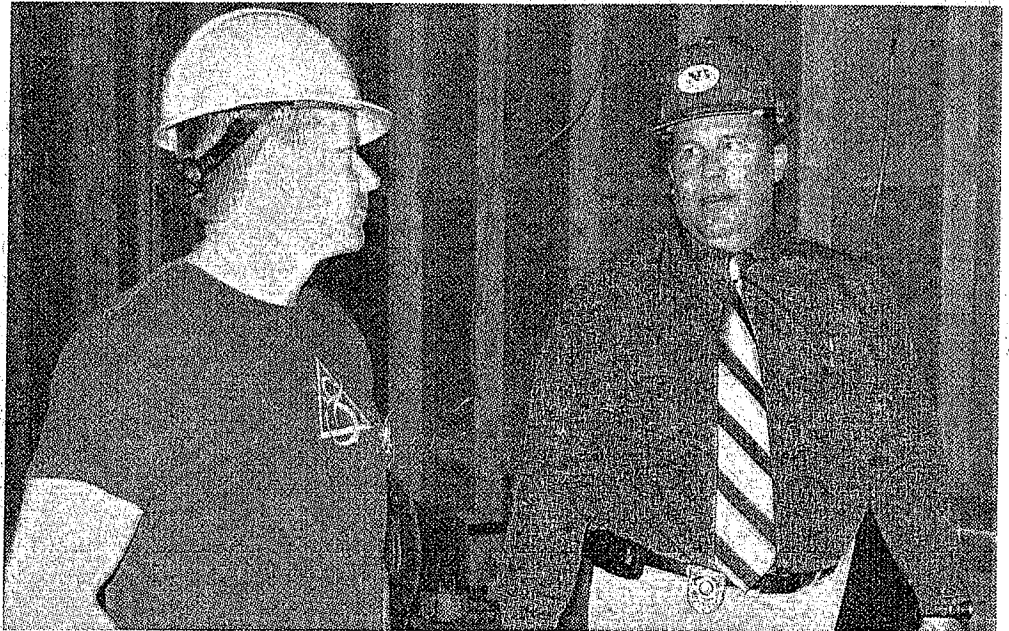


Sullivan  
County  
Commission  
Chairman Jeff  
Barrette listens  
as jail  
Superintendent  
Ross  
Cunningham  
explains the  
features of the  
new  
Community  
Corrections  
Center, which  
is scheduled  
for completion  
in July.

KRISTEN SENZ  
PHOTO



# Construction on correct path

By KRISTEN SENZ  
Senior Writer

The Community Corrections Center construction project encapsulates Sullivan County's new approach to corrections, incorporating an inmate flow that supports good behavior and addiction recovery.



**Unity**

Sullivan County commissioners got a look inside the building Thursday, which is progressing within budget and on track for completion in July. The two-story building attached to the existing jail by a connecting hallway features "flex" areas designed to manage inmate classification and transition offend-

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ers from the jail to an in-house, 90-day substance abuse treatment program.

A split main entryway leads visitors either upstairs to an administrative section with offices, a conference room, training room and armory, or downstairs to the inmate area, which will contain a total of 72 dormitory-style beds. The inmate area will also contain 50 security cameras, 37 secure doors, interior windows that allow staff to observe inmates from main hallways and exterior windows that don't allow inmates to see outside.

"These windows can't be opened and they will all be frosted, because I want them paying attention to themselves," said Ross Cunningham, superintendent of the Sullivan County Department of Corrections. "The concept I've worked on with the staff is, you need to manage by walking around."

Clinicians who monitor inmates in the treatment area will have office space in the unit in which they work, Cunningham said. "The exciting part for me, correctionally speaking, is the staff member who's going to deal with the inmates, their office is right here," he said, motioning to a wood-framed space off the main inmate area on the men's wing. "There will be eyes and ears right here, plus the cameras."

When the building and three phases of staff training are complete, the Sullivan County House of Corrections will begin a new system of rehabilitation for inmates. Offenders entering the jail will be booked — potentially using a new "open booking" system that would involve inmates waiting to be released and for booking watching television in a common area with a divider — and then enter the existing jail for assessment.

Inmates who choose not to participate in programming will remain behind bars. Those who want help and have been offered treatment as a sentencing option would then move to the flex area in the Community Corrections Center for further evaluation. Inmates without substance abuse issues could also serve out their sentences in the flex area, if they show good behavior, Cunningham said.

From the flex area, inmates with substance abuse problems can then progress to the men's and women's treatment areas, where the majority of them will spend 90 days. Upon successful completion of the substance abuse program,

inmates with good behavior can move down the hall to the work release area, which is divided from other inmate areas by a secure door.

The new building will also have recreation areas for men and women, as well as an indoor basketball half-court.

Cunningham said he's hopeful that the county will receive discounted video conferencing equipment from the state, allowing the facility to institute video visitations and video arraignments. Inmates will be able to earn contact visits, which will take place in the

new dining area that will service minimum- and medium-security inmates. Cunningham said he would find out whether the facility will receive the equipment within the next few months.

Also in the next few months, he said, he'll find out whether the University of New Hampshire is awarded a grant that would enable the uni-

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**Ross Cunningham**  
county jail superintendent

versity to partner with the Sullivan County Department of Corrections for data analysis. With graduate students crunching the numbers, Cunningham said, the public would get information from a third party about the center's future impact on recidivism rates. National statistics show the approach Sullivan County plans to employ can reduce recidivism by up to 30 percent within a few years, he said.

Above all, Cunningham said, the Community Corrections Center will enable county corrections staff to work with inmates who are first-time offenders or who truly want to become productive members of society, rather than treating them the same as offenders who repeatedly enter the system and have no desire to change.

"We now have the tools to handle that population, and that's important," he said, "and quite frankly, failure's not an option for me, and I think that's how we should engage with everyone who comes into the system."

*Kristen Senz can be reached at (603) 543-3100, ext. 108, or by e-mail at [ksenz@eagle-times.com](mailto:ksenz@eagle-times.com).*

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