation reaffirmed his dedication to protecting others," his nominating committee said.

Vining has 19 years with the MDOC. In 2018, he received the department's lifesaving award for rescuing two kayakers. He is also a U.S. Air Force veteran. He and his wife have two children.

Derek Wright, SMT

Officer Wright is dedicated to training. He assists with officers' annual PA 415 training, including Prisoner Management and Emergency Health Care, and he teaches several inmate classes, including Cage Your Rage and Thinking for a Change.

CO Wright has been with the MDOC for 24 years. He also helps fundraise for the American Cancer Society. He and his wife have five children.

Robert Halvorsen, NCF

Officer Halvorsen has been respon-

sible for making sure special cleaning tasks are carried out to stop the spread of COVID-19. He has also ensured donning and doffing stations were cleaned and stocked.

"It is these efforts that helped to bring NCF out of an outbreak status," his nominating committee said.

CO Halvorsen previously worked at Ojibway and downstate facilities. He has 26 years with the MDOC. At Newberry, he's become known as the go-to person for his can-do attitude, sound judgment, and attention to detail.

He and his wife have two adult children.

Daren Ferden, ARU

Investigator Ferden is known for his friendliness and ability to bring people together.

He was instrumental in the smooth operation of Green Oaks Correctional Center, the prison opened temporarily to house inmates with COVID-19.

"Daren quickly gathered the less experienced staff and began to mentor them..." his nominating committee wrote. "The staff worked together as if they had known each other for years and had become a small family. Daren was a pinnacle in this formula that helped create its stability."

Inv. Ferden has been part of the MDOC for 22 years. He was an officer at RGC before becoming a transportation officer and then an ARU investigator.

He has two children.

Congratulations to all Officers of the Year! [Read a list of all facility COs of the year on our website.](#)