

Leadership Spotlight

Meet Warden Hilton Hall, Jr., of Hardeman County Correctional Facility

Hilton Hall, Jr., warden at Hardeman County Correctional Facility, may hold the record for shortest retirement. The very week that he finished an impressive 28-year career with the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDOC) in 2012, he received an offer to join the CoreCivic team. He accepted and started a few days later.

“I was just honored, really, to know that what I’d been doing with my life had some meaning and that my skill set was still needed,” he said.

Hall had seen a future in the corrections profession as a strong possibility from an early age. “I’m probably one of the few people who can say that, but I was born and raised only seven miles from the facility where I started. It was the pillar of my small town and the economic driver of our community. If you worked there or at the post office, you were doing pretty well in life,” he recalled with a smile in his voice. That facility was the Georgia State Prison in Reidsville, and Hall started there with the GDOC in 1984 as a correctional officer.

After working his way up on the security side to the rank of lieutenant, he was picked to be an instructor at the Georgia Corrections Academy. When talking about his career path, he is quick to point out that he benefitted along the way from great mentors and opportunities, such as being selected for this position. “I taught all the incoming correctional staff, as well as some specialty areas.”

He then went to Valdosta State Prison as assistant warden. The warden there became an important mentor, teaching him everything about being in charge of a facility. Hall served as warden at a number of GDOC facilities over the next 14 years until he was named regional director of the GDOC. It was after three years in this position that he retired. When he joined CoreCivic, he started as chief of security and then became assistant warden of operations at Wheeler Correctional Facility. He has since served as warden at three CoreCivic facilities, having been at Hardeman since January 2019.

For those considering a career in corrections, Warden Hall recommends getting a degree first, although it’s not a requirement. Before he went back to earn his, he felt there were times when not having a degree hindered his progression. He feels that just having that credential and the higher education experience can be helpful in reaching your full potential, regardless of the area of concentration you might choose.

To become a successful correctional professional, Hall said, you need to have an insatiable appetite to learn, and be smart enough to know you don’t know it all, even after as many years as he’s been in the business. Also important are fairness, consistency and being good at listening — that empathic kind of listening.

Warden Hall is aware of the opportunity a correctional professional has to positively affect lives.

“You have a positive impact, first and foremost, by modeling the type of behavior that brings success. It’s about being seen doing what is right, even when you may think no one is looking. I know it might sound cliché, but many of these inmates did not have a father or other example to follow, and I catch them watching. And they have a real thirst for those qualities that I mentioned; the people who are good listeners and who are firm but fair are the ones these kids run to when they’re really in trouble.

“You only have to look at the news to see there’s a lot that’s negative out there in the world. Now, maybe more than ever, we need good people entering the corrections profession, people who are seeking a role in which, on a daily basis, they can change the course of lives for the better.”