

County Commission Update: A New Detention Center

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

It's hard to believe we're already entering a new year. Where does the time go? I'm sure all of Tooele County's citizens, and especially business owners, are hoping that the new year brings with it new prosperity and peace.

The Tooele County Commissioners are hoping for a prosperous new year for the residents and businesses of the county as well. Commissioner Bruce Clegg said, "I'd like to see our local businesses growing this year. I'd like to see more stores move into the area. And I'd like to see more people shopping locally. Everyone benefits that way, with our sales taxes staying in the county and being used here instead of in Salt Lake."

The growth Tooele County has seen over the last decade or so has created another need. Sadly the crime rate is such that the current jail is continually filled to capacity and regularly overcrowded. The County Commission has worked with the Sheriff's Office to acquire a new jail facility. After only nine months since groundbreaking, the 25 million dollar jail facility is nearly completed and almost ready for use. It's located on SR 36 at the south end of Tooele.

I had the opportunity to walk through the new Tooele County Detention Center with Chief Deputy Duke North, Jail Commander Lt. Dave Harrison, and Support Services Sgt. Glen Murray. I have to agree with Chief Deputy Duke North who said, "This is the state-of-the-art, latest and greatest." He said the building project contractor, World Links Group, wants this facility to be a show case for county jails.

Commissioner Jerry Hurst is pleased with the final results of the project as well. He said, "The new facility is needed now. The old jail is always over capacity and in disrepair. We built this facility to handle our local needs as well as to house federal inmates. We receive money to keep federal inmates, which will subsidize our expenses and help pay down the bond."

"The new jail was designed with the future in mind by building the infrastructure, such as offices, kitchen, and laundry, big enough to handle another inmate area that could be added on later. The whole thing is state-of-the-art and going to make it a lot easier to manage inmates," Hurst said.

While the contractors are finishing some of the last minute work items, Lt. Harrison is conducting training for his jail staff in the new facility before inmates are in place. Chief Deputy North said, "Lt. Harrison has been the driving force in getting this facility exactly the way we want it and ready to go."

Lt. Harrison is excited about the new facility, but especially about some new features. The jail will utilize the latest technology for its jail management system consisting of touch screen door, surveillance camera (91 cameras and counting), and intercom controls; electronic inmate commissary kiosks; and video visitation capabilities.

While the staff would prefer to have the public at the facility as little as possible, there are allowances for that. Just through the front lobby is a room with six video visitation consoles. They allow a visitor to speak to an inmate just like using Skype. Visitors must pre-schedule a visitation time, for which there is a fee. Lobby hours are Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Video visitations can also be made from home computers by logging into the jail system. The visitations may be recorded and monitored. This system will also notify an inmate's relatives of any change in the inmate's status.

The video visitations are just one of the many ways the Sheriff's Office will cut costs with the new jail. It will eliminate the need for officers to escort inmates to a visiting area. The jail location also has a 9800 square foot warehouse that will allow the Sheriff's Office to buy many supplies in bulk. Already the jail has cut cleaning and paper supplies expenses in half by buying in bulk. Although it's not a totally "green" building, it was constructed to be as energy efficient as possible.

Sgt. Murray said the new Tooele County Detention Center nearly triples the capacity of the old facility, going from 104 beds to 277 beds. The inmate areas are controlled by four different control rooms, each looking like a bridge from a spaceship with the touch screen controls, and large windows with high angled views looking into the inmate areas. The jail has three separate inmate pods: a men's pod, women's pod, and medical pod.

The men's and women's pods are completely separated from each other beginning from the time prisoners enter separate booking areas. Both pods have separate holding cells. They both have designated maximum, medium, and minimum security units. They both have group dormitories for inmate workers -- those inmates who are allowed to work in the jail performing kitchen, laundry, or cleaning tasks; and those who are granted work release outside of the jail. Both pods have separate recreation yards.

There is a medical pod staffed with two full-time nurses and one on-call doctor. The medical pod has a medical control room, three exam rooms, one trauma room, four negative pressure quarantine cells, two medical holding cells, one padded cell, one dental suite (equipment isn't funded yet), and an ambulance access door.

There are four classrooms in the men's pod and two in the women's pod. They will be used to provide drug and alcohol treatment classes, transitional training, and GED courses. They will

also be used for non-denominational church meetings and scripture study. They are also equipped to conduct video arraignments with the courthouse.

The facility has a large staff area with several offices, space for future office cubicles, reception, conference room, break room, fitness room, training room, equipment room, locker room, and evidence collection.

Although the new, bigger jail is an unfortunate necessity, it has already brought benefits to the county. Much of the work was performed by local laborers and local subcontractors, and much of the building materials were manufactured locally at the Utah Industrial Depot. With the addition of new hires, the Sheriff's Office Corrections Division will employ 60 people, including the courthouse security force.

Not everyone will be able to get a personal tour like I did, but the Sheriff's Office is planning a public open house for the new Tooele County Detention Center. It is scheduled for January 12th and 13th.

Chief Deputy North said he would prefer not to see any of our local citizens as residents in the new detention center. Of course, like everyone else, I wish we didn't need a correction facility in Tooele County at all. But since that's not the case, I'd have to say we couldn't have asked for a better one.