

KNAUER TO LEAD COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS

LINDSAY WINSLOW BROWN - *lindsayb@kpcnews.net*

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AUBURN — The DeKalb County Commissioners Monday approved Kellie Knauer of Angola to lead the new DeKalb County Community Corrections program.

Knauer plans to set up her office in the basement of the county office building and hire three full-time staff members in early June. By July 1, she hopes people will be sentenced to the program.

Community corrections programs divert nonviolent offenders from serving prison terms in the Indiana Department of Corrections (IDOC). County officials also hope community corrections will reduce overcrowding at the DeKalb County Jail.

Knauer explained that someone who is sentenced to community corrections would be required to wear an electronic monitoring device and turn in a schedule every week. People in the program would be required to stay within the four walls of their homes, except to go to work and attend substance-abuse programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous.

In the future, Knauer hopes to see work-release and transition programs in place. The programs would be funded through an IDOC grant, and offenders would be responsible for paying fees to stay in the programs, which would save taxpayers money.

Knauer added that public safety is her first concern.

“There are going to be people who shouldn’t be put in community corrections. There are people who are a danger to the community or have done something so severe,” Knauer said.

In addition, Knauer also wants to lower the repeat-offense rate and keep offenders from getting in trouble again and again.

In her current job as home detention coordinator for Steuben County Community Corrections, she recently was paid a visit by an ex-offender.

“He came in, sat down and updated me. He’s working as a sponsor. ... I have a lot of respect for the hard work that he’s done. Pretty soon he’ll be celebrating five years of sobriety. ... It’s great to hear people say, ‘I’m still doing a good job,’” Knauer said.

She hopes that by creating case plans for offenders and requiring them to take

classes and serve their communities, they'll want to change.

“The bottom line is, people are going to get in trouble, and they're going to go to jail. But, they're also going to get out. If you don't try to help them, they're going to wind up in the same spot,” Knauer said. “It's about helping people see how their actions affect the people around them and their general happiness.”

Knauer said that since she was a little girl, she has wanted to help people. She considered careers in nursing and counseling, but found they weren't for her. While at Indiana University in Bloomington, she learned about a campus police officer training program and went through the classes. She worked at all the basketball games and often supervised the VIP parking lot.

“Bobby Knight would walk in at the last minute and give me the wave,” she said.

She pursued degrees in counseling and criminal justice and, following graduation, she got married and took the first available job as a loss-prevention manager in Battle Creek, Mich.

A few years later, she returned to Steuben County and worked as a prosecutor's assistant.

“I learned the basics about how the court system works. ... That gave me a lot of experience,” Knauer said.

She then took her current job with Steuben County Community Corrections, where she found there are other ways to help.

“I'm helping people get what they want in life — to be productive citizens and not hurt people along the way,” Knauer said. “People want to live the American dream and drive a nice car, put food on the table ... and pay the bills. When you have a meth addiction or are an alcoholic, you make bad choices and hurt the people around you and keep yourself from obtaining that goal.”