

*Diane Sabatka-Rine*

## Maintaining Momentum And Striving for Excellence

*By Susan L. Clayton*

For nearly 21 years, Diane Sabatka-Rine has worked tirelessly for the staff and inmates of the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services. Sabatka-Rine, currently warden of the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center in Lincoln, began her career as a correctional officer in 1984 at the same facility. Within 10 months, she was promoted to correctional corporal. Sabatka-Rine then went on to hold various positions in different facilities and the central office, including unit manager, records manager, administrative assistant, accreditation manager, unit administrator and assistant warden.

"Diane is held in high esteem throughout the department and has achieved the reputation among her peers and subordinates of being dedicated and enthusiastic," said Robert S. Madsen, assistant warden of the Diagnostic and Evaluation Center. Maintaining this enthusiasm is easy for Sabatka-Rine. "I like what I do and I think that's important regardless of whether you're working in corrections. So, it's pretty easy for me to come to work every day and be enthusiastic about being here," she said, adding, "We all have bad days. That's not unique to corrections and I think it's important that you just keep things in proper perspective. I just try to do what I expect others to do. I don't know that I'm so unique in that regard; I just try to do what's right."

Sabatka-Rine said she got her first taste of the American Correctional Association while working as an administrative assistant at the Omaha Correctional Center. She was named the accreditation manager for the facility and led staff through the ACA accreditation process. Sabatka-Rine then did the same at two other facilities. "It's an excellent checks-and-balance system to have in place," she said. "Why would you not do it? It does a lot for the institution and I think it's a great process."

While serving the department in this capacity, Sabatka-Rine learned much about departmental and facility policy as well as the accreditation process.

According to Madsen, Sabatka-Rine shows her commitment to excellence through the high level of accountability she places on herself, staff and inmates. The key to success with staff is treating each staff member as an individual, said Sabatka-Rine. For example, she noted that what she responds to may not be what everyone responds to. "It's OK that we all have differences," Sabatka-Rine said. She seeks out individual talents in her staff and then gives them the tools they need and the ability to be the best they can be.

Another reason Sabatka-Rine has excelled in her career is her commitment to professional development for both herself and her staff. "Not only does she seize opportunities for self-mastery, but also empowers her staff to do the same," Madsen said, adding, "The level of support and encouragement she provides maximizes performance and morale." Sabatka-Rine pointed out that just like everywhere else, the prison industry continues to change at a dramatic rate. "It's real easy to become complacent and hung up in the same things and not even know what's out there," she said. "I think about how much technology has changed just in the 20 years I have worked here and how if you didn't stay on top of that stuff all the time how far behind you could get." With that said, Sabatka-Rine continuously encourages her staff to take advantage of training opportunities and noted that the department now offers training in areas such as diversity, that years ago were unheard of. Due to continual progress, she said that in the next 20 years corrections will deal with a whole new set of issues that will become important in the mainstream.

Throughout her career, Sabatka-Rine has received letters of commenda-

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tion for preventing an inmate suicide, helping to stop an altercation between 50 to 70 inmates and supporting the attorney general's office. She is modest and says it is just part of her job. For example, Sabatka-Rine said of the attempted suicide, "At the time it was a big deal but again I try to keep things in perspective. I'm just thankful that our timing was right and it wasn't five minutes later."

Sabatka-Rine was recently selected to participate in the department's most recent vision conference where long-term goals were discussed. She has been involved in several facility and departmental initiatives, including ethics instructor for the Staff Training Academy, member of the Appeals Board for Inmate Discipline, Quality Council adviser and Community Involvement Committee chairperson.

In addition, Sabatka-Rine is a Warden's Award recipient and has been named employee/manager of the month on several occasions. She has also received the Patriot Employer Award from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve.

Sabatka-Rine is quick to point out that team work is what makes her successful. "Much of what we do every day involves a team and it's not that one person does any great thing but together we all do great things."

*Susan L. Clayton is managing editor of Corrections Today.*