

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2009

Unity jail gets fed grant for staffing

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The Sullivan County Department of Corrections recently received a federal grant of more than \$260,000 to cover staffing costs at the jail in Unity over the next two years.

Ross Cunningham, superintendent of the Sullivan County House of Correction, said the \$260,879 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice will fund three temporary corrections officer positions and two full-time permanent positions, which the county will fund once the grant expires in July 2011.

In addition to the grant, which was effective Aug. 1, Cunningham requested and received \$20,000 in additional overtime funding for jail staff at a Sullivan County Commission meeting Thursday. Cunningham said the additional overtime funding would compensate for the absence of two corrections officers who will soon leave for deployment in Afghanistan with the Army National Guard.

Those positions must be kept open for one year for the returning soldiers.

Currently, the jail also has four open positions for corrections officers, two of whom would staff the new Community Corrections Center, which will house a residential substance abuse treatment program and is under construction at the county farm in Unity.

Jail administrators are in the process of crafting a staffing plan designed to make the best use of the federal funding, Cunningham said.

The competitive, federal grant program awarded about 60 grants nationwide, with Sullivan County receiving the award in part for its innovative approach to rehabilitation that is inherent to the Community Corrections Center project.

So far, the construction of the new corrections center is running about \$70,000 under budget, Cunningham said Thursday. Likewise, phase one of the jail improvement project, which involves upgrades to the existing facility, is about \$70,000 under budget, he said.

The first phase of the project is on track for completion in mid-November.