

Buffalo County jail nears completion, with move possible in January

Photo by: Brad Norton, Kearney Hub.

THE BASEMENT of the new jail will house storage, a break room for officers and the new Emergency Operations Center.



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KEARNEY - With its exposed concrete walls, bright lights and rows of flat metal bunks, the new Buffalo County Detention Center is beginning to look like a jail.

"All the block is done and all the concrete floors are poured, and with a jail that's about what you need to make it," Corrections Officer Clayton Edwards said with a laugh while touring the construction site earlier this week.

Sheriff Neil Miller said he expects the jail will be finished Nov. 1, and the county could take possession as early as Jan. 1.

"That's when we'll probably have the jail handed over to us to start training the staff and figuring out how to get moved in," he said.

Construction just south of the Buffalo County Courthouse 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.

The Buffalo County Board of Supervisors toured the new jail after a regular meeting Tuesday morning. The Hub toured the building that afternoon.

"What they're finishing up now is a lot of the windows. They have some exterior work to finish up, some brick and things like that," Edwards said. "A lot of it, I don't want to say it's the finish work because it's not, but they're headed towards that point to where it's drywall and things like that.

"There's not a whole lot of finish work. That's why the completion date, even though you see all this construction work going on, is not too far in advance. You don't have all the finish work you do in a house."

The new jail will feature 205 beds, 40 of them in male and female dormitories for work-release inmates.

The rest of the inmates will be housed in two-bunk cells arranged around common areas in "pods." The pods form a semicircle around the master control room.

"(Master control) has a good 180-degree view of all the pods excluding the females, so they can observe all the pods," Edwards said. "This layout is really the main thing that makes our new jail much better."

Edwards said several features in the new jail will cut down on inmate movement. A video arraignment room will allow inmates to appear in court without leaving the jail. Inmates will talk with visitors in video visitation units using a phone and a screen. Instead of bringing inmates to a large dining room, meals will be delivered to each pod.

"The less inmate movement, the safer we'll be," Edwards said.

"What we're doing is looking at running this jail with as few people as we can, but also to run it in a safe manner so we've got a safe environment for our employees and for the inmates," Miller said.

The new jail will also feature 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 will also house 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.

A \$200,000 Emergency Management Program Grant from the state will help fund the center. Buffalo County and the city have agreed to jointly pay the matching funds for the grant.

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