

Marvin Sanders Honored as 2024 MDOC Corrections Officer of the Year

Lansing, Mich. – Marvin Sanders, a Corrections Officer at Saginaw Correctional Facility has been named the 2024 Michigan Department of Corrections Officer of the Year.

Officer Sanders has been an MDOC Corrections Officer for 24 years. Whether administering NARCAN, performing CPR, or engaging in effective communication to deescalate volatile situations, he routinely exhibits exemplary heroism. His peers recognize his deep understanding of policy and procedure and his dedication to mentorship and continued learning. He is widely regarded as an honest and objective leader who recognizes humanity in every individual.

Officer Sanders is a volunteer firefighter for the Bridgeport Fire Department, a part-time deputy for the Midland County Sheriff's Department, a member of the Bridgeport Gun Club and participates in Shop with a Hero events. He is currently enrolled in courses at Delta College.

"Take what's given to you and make the best of it," Officer Sanders said. "Strive for your goals, work hard, and don't take what you already have for granted."



Marvin Sanders, SRF

Finalists for Officer of the Year:

James Burch, IBC

Officer James Burch has been an MDOC Corrections Officer for 24 years. Staff and offenders are put at ease by his consistent demeanor and contagious smile. He is a departmental trainer in cell extraction, handgun, transportation, and squad training. He has made numerous notable and impactful contributions to Bellamy Creek Correctional Facility and his community.

James has coached Little League Baseball and Softball in Greenville since 2014. He has been the Vice President of the Greenville Youth Softball/ Baseball League for the past five years and was previously the Softball Director. He is a member of the Greenville Community Church and was previously very active in the Awana program, a non-profit ministry focused on providing kids with every opportunity to understand and be involved in church.

Officer Burch believes that society wins if we positively focus on our children.

Justin Cantu, TCF

Officer Justin Cantu primarily works as a yard officer and monitors youth movement. He is often assigned to the Perimeter Security Vehicle. He has been an MDOC Corrections Officer for eight years and is a departmental trainer for prisoner management, emergency healthcare, dynamic use of force, personal chemical agent, electronic control device (ECD), gun tower, handgun retention, and is an institutional weapons trainer.

Justin is known for being levelheaded and is calm under pressure. He is open-minded, willing to accept change, and adapts to any situation. Other officers seek his guidance and follow his lead due to his calm demeanor and extensive training. He has contributed valuable input with the creation of the youth yard schedule, medication lines, and chow hall movement which has increased staff coverage and led to a safer environment.

Officer Cantu has been an active member of Kensington Church for the last five years. He volunteers with Detroit Animal Welfare Group (D.A.W.G.), an organization that rescues, rehabilitates, and trains animals for military veterans and people in need.

Matthew Oppermann, LRF

Officer Oppermann has been an MDOC Corrections Officer for 23 years and was previously a corrections officer for the Saginaw County Sheriff's Department for nine years. He is well known for his wisdom, tenacity, and attention to detail.

Whether identifying a medical emergency or performing CPR on an unresponsive prisoner, Officer Opperman can be counted on to make the right call. His input is regularly sought during institutional change, and he is invested in the success of his facility.

Officer Opperman has participated in multiple MDOC hosted charity hockey games where facilities on the west side of the state raise money for charities. He has also volunteered for the Michigan Coast Guard Festival in Grand Haven, the Fruitport Old Fashion Days during Memorial Day Weekend, and assists with Earnest C. Brooks Correctional Facility hosted recruitment events.

Mark Smith, MCF

Officer Mark Smith has been an MDOC Corrections Officer for 15 years. As a former Sergeant for the United States Marine Corps, he is a natural leader. He is regarded by his peers as a skilled professional who consistently exceeds expectations while maintaining impeccable steadiness. He continuously pursues ways to better himself, those around him, and his workplace. Mark's positive energy, fair and consistent application of policy and procedures, and respectful demeanor have immensely enhanced public trust of MCF and the MDOC.

Officer Smith received a Warden's Coin for discovering a large package of narcotics that was thrown over the fence. On several occasions, he has discovered drugs in legal mail as well as drugs and weapons in the housing units. He has responded to countless emergencies and saved the lives of many prisoners.

Mark genuinely and unequivocally cares about other people. He is always willing to lend a helping hand and is generous with his time and energy. He regularly visited and aided a fellow officer who eventually succumbed to cancer. When a coworker with children was going through a divorce, he offered a place of residence.

Mark has served as an MCO steward, an Epic Committee member, and is presently an integral part of the MCF Employee's Club. He has participated in the Polar Plunge, and donated to the Special Olympics, Toys for Tots, and the Muskegon Rescue Mission. Mark has also coached little league baseball with his son, Aric.

From the Desk of MCO Communications Coordinator Adam Earley