

Leadership Raised in Nashville

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The year is 1988. Ronald Reagan is president, George Michael's *Faith* is Billboard's number one single, and about 85 percent of households don't have a computer. It's this same year three people, little known at the time, all work at the Nashville-Davidson County Sheriff's Office (DCSO). They are classification intern Daron Hall, "guard" (now, an archaic term) Tony Wilkes, and pre-trial release intern Marsha Travis. Thirty-one years later, Sheriff Daron Hall, Chief of Corrections Tony Wilkes, and Director of Standards and Accountability Marsha Travis lead the most prominent public safety associations in the country. All three share the passion of helping people change their lives.



Director Marsha Travis, Sheriff Daron Hall, and Chief Tony Wilkes

For the first time ever, the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), the American Correctional Association (ACA), and the American Jail Association (AJA) intersect in Nashville. Hall, until later this week, is president of NSA, Wilkes is the Vice President of ACA, and Travis is the president of AJA. It's an honor for any of these titles to be bestowed upon a member of one agency; having all three leaders in one sheriff's office is unprecedented.

"We have made it a hallmark of the DCSO to do what is right for those in our custody," Hall said. "Each of us has taken our own path – but, most importantly, our goal is the same – to make what we do important and to have a vast influence on others in our profession. This leadership exemplifies our commitment to not only guide the very critical work in corrections we do here in Davidson County, but also have an impact nationally."

Hall, who was elected Davidson County sheriff in 2002 and also served as president of ACA, was sworn-in as NSA president last year. Leading the country's 3,000 sheriffs has been a challenge mainly because of the considerable differences in sheriff's offices.

"From the beginning, I wanted to lead an association representing all sheriffs, no matter the county size, geographic location, or political affiliation," Hall said. "I realized early on the issues facing sheriffs in small counties are not always the same issues facing sheriffs in metropolitan areas. Additionally, corrections and our nation's jails are often left out of public safety conversations. I have kept those subjects and decriminalization of mental illness as part of my national agenda."

Wilkes realigned his career path in 2010 to include ACA as part of his professional development.



He has traveled throughout the world as a correctional expert, lending his knowledge to others in the United States, Mexico, the United Arab Emirates, and South America. He was on the forefront of sweeping changes when he served on a committee that developed national restrictive housing standards and provided guidance for eliminating solitary confinement.

Wilkes made it a priority to obtain a broad perspective of correctional disciplines including adult local detention, youthful offenders, state and federal, parole and probations; believing these perspectives would make him a better leader both in Nashville and beyond.

“While ACA continues shaping the field and having a global impact in corrections, I have learned the importance of governance and being the catalyst for confronting correctional challenges with best practices and implementing those best practices locally,” Wilkes said. “Additionally, I have come to understand progressive leadership requires change and there are many challenges associated with that change. The life we led yesterday in corrections doesn’t apply to today. When I put the social and economic inequalities of the criminal justice system into perspective, it makes me further recognize while we deal with current crises, we must lean forward and be prepared for the next.”

Travis, who says she entered corrections prior to the industry’s push to professionalize, began her involvement with AJA because the organization had people involved “just like me” and most shared similar issues. It was important for her to become a resource for others the way she received help and guidance over the years.

“As with most situations in my work life, I have received far more than I have given. I’ve been challenged to address topics through committee work in areas where I didn’t necessarily have any expertise. This required me to evolve and educate myself on issues outside of my comfort zone,” Travis said. “The network of individuals who work in the criminal justice system is vast and, luckily, most are moving toward progressive management and a greater quality of life for everyone the system touches. This positive growth over the years has made many recognize the important role jails play in improving lives of those incarcerated. It’s a significant part of every

community in this country and being a national leader pushing for improvements adds purpose to my life.”

Growing up in corrections has given each of these three a unique perspective along with diverse career paths; however, they have a common goal of placing a spotlight on the profession and bringing about transformative change to an often forgotten, but critical, part of the criminal justice system.