

County jail offers new structure

Unique approach divides inmates into two 'tracks'

By **KRISTEN SENZ**
Senior Writer

Similar to holistic health practices that treat the whole patient, the concept behind the Sullivan County Community



Corrections Center is to treat all aspects of an inmate, with the goals of reducing recidivism and improving society.

In large part, the structure of the CCC programs and services is based on visual reminders of incentives for positive behavior and punishments

for failures to comply. This carrot and stick methodology isn't new to the corrections sphere, but Sullivan County's efforts to align its new building with a new approach to rehabilitation have set it apart from the rest of the country.

"This has actually never happened

anywhere before," said Kevin Warwick, a Massachusetts-based consultant for the county who works with corrections departments across the country. "People are looking at this county and saying, there's something pretty interesting going on there."

The Sullivan County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee met Thursday to roll out plans for programming at the center, which is

scheduled to open in early July.

Developed locally, but based on national research, the community corrections treatment model divides inmates into two "tracks," those who have longer sentences and more serious substance abuse or mental health issues and those who are in jail for only a short time.

See **CENTER** - Page A2

Inmates who serve six months to a year will receive intensive substance abuse treatment, gender-specific individual and group therapy, life skills education and transitional services designed to help them ease back into the community upon release.

"If you're shooting eight bags of heroin a day and you're going to be here for six months to a year, you're going to get the Cadillac program," Warwick said.

Inmates who serve shorter sentences or aren't struggling with substance abuse will receive fewer services, but even those who enter the county corrections system for a few days will be encouraged to participate in some form of treatment.

"The studies show that you can get up to a 32 percent reduction in your recidivism rate if you're doing these kinds of things," Warwick said.

The county hopes to reduce its recidivism rate from about 75 percent to about 60 percent by the end of the third year with the new center, a goal Warwick said he believes is achievable.

As an example of how the building design facilitates the approach, a hallway that will connect the CCC to the existing jail will act as a reminder to

inmates who are allowed to participate in treatment programs that slip-ups will land them back in orange jumpsuits and behind steel bars.

"If they don't participate, there's that constant reminder that they can go back down to that jail," said Jane Copland, programs director for the Sullivan County Department of Corrections.

Jail Superintendent Ross Cunningham said the connector hallway also served to reduce construction costs by consolidating fire safety and air-handling systems.

On the other end of the spectrum, the increased treatment and service options will provide more incentives for positive behavior at smaller increments.

The Sullivan County Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee has about 25 members, and all of them have some stake in the community corrections center effort.

That effort began about three years ago with studies that showed the county needed to upgrade its facility and address the high percentage of inmates with substance abuse problems.

When the CCC opens, the Sullivan County Department of Corrections will have the

first in-house residential substance abuse treatment program in New Hampshire.

"This is a great step for Sullivan County to keep people in their community, rather than sending them somewhere else," said Jan Peterson, committee member and managing attorney at the New Hampshire Public Defenders office in Keene, which also serves Sullivan County.

While the CCC program model is designed to help every offender, members of the coordinating committee acknowledged that it won't work for everyone, and the programming structure will continue to evolve with time, once it's put into practice.

Citing a number of grants the county corrections department has been awarded in recent months, totaling almost \$1 million, Warwick said the broader corrections community is beginning to notice Sullivan County's unique and collaborative approach.

"This county has a way of really mobilizing and working on the right things," he said. "That's why we're starting to get this money; the Sullivan County Department of Corrections is starting a program that the country wants to look at now."