

September Feature: Meet Connie Kath, Detention Deputy, Olmsted County Adult Detention Center

Deputy Connie Kath became an Olmsted County Detention Deputy in 2015. Having been in corrections for many years prior, she made the decision to return to the field to make a difference. “It’s a passion,” Deputy Kath said. “If I can reach one person, I feel like I’ve been successful. My purpose isn’t to change people, but rather to try and help others see their potential and self-worth.”



Becoming familiar with the minimum requirements of the agency you wish to work for is essential when considering a career as a correctional officer. In Olmsted County, a detention deputy applicant is required to have a high school diploma or equivalent, have a history of being a responsible and reliable United States citizen, and be free from any felony convictions. Applicants must also be physically capable of doing the job.

Candidates for detention deputy positions face a rigorous selection process that includes many examinations and components. They are required to take a job simulation examination (REACT). There are four components to the REACT Testing System: a video test that uses simulation of actual job circumstances, a reading test, a math test, and a report writing test. Applicants are also required to pass a physical strength and agility test. Each candidate is given one chance to pass all components and move forward in the selection process.

Individuals who progress past the REACT and physical fitness tests are asked to participate in an oral interview conducted by an interview board. The interview responses are then rated to provide a score. Using those scores, candidates are ranked by their total scores to establish an eligibility roster. Those who are placed on the eligibility roster must successfully pass a background investigation, a psychological evaluation, a medical evaluation, and a civil service commission review to be eligible for appointment. As a detention deputy job vacancy occurs, the Olmsted County Sheriff is given the top seven certified names from the eligibility roster. The Sheriff then selects one of the top seven to fill the vacancy. Deputy Kath explained that once a deputy is hired, the greater portion of training is done as on-the-job instruction. New hires are given required written tests during the on-the-job training (OJT), and platoons do additional trainings throughout employment. “You have to understand your job and be very thorough,” she indicated.

In Olmsted County, a detention deputy can expect to start at \$20.60 an hour, with yearly performance reviews. Detention deputies at the Olmsted County Adult Detention Center (ADC) oversee the vast population of adults who have been arrested, are awaiting trial, or who have been sentenced to serve time. The ADC is a direct supervision facility with a capacity of 202 beds. “You have to be on your game,” Deputy Kath stated. “Assuring the safety and security of the facility, its detainees, and our officers is first and foremost. When I walk through the door my mindset flips. I’m role playing and preparing myself for the what-if’s.” In addition to supervising detainee interactions and movement, detention deputies process inmates; maintain accurate intake, care, and release records, including body searches, fingerprinting, photographing, and work details; inspect items brought into the jail and check incoming and

outgoing mail; supervise visitation; serve meals, distribute commissary items, and dispense prescribed medication to detainees; patrol the jail area to maintain order; transport detainees to health care, court, and programming facilities; and conduct housing, bedding, and well-being activities. Deputy Kath shared that there are “so many things above and beyond what the job description states. We wear so many hats.”

Correctional officer careers are in high demand in Southeast Minnesota. According to labor market data projections from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), there is a forecasted need for replacement hires in the corrections field of over 200 openings across the next 10 years. These openings will come from new job growth that is occurring and vacancies through retirement, career moves, and advancements. Deputy Kath believes that the demand is high because “the job has to be a fit for you; it either works or it doesn’t. It’s mind mechanics; you have a lot going on and things can change in a second. It can be a tough environment, but it’s truly a whole other family. Officers look out for one another.”

Deputy Kath believes the most challenging aspect of being a detention deputy is the increase of inmates with drug addictions and mental health issues, sometimes undiagnosed. She explained, “It’s hard because there isn’t anything I can do but provide resources or refer them to our Programs Department within the facility, who can refer them to resources in our community to seek assistance.”

In addition to serving as highly qualified law enforcement professionals, correctional officers use their positions to provide crucial support and mentoring to detainees, many of whom lack the skills, the inspiration, or the incentive to prepare for their lives once they reenter the community. Correctional officers take the term “corrections” to heart, employing professional concern, dedication, and commitment to the detainees they supervise, as to produce valuable members of society once they are released. Deputy Kath shared that the most rewarding aspect of her job is seeing ex-offenders in the community, even months later. They have returned to society and are employed and raising their families. “They’ve often commented that during the lowest place in their lives, I listened to them and wasn’t judgmental. It meant a lot to them. That, in itself, shows that I made some kind of difference. The reward is being able to occasionally experience that,” she commented.

Corrections has traditionally been a male-dominated career field, but the industry is changing. In what some may consider a nontraditional job, Deputy Kath is following her dreams and utilizing her interests and skills. “For me, choosing this career field was an easy decision,” she commented. “I didn’t look at it as being a nontraditional job. We’re all (women and men) trained the same way and have the same job to do. I feel that gender shouldn’t be an issue. It doesn’t make us greater or less than because we’re female. Having male and female officers actually complements the facility.” People, men and women, often remark to Deputy Kath that they could never do what she does as a detention deputy. To that, she frequently comments, “Why not? Why can’t you? If you have the qualifications and a desire to do it, go for it! You won’t know unless you try it. If you have a desire to work with people in that environment, to be nonbiased and nonjudgmental, and to make a difference in people’s lives, it has its rewards.”

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