

Couple months to go on jail's final touches



Brad Norton, Kearney Hub

Buffalo County Justice Center

BUFFALO COUNTY Sheriff Neil Miller shows off the county seal on the lobby floor in the new Buffalo County Justice Center, which is scheduled to open this fall.

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KEARNEY — The scales of justice will adorn the outside of the newly constructed Buffalo County Justice Center when the facility opens within the next few months.

At its regular meeting Tuesday the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors debated the wording that will be on the scales of justice on the building's north entrance to the Justice Center off First Avenue and 15th Street. The board also discussed the coloring on the emblem.

Bill Barritt of Beckenhauer Construction of Norfolk, project manager for the Justice Center project, said Phase II of construction is nearly complete. The 40 additional

beds of the jail are complete, most of the pews are set in the courtrooms, much of the carpet has been laid and the finishing touches are being put on.

"The final TLC part of it is still in process," said Carl Gibbs, superintendent for Beckenhauer.

A \$24.5-million bond issue that voters approved in an April 2008 vote funded construction of the jail and new court area.

After it's completed the entrance to the Justice Center will be in the horseshoe parking lot on the west side of the courthouse along the south corridor. The Buffalo County and District Court offices will be located just inside the door. Before entering the courtroom corridor, people must first go through a metal detector and scanner.

"Just like the airport, you're going to walk through a metal detector, and we're going to X-ray everything you're taking in there," said Sheriff Neil Miller.

There won't be full-body scans, however.

The Justice Center will house three courtrooms, each with a jury room, and two hearing rooms. Private security doors separate the jail portion of the building from the courtrooms and judges.

Each courtroom has a holding cell off the court area for inmates waiting to appear before a judge. In the new facility, Miller said, inmates will be transported within the building from their cells to the courtroom without ever having contact with the public.

"That was a big deal for us," Miller said.

Currently, inmates are walked down hallways accessible to the public on their way to court.

The old buffalo head mount that once adorned the old courthouse will also be mounted in the main lobby of the Justice Center.

Once the building is opened, the public entrance to the jail will be in the southwest corner of the building at 1417 First Ave., in between 14th and 15th Streets. There the public can visit inmates and post bond.

No public entry will be allowed through the current Central Avenue entrance once the permanent entrance is opened. A kiosk, currently located near district court on the south end of the courthouse, will be moved to the new public jail area.

Barritt said he expects the county to be able to occupy the new courts complex and additional jail space in late October or early November.

In other business Tuesday, the board:

- Set a public hearing date of Sept. 13 at 10 a.m. to vacate a portion of 115th Road near Ravenna.
- Authorized an interlocal agreement with the city of Kearney for a Justice Assistance Grant through the state Crime Commission.
- Went into executive session for 10 minutes to discuss contract negotiations. No action was taken.