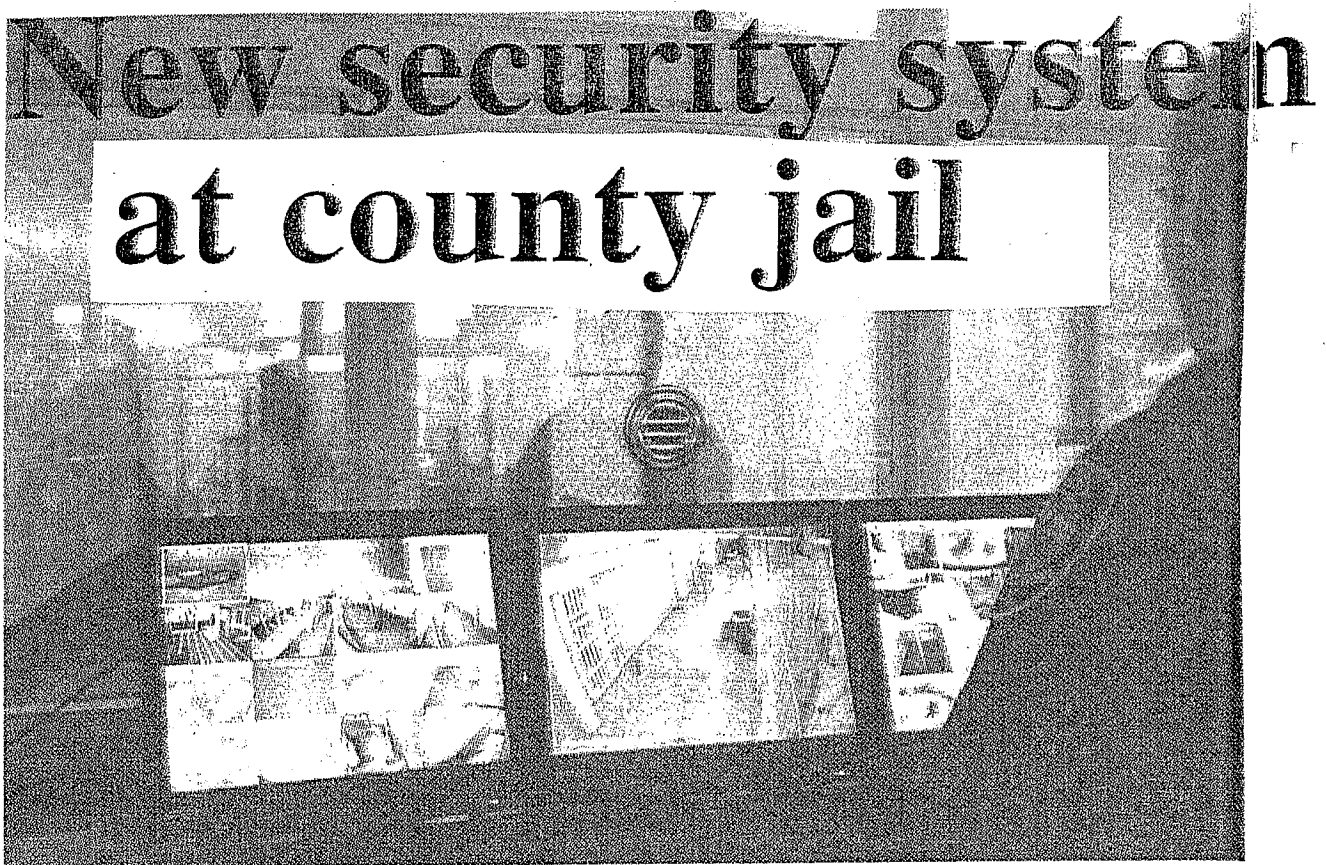


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New security system at county jail

COURTESY PHOTO

Sullivan County corrections officer R. Blake mans the control center at the county jail in Unity. Officials say the jail's new touch screen security system makes the facility safer and more secure.

By **KRISTEN SENZ**
Senior Writer

A new touch-screen security system at the Sullivan County House of Correction is making the facility safer and more efficient, corrections officials said Monday.

The new \$185,000 system, which is almost fully installed, nearly doubles the number of security cameras inside the jail and has made the giant loops full of keys that jailers used to carry a thing of the past, jail superintendent Ross Cunningham said.

"It has made the whole operation more efficient, and more safe and secure," he said. "This brings the facility up to modern standards."

Installed by Massachusetts-based KNE Inc. and its subcontractor, Connecticut-based Red Hawk, the new security system will also to quicken response times in the event of a fire or other emergency at the jail, Cunningham said. Instead of running to an area of the jail with a key ring and searching for the right key to open a door, corrections officers can open doors from the jail's

control center by tapping on a main screen. That screen shows schematics of five different areas of the facility and allows the control center operator to open doors and operate the intercom system while monitoring the 46 security cameras, said corrections department Sgt. Dan Gokey.

"It's a lot more security-minded," Gokey said. "The officers before carried all these keys with them at all times."

In addition to speeding up response times in emergency situations, the keyless system also makes the job of corrections officer safer, Cunningham said.

KNE Inc. and Red Hawk began installing the new system about three months ago. It is now about 99 percent complete, Gokey said.

"At first, it was kind of confusing," said corrections officer R. Blake, who was working in the control center Monday, "but now that it's getting to the point that it's almost fully complete, it's a lot easier to run."

Gokey said all staff members at the jail will begin training on the new system over the next few weeks.

The cost of the touch-screen security sys-

See **SECURITY** - Page A2

Page 1 of 2

tem, which included the replacement of 13 doors inside the jail, was not included as part of the first phase of a \$6.9 million jail improvement project the county approved last year. Funds for the security system came from a capital reserve fund, but its installation coincides with several other upgrades at the jail this year. Newly built administrative office space is complete and will be occupied early next year, Gokey said. A new \$300,000 HVAC system is now fully installed and operational. Gokey said temperature inside the facility, which sometimes reached above 100 degrees during the summer, had been a serious issue.

"We're lucky we never had any incidents or altercations here because of the heat," he said.

Additionally, the county recently spent an extra \$7,000, which was not included in the budget for the jail improvement project, to install motion-detecting sensors in the jail's attic area. Cunningham said he received permission from the Sullivan County Commission to purchase and install the sensors after former inmate Robert Hale III escaped from the facility a few weeks ago. Hale, who faces charges of armed robbery and now escape, has since been recaptured and is awaiting trial at New Hampshire State Prison in Concord.

The second phase of the jail improvement project involves the construction of the Sullivan County Community Corrections Center at the coun-

ty complex in Unity. The center will house a 90-day residential substance abuse treatment program designed to treat the most common problem among inmates.

Gokey said he has seen the Sullivan County jail population more than double since he started working there about 12 years ago.

Because inmates' substance abuse problems aren't addressed while they're in jail, he said, many of them end up re-offending. And drug problems tend to run in the family in Sullivan County, he said, so oftentimes the jail is housing two or three members of the same family, a trend that shows no sign of changing without a new approach to rehabilitation.

Page 2 of 2