

Striving for *Perfection*



THERE IS ONE WORD THAT HAS GUIDED BOONE COUNTY JAIL DIRECTOR KEITH HOSKINS THROUGH A VERY SUCCESSFUL CAREER: **PROACTIVE**

He has followed that guide through to its logical conclusion. The Boone County Jail facility is the first in Missouri to be accredited by the National Institute for Jail Operations, a program designed to head off legal and institutional trouble before it starts.

Hoskins, a Missouri native, began his corrections career on the ground floor. After graduating from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a degree in law-enforcement oriented management and counseling, he went to work in 1986 as a deputy at the old Boone County Jail.

The "old" jail was built in 1934 to hold 37. It was project #163 of the Depression-Era Public Works Administration, part of the New Deal of 1933, in concert with the county. The federal government provided 30 percent of the cost of a project, including material and labor. It took several votes in 1933 and 1934 for voters to approve the county's portion of the project. In the 1970s voters rejected the idea of a new jail several times, but cooperative effort between the city of Columbia and the county cleared the way for expansion and modernization that upped the bed count to 85. Through the 1980s the facility again became overcrowded. Eventually the federal courts ruled that 78 was the maximum population, forcing the county to house additional detainees elsewhere. For jails across Missouri and the nation, litigation was rapidly changing the rules and the reality of incarceration.

Hoskins was asked to work with others to develop a plan for building a new jail and in 1991, years of work by law enforcement and public officials came to fruition when the doors of the new 134-bed facility opened. Meanwhile, Hoskins was rising through the ranks to director of the facility, also serving as co-chair of the Missouri Jail Administrators organization.

Today, Hoskins oversees a modern, pod-design, 246-bed facility, 55 of which are designated for use by women. He oversees a staff of 54 employees working 12-hour shifts. He is backed up by two

lieutenants and a captain who serves as assistant director. The staff at the Boone County Jail works additional overtime to make sure the facility is staffed properly, along with ensuring detainees are taken to court and medical appointments.

Hoskins is very mindful of referring to those incarcerated in his facility as detainees, not inmates. Most have not been convicted of a crime but rather are awaiting trial or other legal process. On a recent day Hoskins noted that 99.3 percent of his current population were detainees, underlining his use of the term. "We are a detention facility," Hoskins said.

Interestingly, one of Boone County's proactive protocols is to never fill the jail to capacity. In fact, when the facility reaches 85-90 percent of operating capacity, detainees are sent to jails in surrounding counties. For sheriffs around Missouri struggling with jails packed to overflowing, this may seem extravagant. For Boone County it is just part of being prepared for unforeseen eventualities.

"If we have an incident that requires segregating detainees or there is a mass arrest (like in a drug sweep) we have space to address the event," Hoskins says. "If we would run at full capacity, we would not have that flexibility. By running under 100 percent, we actually save money in the long run," Hoskins says.

Hoskins, who has visited correctional facilities nationwide for Boone County, said the majority are "reactive." In other words, sheriffs and administrators are pressed and focused on today's problems instead of tomorrow's solutions. It is Boone County's proactive approach that, in large measure, has resulted in the jail becoming a NIJO accredited facility.

Like sheriffs across the state, Boone County has had its share of detainee-initiated lawsuits. Indeed, such suits were the basis of a wave of jail building in Missouri counties of all sizes. Court actions in Boone County included detainee complaints about eating off stainless-steel tables, the thickness of mattresses and a lack of cushions in steel chairs. Every sheriff knows that the



jail is their biggest liability. “Part of my job is to keep the sheriff out of court,” Hoskins said. Establishing protocols, rules and standards are key to his proactive approach. And that is where the NIJO program comes in.

The NIJO program is focused on development of standards and procedures that reflect case law, court decisions and other factors to reduce liability. A check list of 600 standards for Missouri, everything from water heater temperature to security and maintenance, develops a system that reduces jail legal liability significantly. In addition, NIJO legal-based guidelines for policy are focused on safe and effective jail operation. Specific and effective jail policies can be developed and maintained with the system.

NIJO accreditation is not built in a day. Hoskins and Lt. Damon Reynolds spent 22 months bringing Boone County policies and procedures in line with Missouri-specific NIJO guidelines. It took a group effort of the entire Jail Branch to implement these policies and procedures at the Boone County facility.

More than a dozen categories of standards cover the gamut of jail operations: administration, inmate intake and release, inmate management, detaining access to communication, security and control, detainee services, sanitation and maintenance, programs for detainees, Americans with Disabilities Act compliance and access to marriage and religion.

Hoskins points to this last category as an example of the complexity of maintaining policies that meet the standard of current case law and legal requirements. One Missouri county required that both parties appear at the courthouse, in person, to secure a marriage license. Subsequent litigation resulted in a change in the Recorder of Deeds Office requirements that now allow inmates/detainees to be married while incarcerated. The Boone County Jail has seen 10 marriages, although Hoskins said, “they do not consummate” the union. The facility has also arranged for baptisms to fulfill requirements of religious access.

To keep up with it all you must be “on the ball and up to date”

Hoskins said. He believes adhering to the NIJO program makes that possible.

“(NIJO certification) is an in-depth look at how jail management works,” Hoskins said. “Because it is based on case law it is not just best practices, it is based on law and precedent. The process gives a great picture of what you have been doing right and what you have been doing wrong and it shows where there are liability weaknesses so you can be proactive instead of reactive.”

The NIJO system is web-based, providing the opportunity to work through standards and provide proof that policies comply with standards. At the end of the paperwork process a NIJO auditor conducts an on-site evaluation.

“It’s a deep dive. The auditor looks at everything from where the air conditioning is set to drinking water access,” he said, adding that the auditor spent two and a half days with him and staff, scoring compliance with each of the 600 standards. “The auditor said we did very well for our first time.”

The result? A total score of 98.45 percent compliance and NIJO accreditation. That’s not good enough for Hoskins whose goal is 100 percent next year.

Each year the policy is updated to meet new criteria, creating what Hoskins calls a “living breathing policy document.” NIJO keeps track of state and federal rulings and updates standards each year, providing guideposts through the tangled world of potential jail litigation.

There is a cost to NIJO certification, and it is based on the facility’s average daily population. Hoskins said it takes time to work through the process, but the benefits of having eyes opened to liability and developing policies to head off trouble is well worth it. Meeting the high NIJO standard goes a long way toward the prime objective: reducing legal liability that could negatively impact the county.

■ By Michael Feeback