

# NEWS RELEASE

## DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

### Commissioner Claire DeMatteis

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Presented by Jason P. Miller, Chief of Communications and Community Relations

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## James. T. Vaughn Correctional Center employees donate \$3,300 in food assistance to local families impacted by COVID

**Smyrna, DE** -- This month, an employee-led donation drive at James T. Vaughn Correctional Center collected \$3,300 to provide a helping hand to Smyrna-area families who are struggling to keep food on the table in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The idea, according to organizers, came out of the darkest days for JTVCC, the 2017 inmate uprising that took the life of Lt. Steven R. Floyd, Sr.

"The staff at James T. Vaughn have always remembered the big and small tokens of support we received from our neighbors in Smyrna following that tragedy, from meal donations dropped off at the prison to simple messages of encouragement," said **Sergeant Ralph Bailey**, donation drive organizer and 30-year DOC veteran. "That outpouring really lifted our spirits when we needed it and we have been on the lookout for an opportunity to pay that generosity forward. When we saw how the COVID pandemic was impacting our hard-working neighbors through no fault of their own, we knew this was our time to get together and give back."

In April, Sergeant Bailey enlisted the support of like-minded Officers, including Corporal Patricia Villarreal, Lieutenant Nathan Atherholt, Corporal Kenneth Hammond, Corporal Delano Smith, Sergeant Justin Perkins and others, and the *JTVCC COVID Relief Fund* was up and running. Champions of the donation drive across the facility made personal pitches to their fellow security and administrative staff, and one even put up a personal fundraising match challenge. The response was overwhelming and the initial goal of \$300 was shattered within a day. Special recognition goes to members of the prison's Security Housing Unit (SHU) team for going way above the call and raising \$2,300. Organizers received so many donations over two weeks, in fact, that they ran out of donation receipts. **In total, \$3,300 was raised from JTVCC employees.**

Earlier this week, *JTVCC COVID Relief Fund* organizers presented eleven \$300 grocery store gift cards to Smyrna Police Chief Torrie James, whose Department is working collaboratively with Smyrna town leaders to distribute the cards to residents in need. Each gift card is intended to help meet the basic food needs of a family for a month. **See attached photo from the gift card presentation at Smyrna Police Headquarters on Wednesday, May 20.**

"Thank you to the men and women of James T. Vaughn Correctional Center for their generous donation to help families in our community who are struggling during this pandemic," **Smyrna**

**Police Chief Torrie James said.** "We are humbled by this gesture and will make sure that the funds raised go directly to families in need here in Smyrna. JTVCC has always been very supportive of our department, and I really value the working relationship between our organizations."

"Our Correctional Officers and employees are performing the toughest jobs in state government with excellence and determination, and that means even more as we battle the threat of COVID," **said Department of Correction Commissioner Claire DeMatteis.** "Even with the challenges and stress they and their families are experiencing, this donation shows that they also have incredibly big hearts. I am so proud of our employees at James. T. Vaughn Correctional Center whose generosity towards the community demonstrates that we are all in this together."

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