



A worker moves about on the roof being reshingled at the Sullivan County House of Corrections, part of the \$1.3 million Phase 1 upgrade at the Unity facility. (Archie Mountain photo)

Phase 1 upgrades near completion at HOC

Community Corrections Center set to start

By ARCHIE MOUNTAIN

Staff Writer

amountain@dsalmonpress.com

UNITY — Come next June, the physical plant and the treatment and programs available to drug and alcohol offenders will change dramatically in Sullivan County.

With the opening of the Community Corrections Center, new doors will be open to offenders who currently serve their court-ordered sentences in the overcrowded Sullivan County House of Corrections in Unity.

Ross Cunningham, superintendent of the Sullivan County Department of Corrections, said 80 to 90 percent of prisoners now confined at the House of Corrections are in need of treatment.

And that's where the new \$5.6 million Community Corrections Center comes into play.

That building will be attached to the present House of Corrections facility that has undergone a \$1.3 million upgrade. Work at the HOC is on track to be completed next week. Bids closed Tuesday for the site and concrete work at the CCC.

"We want to get that work completed before snow flies and then work right through winter on the building," Cunningham said.

The new corrections center will have 72 beds, including 32 treatment beds, 16 work release beds and 24 beds for females.

The present HOC jail was built in 1978 and was designed to house 44 inmates. On Thursday, Sept. 17, there were 82 prisoners in the jail.

Plans to improve the facility with more space and treatment programs started in 2005.

At the outset, a \$45 million facility with the Community Corrections Center attached was on the table for discussion purposes. A second proposal focused on a revised jail plan costing \$38.3 million with the Community Corrections Center in a separate building. At that point the \$6.9 million proposal surfaced and won support.

Phase 1 of the project deals with improvements at the House of Corrections. Some of that work included a new air handling system, sprinklers installed throughout the building, new roof, insulation of attic space, and security upgrades.

Adding air conditioning at the HOC was accomplished at a

small price," Cunningham said. Adding that feature was cost-effective because of the major upgrades being made to the air handling system throughout the entire building, according to Cunningham.

When it's 100 degrees outside in the summer, it's like 125 degrees in the jail building for both the prison population and the jail employees, Cunningham stated. The goals of treatment at the Community Corrections Center follow:

- To provide a secure program that focuses on the inmate's successful transition back to the community.
- The program is based on best practice models (Delaware Model).
- 24-hour supervision and services.
- Decrease institutional disciplinary issues.
- Ease overcrowding at the Sullivan County DOC.
- Graduated treatment progress.
- Reduce recidivism rates.
- Provide for cost-effective transition.
- Improve employment and housing opportunities.
- Provide post-release substance abuse treatment program.

Cunningham said female offenders do not have access to re-entry services at present and the DOC does not have a comprehensive treatment program. Inmates currently await a treatment bed for an average of 120 days, he said.

Cunningham said the new facility will provide many benefits to Sullivan County.

- To limit the future need of secure beds in Sullivan County, a part of the long-term solution.
- A proven, cost-effective method for inmate management.
- Inmates become productive taxpayers.
- Reduce transportation costs for the Sullivan County Sheriff's Department.
- Equal treatment for both male and female inmates.

When the Community Corrections Center opens its doors, the current staff of 46 will be increased by three new positions. All three are funded for one year with a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice.

"I appreciate all the support from the county commissioners and county delegation for this project," Cunningham said. He also praised his staff for its hard work dealing with all the challenges faced and meeting future goals.