

OCTOBER 16, 2009

Claremont Villager



Groundbreaking ceremonies Tuesday signaled the official start of construction of the Community Corrections Center at the Sullivan County complex in Unity. From left, John Beaver, project manager of North Branch Construction of Concord, Sullivan County corrections superintendent Ross Cunningham, County Administrator Greg Chanis, Jeff Barrette, Sullivan County Commission chairman, commissioner Ethel Jarvis and State Rep. Ray Gagnon, chairman of the Sullivan County Delegation. (Archie Mountain photo)

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Ceremony signals start of corrections center

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UNITY — The blustery fall weather did little to dampen the enthusiasm of participants at the official groundbreaking ceremony for Phase 2 of the Community Correctional Center Tuesday afternoon.

While there was plenty of praise to share with the gathering of 30 people, Sullivan County Delegation chairman Jeff Barrette singled out the ongoing efforts of Ross Cunningham, superintendent of the Sullivan County Department of Corrections.

At the outset of discussion, focused on improving the facilities at the county jail, there was talk of a \$45 million project with the Community Corrections Center attached. A second proposal called for a revised jail plan costing \$38.3 million with the Community Corrections Center in a separate building.

"And then along came Ross to take a look at what was being done," Barrette told the group in the Ahern Building prior to the groundbreaking. "We thank Ross for his forward thinking."

With Cunningham providing the framework for change, the end result was a \$6.9 million project that included \$1.3 million for Phase 1 upgrades to the present House of Corrections and \$5.6 million for the new corrections center for the treatment of drug and

alcohol offenders.

Barrette also had words of praise for County Administrator Greg Chanis and the entire Sullivan County Delegation who threw its support behind the project. "Ross attended 30 meetings before it went to a vote," Barrette said of Cunningham's day-to-day involvement.

The new corrections center, expected to be completed by June, will have 72 beds, including 32 treatment beds, 16 work release beds and 24 beds for females. The present HOC, built in 1978, was designed to house 44 inmates.

Plans to improve the current facility with additional space and treatment programs started in 2005. A study revealed that between 80 and 90 percent of inmates are in need of treatment programs.

Some of the goals of the Community Corrections Center include a decrease of institutional disciplinary issues; ease overcrowding at the HOC; graduated treatment progress; reduce recidivism rates; provide for cost-effective transition; improve employment and housing opportunities and provide a post-release substance abuse treatment program.

"We're embarking from drawing a line in the sand to curve the inmate population downward," Cunningham said. "This is quite an interesting venture. I got here in 2007 and it's been non-stop since. I'm looking forward to the future."

Gagnon was in agreement.

"Having a treatment focus and perspective, we here in Sullivan County could be setting a standard for the state," Gagnon stated.

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