

Jail doors open

• Open House offers inside look

By Monique Headley
Stillwater NewsPress

On Saturday, more than 500 citizens of Stillwater went to jail.

From 1 p.m. to 5 p.m., the Payne County Jail opened its doors to the public to offer the opportunity for self-guided tours of the first two floors of the new five-floor jail west of the Payne County Courthouse on 6th Street.

The jail had been in planning or under construction for 14 years. Saturday's open house was a chance for the public to see tax dollars in action, said Sheriff R.B. Hauf.

In November 2006, Stillwater voters passed a resolution for a 3/8-cent county sales tax to fund the county jail project and pay bond loans for the Payne County Administration Building.

"We did unique things so the economics were better," said architect Billy Knowles of BKL Incorporated.

The building was projected at \$18 million with actual costs at \$18.2 million, he said.

Weather and subcontractor delays and the receipt of bids from only three general contractors decreased opportunities for additional savings, he said.

Knowles said he had several firm deliverables.

"The biggest focus was that the committee wanted the building to be located on this corner to house a capacity of 250 to 300," Knowles said. "We gave 284.

"We also wanted to complement the existing courthouse design, create a way to get inmates to court out of public view and stay in budget. Designed to handle minimum, medium and maximum security inmates, "We are very proud of this building," said Knowles. "It is a state-of-the-art facility and one of five high-rise county jails in Oklahoma."

"I am very pleased with the public turnout. I feel like they had to have a chance to see the place before it was occupied," said Hauf. "I am relieved and very anxious to get everyone under one roof, especially in a facility as nice as this. It will be safer for the public, the inmates and the staff."

The current move-in date is scheduled for mid-July, said Hauf.

"I anticipate to make the transition by that time," he said. "It's down to just a small list of items, basically, staff training and supplies."

He said he does not foresee any further delays.

The number of inmates in current facilities remains problematic, said Hauf.

"Overcrowding has been a continuing issue well before the jail was planned - it was just prolonged," he said. "The state jail inspector made it known if no plan was in place, we would have to find alternative placement for inmates at our expense.

"He monitored the overcrowding but did not impose

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such action," Hauf said.

"It has turned out great," said Don Garrison, director of the Jail Inspection Division for the Oklahoma State Department of Health. "We were here Thursday and there were two or three things we saw which were not a big deal. I told them to occupy when ready.

"The architect has built several jails. This one is a little larger than average," said Garrison.

Experience is important because building a jail is different from a house, he said.

"There is always something that delays completion," he said. "We are used to that. It happens all the time and we don't worry too much about that."

Many said the project was a considerable undertaking. "This is a big deal," said Payne County Commission Chairwoman Gloria Hesser of the multi-million dollar project. "It has turned out great."

"At the point we signed the contract," said David Lambert of the Stillwater-based Lambert Construction Company, "It was the largest single project we had done."

Lambert Project Superintendent Kevin Jennings said, "There were delays pretty much from the beginning. We worked with between 15 to 20 subcontractors at different stages of the project."

The building is complicated and high tech because of its safety needs, mechanical, electrical and heating and cooling systems specifications, said Jennings.

"The whole thing was challenging but probably biggest was its precast construction, detection equipment and ductwork."

Its prefabricated parts were constructed in Oklahoma City and transported to Stillwater for assembly, he said. According to Jennings, any prior deficiencies were satisfactorily addressed for the final approval of the state fire marshal and jail inspector.

Because of its location and height, the jail is constructed according to windload and seismic requirements, he said. It is in compliance with Oklahoma Correctional Association and American Correctional Association stan-

dards and codes as well as with the mandates of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"This is a jail the citizens of Payne County can be proud of and will serve them well for many years. It is a complement to the downtown area," Knowles said.

In attendance were Rick and Barbara McCoy to tour the facility.

"We came to see the jail they have been working on for a long time. It looks nice," said Barbara McCoy.

During construction, Jennings said, three people were injured, though none seriously.

Phase two and three of the overall project remain outstanding for completion of all construction and renovation associated with the tax, Knowles said.

According to Knowles, phase two will be the renovation of the rest of the courthouse. It is scheduled to take place after July 6 when the old jail will be torn out and the space converted for dispatch use, lockers, patrol offices and evidence storage.

Phase three is slated to take place five to six months afterward when sheriff and district attorney offices will move to the first floor of the building.

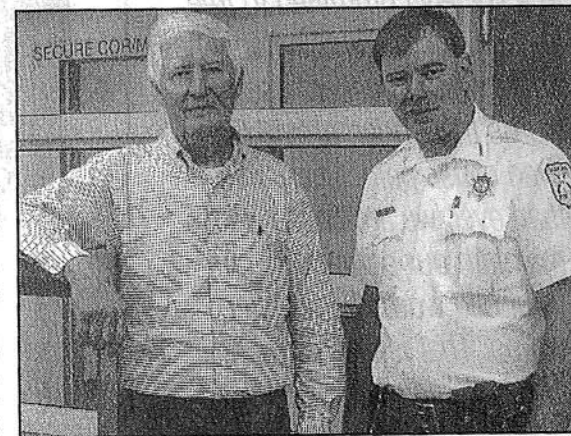


Photo by Monique Headley
Payne County Sheriff R. B. Hauf (right) and architect Billy Knowles take a moment inside the yet unoccupied Payne County Jail.