

Jailers' pride signals voters did right thing

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It is not every day — thank goodness — that ordinary people set foot inside jails, so it was with a high level of curiosity that Buffalo County citizens toured their new jail Wednesday.

Some simply wanted to see what a jail is like; others wanted reassurance, as taxpayers, that they are getting value for their money.

Barely two years ago, voters approved the \$24.5 million justice center bond to build a 205-bed jail and courts complex.

Opening of the jail for tours Wednesday signaled that the justice center project has nearly reached the halfway point. All planners involved in the project, including Sheriff Neil Miller, are to be congratulated for keeping on schedule and on budget.

But let's get back to the tour.

The architecture that visitors witnessed was impressive from a variety of perspectives. Nearly \$12 million is being spent on the jail, but it looks as if a lion's share of that sum went into specialized jail equipment, not brick and mortar.

Cell pod doors, two-way windows, monitoring systems and industrial-size kitchen equipment all contributed mightily to the cost.

The architecture also was impressive from the functionality perspective. The design appears well-founded for efficiency and safety. Potentially dangerous prisoners will be moved, monitored and cared for with a high degree of safety.

Just as impressive as the sheer starkness of the jail's interior was the pride evident among jail staffers conducting Wednesday's tours. They swelled with pride in their new facility and were openly appreciative for the opportunity to do their jobs there.

When taxpayers approved the justice center bonds in March 2008, they in effect told jailers "we will provide you the facilities you need to do your jobs."

Jailers appear ready to carry on, using the new tools at their disposal.

In that sense, taxpayers are getting their money's worth with the jail structure, itself, and in the dedication of the people who will operate it.