



*Ultimately, our business is safety, and people should expect the best when receiving such a vital public service.*

# Expecting the Best From Corrections

**James A. Gondles Jr., CAE**  
Executive Director  
American Correctional Association

Serving the public is a noble pursuit but, as we all know, it is also very demanding. Institutions of public service receive tremendous pressure from their leaders, as well as their constituents, to be efficient, successful, accessible, flexible, accountable and cost-effective — and corrections is not exempt from these demands. Ultimately, our business is safety, and people should expect the best when receiving such a vital public service.

The American Correctional Association was founded in 1870 with the belief that those working in corrections have an obligation not only to care for those in our charge, but to prepare them for their return to society. We also have an obligation to push the limits of the profession and to challenge ourselves to continually improve the ways in which we do business.

Our society changes continually and corrections often struggles to stay ahead of the game. Faced with ever-shrinking budgets and the tough choices that are forced upon us, we often find it very tough to do our jobs on a daily basis, leaving no time and resources to adequately prepare for the future. Yet, ACA continues to advocate for changes and highlight new research and practices designed to give the profession a glimpse at what the future may hold. Through our publications — including this issue of *Corrections Today*, which highlights many of the best employ-

ees in the profession — research, training programs, and standards and accreditation process, ACA continually strives to prepare the profession for anything that the future could present. To do this, we must think beyond the box, not just outside of it. We must expand our thinking, rather than just plan for the future based on what we know today.

ACA has led the charge to explore the relationship between public health and corrections. During the 2004 Winter Conference in New Orleans, we hosted a Webcast featuring the Hon. Vice Adm. Richard Carmona, U.S. surgeon general, and Dr. Edward Thompson, deputy director for public health services for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, along with national leaders from all areas of the corrections field. Our goal was to develop the relationships and insights that will allow corrections and public health to work together to find solutions to one of the most costly and vexing problems that our government deals with — improving the health of those at the greatest risk for chronic and contagious disease. This initial goal met with resounding success as Carmona announced during the Webcast that his office will prepare a Call to Action on Correctional Health. This effort will help us to shape the debate and explore new ideas and initiatives related to correctional health care.

ACA is working — along with advocates in Congress — to find

ways to reduce the numbers of juveniles who suffer from mental health problems and are unable to get treatment in the community from entering our nation's correctional systems. We have supported legislation that will make correctional administrators more accountable for ensuring that sexual assault or abuse does not occur in correctional facilities. We also have worked to ensure that the voice of corrections is heard as Congress develops legislation designed to promote the reintegration of offenders into society. We do not believe that these initiatives should mirror efforts of the past that were under-funded and often doomed to fail from the beginning. We want to identify innovative solutions that will ensure that we have every opportunity to succeed even if it means that we have to re-examine how the profession operates.

Being the “best in the business” means challenging popular conventions and sometimes taking on issues that are difficult and unpopular. We will continue to look for new ways and more effective and efficient ways of doing business. We will continue to challenge ourselves — and you — to look beyond the box as we strive to be the best in our business. ♦