

VIRTUAL WINTER CONFERENCE OVERVIEW



A Highly Successful Virtual Winter Conference

It took us to a ‘place that our founders never dreamed’

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Some things in 2021 will forever be remembered. COVID-19 and the events related to it are just some of those things. But in the midst of the challenging events, something historically wonderful took place at ACA. On Feb. 3-6, we held our first ever 100% virtual conference. And as one conference attendee put it, “It was more than a thing out-of-this world to see. It was something to experience.”

Different, But Still A Great ACA Event!

When an American Correctional Association's General Session takes place, it is often quite something to behold. The early morning excitement gathered outside the door of a cavernous meeting hall, seats gradually filling to capacity, the familiar fresh faces — some of whom you have not seen in a year, and then there is the hushed tension just before everything begins. There is the color guard, leading a proud Executive Committee which always enters with a modicum of reverence. And do not forget the playing of our national anthem, other countries' anthems, too. All this pomp and circumstance is naturally befitting the oldest, largest, and by far the most significant corrections organization of its type in the world today.

But this year was different

There was no pomp, no circumstance. Instead of viewing it live and in-person, attendees viewed it on their computers. Some were at their homes; some were in their offices. Maybe, some even sat

in their cars and watched on their smartphones. Yes, the 2021 Virtual Winter Conference General Session was quite different. But the fascinating thing about it all was the fact that it all was truly captivating and engaging. Some might say, "Because the heart of ACA was there, it was still great!" If you were one of the many attendees, then you can understand why some virtual conference-goers watched the General Session multiple times.

ACA President Gary Mohr began with his usual comfortable manner. This time he spoke about the challenges the virus has wrought. The Executive Committee was introduced and ACA Executive Director Jim Gondles, and President Mohr, by their very presence and tone, assured us ACA is moving forward positively, despite current world events and challenges. Sponsors Aramark and Falcon made the entire event possible, and they were duly acknowledged for doing just that.



Film star and mental health advocate Sean Astin addresses the ACA General session, reminding corrections workers to care for their own mental health as well as those under their care.



Outgoing ACA President Gary Mohr thanks members for their support and for upholding our field through extraordinary circumstances.

General Session

When “The Wall of Honor” was shown, with “Amazing Grace” playing gently in the background, the names of the fallen scrolled upward. It served to remind all that far too many “Corrections Heroes” had passed away due to an unseen enemy, the coronavirus.

ACA’s General Session always features renowned speakers, and this year’s virtual conference was no exception. The name Sean Patrick Austin may not immediately ring a bell, but once you realized this “overachieving” actor, director and producer played “Samwise Gamgee” in The Lord of the Rings trilogy, “Mike Walsh” in The Goonies, “Daniel Ruettiger” in Rudy, “Doug Whitmore” in 50 First Dates, “Bill” in Click, “Raphael” in Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, and “Bob Newby” in Netflix’s Stranger Things then you know Mr. Austin surely deserves a bit of undivided attention. It should be noted that Mr. Austin is the son of the beloved actress Patty Duke (1946-2016) who, by the way, spoke at a previous ACA conference years ago.

Mr. Austin’s passion for movies, television and the stage does not stop there. He has been intimately involved with programs that help children and support mental health. His physical prowess is on full display in his life, also, because he has participated in numerous marathons and triathlons. All of this made for an excellent featured speaker who left us with a line from The Lord of the Rings that summarized it all: “There is some good left in this world, and it’s worth fighting for.”

As we approached the end of the approximately one-hour General Session, we heard from one of our sponsors, Falcon. Dr. Elizabeth Falcon spoke about sponsoring ACA events during “a tidal wave of change.”

President Mohr reminded us, “It’s a great day to be alive” and praised many individuals, including Dr. Elizabeth Gondles. It is a well-known fact that Betty’s tireless efforts to move the organization through the intricacies of both correctional health and ACA’s international work are almost legendary.

Also recognized were Correctional Officer Cullen Calderon, Wyoming Department of Corrections, ACA’s 2021 Medal of Valor Awardee and SGT. Alejandra Grijalva, ACA’s 2021 Martin



2021 MEDAL OF VALOR AWARDEE



CORRECTIONAL OFFICER CULLEN CALDERON
Medium Correctional Institution
Wyoming Department Of Corrections



2021 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEE



SGT. ALEJANDRA GRIJALVA
Corrections Non-Commissioned Officer
United States Army
Attending: American Military University

CO Cullen Calderon and Sgt. Alejandra Grualva, two rising stars in the corrections field, were honored for their exceptional work and integrity.

Luther King Jr. Scholarship Awardee. She attends the American Military University.

Although he was not the last voice you heard during the General Session, President Mohr’s comments were quite poignant and quite encompassing for the moment. He spoke of “hope” and “unity” and how we are “all more alike than different.” He ended with these words from Robert F. Kennedy:

The future does not belong to those who are content with today, apathetic toward common problems and their fellow man, timid and fearful in the face of bold projects and new ideas. Rather, it will belong to those who can blend passion, reason and courage in a personal commitment to the ideals of American society.

BY FLOYD NELSON JR.

Sponsors

A Heartfelt Thanks to Our Generous Sponsors



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Plenaries

ACA's Virtual Plenaries Take Center Stage

WINTER CONFERENCE

2021 VIRTUAL WINTER

The common definition of a plenary is “a meeting or session attended by all participants at a conference or assembly.” But apparently those who long ago defined “plenary” failed to take into account a pandemic that would grip the entire planet for more than a year. “Meetings or sessions,” as we commonly know them, were and remain off the table.

The good news is the American Correctional Association adapted, adjusted and innovated with the result being the 2021 Virtual Winter Conference. And, as is often the case, our incredible plenaries took center stage for all who attended February’s event, amply suppling attendees with the latest, vital and critically important information corrections information available.

“Correctional Leadership in a Socially Distanced World” fully engaged, as all the plenaries



Plenary Critical Issue #2: COVID-19 Impact on the Health and Safety of Correctional Staff, Offenders and the Public.

Panelists



Tony Parker
Commissioner
Tennessee Department of
Correction



Annette Chambers-Smith
Director
Ohio Department of
Rehabilitation &
Corrections



Todd Ishee
Commissioner
North Carolina
Department of Public
Safety



Cortrell Davis
Major
Lafourche Parish Sheriff's
Office

Plenary Critical Issue #1: Correctional Leadership in a Socially Distanced World.

ultimately did, the all-important topic of strategies for reasonable alternatives for the management of the population all while maintaining good security for all staff, the justice-involved population and the public safety.

Correct RX Pharmacy Services President and Founder Dr. Ellen Yankellow spoke about the significance of her company sponsoring such events and other salient ACA events as well. She even shared key members of her wonderful team with the attending public.

David Bobby, co-chair of the ACA Professional Development Committee, led the panelists who included: ACA President Tony Parker, Commissioner Tennessee Department of Correction; Annette Chamber-Smith, Director of Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Corrections; Todd Ishee, Commissioner North Carolina Department of Public Safety; and Cortrell Davis, Major, Lafourche Parish Sheriff's Office.

“COVID-19 Impact on The Health and Safety of Correctional Staff,

Offenders, and the Public” was the title of the next plenary session. Sponsored by VitalCore Health Strategies. VitalCore Chief Operating Officer for Clinical Services Dr. Lorelei Ammons talked about how overcoming and what we can learn from the pandemic. The Moderator for this plenary was President and CEO of Alvis Inc. Denise Robinson who also happens to be ACA’s President-elect.

This plenary focused on change and how to manage the change that COVID-19 had placed on everyone’s life. Gary McFadden, Sheriff Mecklenburg County, North Carolina; Tony Annucci, Acting Commissioner, NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS); and John Morely, MD, Deputy Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer NYS DOCCS were the esteemed panelists.

Another ACA panel titled “**Correctional Staff Wellness Programs: Cost-Effective Alternatives,**” saw Past President Gary Mohr sit in the Moderator’s seat as panelist delved into removing barriers to success. As the Past President Mohr said, in corrections “we are always asked to do more with less.” Panelist consisted of Sonya Gillespie, Interim Division Chief, Peer Support and Wellness Coordinator, Denver Sheriff Department; Gary Junker, Ph.D., HSP-P, Director of Health and Wellness Services, North Carolina Department of Public Safety; Scott Frakes, Director Nebraska Department of Correctional Services, ACA Performance-Based Standards Committee; and Colette Peters, Chair ACA Staff Wellness Committee, Director of Oregon Department of Corrections.

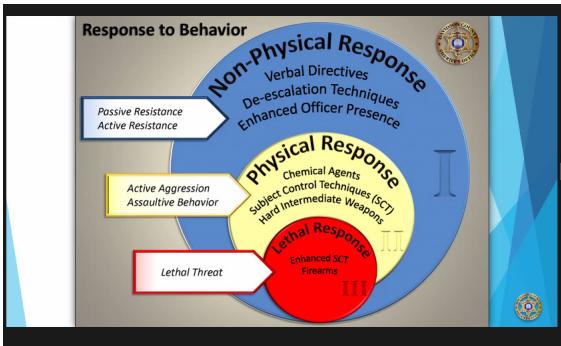


Plenary Critical Issue #3: Correctional Staff Wellness Programs: Cost-Effective Alternatives.

“Prevention, Intervention and Management of Disruptive Behaviors” was the last panel. Sponsored by Falcon Inc., Falcon Vice President Dr. Robin Timme reminded everyone that corrections “can be more effective for those who work and live inside of them.” Once again, Past President Gary Mohr took the helm and led a distinguished panel that included: Timothy C. Ward, Commissioner, Georgia Department of Corrections; ACA Vice President Tony Wilkes, Chief of Corrections, Davidson County Sheriff’s Office; ACA President Tony Parker, Commissioner Tennessee Department of Correction; and ACA National Mental Health Consultant, Dr. Dean Aufderheide, Director of Mental Health Services, Florida Department of Corrections.

All in all, the plenaries were what one would expect from the American Correctional Association, an organization committed to bringing the corrections professionals only the best.

BY FLOYD NELSON JR.



Plenary Critical Issue #4: Prevention, Intervention and Management of Disruptive Behaviors.

'The Greatest Correctional Association in the World'

The Closing Session of the 2021 Virtual Winter Conference was opened by soon to be Past President Gary Mohr who acknowledged the conference had indeed been a big success and then he uttered his signature phrase, "It's a great day to be alive."

Mohr introduced the Executive Committee, not unusual for an ACA event. But keep in mind this conference was virtual. The Executive Committee was not in a large hotel ballroom that had been converted into a sizeable conference hall. In fact, the Executive Committee was not even in the same room, not even the same state nor the same city. More than likely, when their images appeared on our many screens and devices around the world, the Executive Committee was somewhere practicing social distancing and staying safe in their own states, cities, and towns because COVID-19 had set the course of events months ago.

Before Mr. Gondles introduced the speaker, he thanked Viola Riggin, CEO of VitalCore Health Strategies, for sponsoring ACA's Closing Session. VitalCore was clearly instrumental in making ACA's first-ever, all-virtual Closing Session a big success.

Soon afterwards, Mr. Gondles proceeded to introduce Glen Ward, a man billed as a "Humorist and Inspirational Speaker — Wholesome Entertainment with a Timely Message."

Mr. Ward travels across America addressing corporations, national, regional, and state associations, government agencies, chambers of commerce, schools, civic organizations, and churches. His wholesome humor, according to his bio, "involves hilariously accurate impersonations of well-known political and musical celebrities. He also entertains his audience with stories and life lessons learned from his experiences growing up in a minister's home.



Changing of the guard: ACA's 106th President swears in his successor, Tennessee DOC Commissioner and 107th ACA President Tony Parker.

It was about 28 or 29 years ago when Mr. Gondles said he and ACA's Dr. Betty Gondles first encountered Mr. Ward. The couple was attending a South Carolina correctional meeting in Myrtle Beach. Mr. Ward made them laugh then and, there was no doubt he would make them — and all of us attending the Closing Session — to laugh now.

In 1995, in Dallas, Texas, Mr. Ward spoke at ACA for the first time, but his popularity brought him back to ACA again and again until he eventually became "part of the ACA family."



Comedian Glen Ward delivers a virtual stand-up and skit show, complete with celebrity and musical impressions.

Speaking live from his Columbia, South Carolina home, his dining room to be exact, Mr. Ward told us, “In this day and age, we all need a laugh, and we all need uplifting.”

Consummate humorist and inspirational speaker that he is, Mr. Ward spoke about a variety of things.

Recounting one of his favorite shows, Swamp Loggers, he told the story of one of the truckers who had a very heavy Southern accent. It was so heavy, the producers needed to put the text of his words at the bottom of the screen so viewers could understand what he was saying. But, Mr. Ward, said he knew exactly what he was saying and proceeded to imitate the trucker’s rich Southern accent flawlessly. Of course, many of us, most of us, still did not know what the trucker was saying.

Mr. Ward also recounted funny and unusual medical terms he had heard spoken, mistakenly, of course. Terms like “Hyena Hernia” and “Roaches of the Liver” and “Acid Reflex.” He even heard someone say that the only had “a little coma” while another person had a “compact disc” in their back.

Amid the humor, he reminded us of the important values of life. “When happiness

comes to your home,” he said, “always give it a place to sit.”

Mr. Ward went on to speak about The Lawrence Welk show and astounded us by singing “Danny Boy” as he imitated the voice of the show’s popular Irish tenor perfectly. Mr. Ward then imitated Johnny Mathis, Aaron Neville, and the Bee Gees. They were all captured perfectly, and humorously, in song and mannerism.

Up next was known other than American icon, Willie Nelson. If you closed your eyes, you would swear that it was the real Willie Nelson singing “Bridge Over Troubled Water,” instead of Mr. Ward who had even donned Willie Nelson’s signature baseball and a long-hair wig for authenticity and just for fun.

Mr. Ward continued to pepper us with words of wisdom and words to live by. “Relax, enjoy life.” And “speak your love to those you love.”

As a part of his farewell to us viewers, Mr. Ward recalled how Mr. Gondles and Dr. Gondles had sent him a sympathy card more than 20 years ago when an in-law had passed. Mr. Ward held up the card for all viewers to see, because after more than two decades, he had surprisingly still kept the card.

Following Glen Ward, Lorelei Ammons, Chief Operating Officer for VitalCore, expressed her appreciation for her company’s involvement



ACA’s 106th President Gary Mohr honored for his service to ACA members. President Mohr was thanked especially for his perseverance and leadership as ACA adapted and overcame the challenges brought on by COVID-19.

Closing Session

in the Closing Session and she left us with an important team-related quote by Ken Blanchard: "None of us is as smart as all of us."

Next, Mr. Mohr returned to the podium to conduct one of his last final acts as President. The swearing-in ceremony included giving the oath of office to "officers, the Board of Governors, Commission of Accreditation for Corrections and the Delegate Assembly." With that act, Mr. Mohr officially became "Past President," and Tony Parker became "President." Denise M. Robinson became President-elect, Tony Wilkes remained Vice President, and Dr. Harbans Deol became Treasurer.

"God created each of us, and we are more alike than we are different," said Past President Mohr in his final remarks. As a last, "final, final act," Past President Mohr asked each of us to write a hand-written note to that person who had impacted our life positively. He said that if that person has passed away, send it to their spouse or children. "This can bring a smile or even a tear to a deserving loved one."

Let the record show that Gary Mohr gave his hand-written note to Jim Gondles.

Past President Mohr introduced the 107th President, Tony Parker, who gave remarks. (Please see the previous issue of Corrections Today or go online to read President Parker's important remarks.)

After President Parker gave thanks and praise to his predecessor, he spoke about heroes. And he gave us moving words from former U.S. President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt. Here is an often-quoted section of President Roosevelt's words:

"It is not the critic who counts, not the one who points out how the strong man stumbled or how the doer of deeds might have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred with sweat and dust and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause; who, if he wins, knows the triumph



ACA President Tony Parker receiving the ceremonial ACA gavel to start his term.

of high achievement; and who, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

As tradition would have it, Mr. Gondles took to the podium one last time and although he gave ACA's American Eagle to the out-going president, he gave these words to all of us and to America:

"The eagle needs its left wing and right wing to fly," Mr. Gondles said, and when they are working together the eagle soars beyond any possibility that this country thinks it can go."

Mr. Gondles also presented incoming ACA President Parker with a gavel to use during his two-year tenure as ACA's 107th President. Mr. Gondles went on to say, "Thank you for supporting the greatest correctional association in the world, God bless you and we'll see you in August in Nashville, Tennessee for the 151st Congress of Correction."

BY FLOYD NELSON JR.

Mark Your Calendar!



NASHVILLE

151ST CONGRESS OF CORRECTION

AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION ♫ AUG. 12-15, 2021

Questions?

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