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Saluting Employees

SHSU scholarship winners climb the career ladder at TDCJ

Captain Timothy Fitzpatrick of the Polunsky Unit and Assistant Director Jennifer Robinson of the Huntsville Placement and Release Unit would like to grow their careers at the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to help their employees as well as the offenders under their supervision.

With their passion and commitment to the state agency, the pair was recently awarded scholarships from the College of Criminal Justice and the Correctional Management Institute of Texas to attend the Master of Criminal Justice Leadership and Management Program at Sam Houston State University (SHSU). The weekend program is designed specifically for working professionals who want to advance in their careers.

Fitzpatrick began his career in criminal justice at the Jim Ferguson Unit in Midway and has served at the Goree and Byrd units in Huntsville. In October, he joined the Polunsky Unit in Livingston, where he supervises, instructs, trains and ensures the safety of assigned employees and offenders.



“Our mission is to protect the public, 100 percent,” said Fitzpatrick. “This is an inherently negative environment, but my goal is to keep the staff positive and morale high. Taking care of my staff is a priority. If they need something, I am there for them.”

Fitzpatrick works in one of the largest facilities in Region I, which has the added distinction of housing Death Row offenders and segregation units. On any given day, there are about 2,950 offenders on the unit. He wants to continue his career at TDCJ and hoped to join the Master’s Program, but didn’t have the funds to do so. With the scholarship, he can now return to SHSU and get a master’s degree, which will assist him in his future endeavors.

Robinson started her career with TDCJ as a field parole officer in Conroe, where she served for more than seven years before promoting to a unit supervisor position in Huntsville where she served for another five years. As a parole officer, she assisted in the New Technology New Development Program with Information Technology (IT), which she is still pursuing in her current position of Assistant Director of the Placement and Release Unit.

“I am constantly looking for ways to modernize and streamline how things get done,” said Robinson. “We always have projects with IT to try and make everything better. I love the Parole Division and I loved being a parole officer. I enjoyed trying to make a difference in the offender’s lives, whether it was assisting them with problems or concerns or addressing public safety issues when they were on the wrong path. While I miss the interactions with offenders, I enjoy this job because you can have a wider range of influence with the agency each time you promote.”

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On a daily basis, Robinson supervises a staff of 41 who are in charge of the daily release of offenders through the Huntsville “Walls” Unit, the placement of offenders in halfway houses, and the referral of parolees to substance abuse treatment programs. Her unit includes parole officers, program supervisors and clerical and administrative staff.

“On any given day in Texas, there are at least 1,700 offenders in halfway houses,” Robinson said. “From Monday to Friday, on average anywhere from 50 to 100 offenders are released daily from The Walls. There is

a huge amount of things needed to process these people prior to the actual release, such as when they will be released, what their parole stipulations for release will be, and where they will go.”

Robinson is also involved in the annual review of parole policies and procedures and she is able to make recommendations on a wide range of those policies based on her years in the field.

Robinson already has two bachelor’s degrees from SHSU in Psychology and in Criminal

Justice, and wanted to pursue her master’s degree to continue to promote within TDCJ. She also has a lifelong love of learning.

“I love school and I have always loved school,” Robinson said. “I always wanted to get my master’s degree and this program is designed for people with full time jobs so they can go on the weekends. The fact that I received the scholarship and the hours are on the weekend allows me to finally go for my master’s.” ●