

Jail's first inmates will be UNK students assisting with training



Photo by: Brad Norton, Kearney Hub file

Sheriff Neil Miller speaks inside the sally port of Buffalo County's new jail in September. Miller said workers are finishing "punch list" tasks and the county is planning a ribbon cutting, dedication ceremony and public tours on Feb. 17.



A crane lifts 5,000-pound, two-bed cells into place in April in the new jail. Altogether the jail has 205 beds, about 40 of them in male and female work release dormitories.

Posted: Friday, February 5, 2010 1:00 pm | Updated: 12:40 pm, Fri Feb 5, 2010.

By BETSY FRIEDRICH Hub Staff Writer | 0 comments

KEARNEY — A group of University of Nebraska at Kearney students will see firsthand what a night in jail is like later this month.

The students aren't going to be arrested. Instead, they'll be helping Buffalo County Corrections Officers prepare for the move from the old jail to the new facility that has been constructed south of the Buffalo County Courthouse.

"We're going to do tours so the public can see it, but the point of having people there for a length of time is so our staff can kind of run the facility with friendly faces before we move our prisoners in," Buffalo County Sheriff Neil Miller said.

Miller said the students will be booked into the jail as if they were prisoners, fed a meal and put in lockdown just as inmates are each night.

"It's so our corrections staff can start learning how to open doors and unlock doors and move people around," he said.

Miller said the date for the training has not been determined, but he is working with UNK's criminal justice department.

In addition to the training, the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors is planning a ribbon cutting and dedication ceremony for 10:30 a.m. Feb. 17. The ceremony will be followed by public tours of the facility.

Construction began in August 2008. The project is funded by a \$24.5 million bond issue that voters approved in April 2008.

When the transition to the new jail is complete, the current jail will be demolished to make room for a new courts complex that will include five courtrooms and office space for judges and clerks.

Together, the jail and court space will be known as the Buffalo County Justice Center.

Miller said subcontractors and construction crews will be on the site until Feb. 12 to finish the punch-list work.

"It's just all those final things that have to get done or fixed before we get in there," he said. "We're also starting to put some furniture into the building along with fixtures and equipment. It's anything from carts and shelving and racks and inmate clothing and pots and pans and just all those things you have to have before you move in."

Miller said the inmates will be moved to the facility sometime in the first part of March, but he declined to name the date for security reasons.

The new jail has 205 beds, 40 of them in male and female dormitories for work-release inmates, a central master control area, a video arraignment room, more space for officers to fill out paperwork, locker rooms for corrections officers, a break room, and a large training room or conference room.

The basement also houses a new Emergency Operations Center. Buffalo County Emergency Manager Darrin Lewis currently operates from a temporary space on the top floor of the Law Enforcement Center.

The new EOC will include computers, amateur radios, backup power sources and the county's backup 911 system.