



Facility of the Month

Opened in July 2003, the new Whitfield County Law Enforcement Center in Dalton, Ga., was designed to maximize efficiency. Pieper O'Brien Herr Architects created a \$21

million facility that includes space for the sheriff's department, patrol and criminal investigation division, evidence/crime scene room, visitation, warrant division, appearance court, and a 544 bed jail. All within 139,789 square feet and on only 11 acres.



FACILITY OF THE MONTH

Under One Roof

A new law enforcement center brings together the sheriff's department, appearance court, and 544 jail beds in Whitfield County, GA.



“Maximize efficiency.” That’s the answer Anthony Turpin gives when asked the reason for building the new Whitfield County Law Enforcement Center in Dalton, Georgia. “The impetus was mainly to get everyone under one roof to improve efficiency,” continues Turpin, the center’s project manager and an architect with Pieper O’Brien Herr Architects.

Before this new \$21 million replacement building opened in July 2003, Whitfield County operated an older facility

that lacked the necessary space needed by a modern sheriff’s department, and the jail was so overcrowded officials were paying to house inmates at facilities outside the county.

Seeking Voter Approval

The need for a new facility was realized as long ago as 1997, when an initial needs assessment determined the county required 450 new beds. In an effort to get the most out of the new building, Pieper O’Brien Herr Architects prepared a concept package based on the sheriff’s programming needs, which included space for his department, patrol and criminal investigation division, evidence/crime scene room, visitation, warrant

division, and an appearance court. And, of course, hundreds of new jail beds.

The concept package was created for the benefit of voters who were going to be asked to pass a SPLOST (special purpose local option sales tax) referendum, which is a five-year penny tax used to fund the project.

“We think the county did the right thing getting us involved early so they could have something physical and tangible to take to the public, with the renderings going to Rotary Clubs, garden clubs, and other meetings,” says Turpin. “We just provided what the county wanted us to give them and they took it from there. We backed out of the picture at that time because we didn’t

want to get involved in the politics.”

The package prevailed and voters approved the referendum. The firm started developing drawings in 2000.

Making it Fit

Maximizing efficiency involved more than just putting multiple sheriff’s department functions and new jail beds into one 139,789 square-foot facility. It involved putting all those functions into a facility large enough to meet needs 20 years down the line to accommodate inmate population growth and an expanded sheriff’s department. And, finally it involved putting all that, plus parking and a retention pond onto a difficult, heavily wooded site that’s only 11 acres. The site is bordered by existing buildings, including a hospital, the public health department, and 911 call center, as well as railroad tracks and residential and commercial buildings. And, there needed to be space leftover for future expansion should the county need to add an extra 484 beds. When commenting about how all that was squeezed onto a small site, Turpin jokes, “We surprised ourselves somewhat.”

However, before construction of the compact complex could begin, the site presented one last challenge. There was a smattering of caves that Turpin says were initially thought to be where ammunition

was stored during the Civil War. It turns out the network of caves was a former jeweler’s rouge mine. Rouge is a fine clay soil once used to polish stones.

“Our concern was for the stability of the soil and the foundation of this large project,” explains Turpin. “We did extensive soil borings, 40 to 50 borings throughout the building pad, some approaching 50 feet in depth. Only one place had a void that was broached and we addressed that. The network of tunnels was not as extensive as expected.”

Strong Architectural Statement

Turpin says the site constraints helped form the building itself. “When you have a big, flat, vacant site it’s harder to plan sometimes because you can plan almost anything-you have to have a strong concept about how you’re going to lay it out,” he explains.

A central spine is the concept that organizes the Whitfield County Law Enforcement Center-everything connects or circulates around the spine. Turpin joked that the central spine was referred to as the “Green Mile,” and there was some half-serious discussions about painting it green.

But, when you’re dealing with a tight footprint, a long central spine isn’t the easiest feature to accommodate. But it worked. And the architects also found



Non-structural steel columns outside the employee entry are more than purely decorative, they will prevent a vehicle intrusion. The double-height window gives the illusion of a single-story building, creating a more human scale near the entrance.

themselves designing up, as opposed to out. “We decided that with the amount of programming the sheriff required, it was going to have to be a two-level facility, and that, coupled with site constraints, required us build up to and still have enough room for parking,” says Turpin.

Putting a two-story building on a prominent site (the building basically sits on top of a hill) can overwhelm its location.

“It has a very physical presence,” explains Turpin. “We had to pay close attention to the architecture and aesthetics and materials so it doesn’t look like a fortress and is somewhat warm and inviting to the public.”

Turpin and his team attempted to scale the building appropriately. In certain places, windows are full height, stretching through both floors to give the impression of a single-story building; spandrel glass spans the transition area from first floor to second floor. Additionally, around the facility’s public entrance, smaller masonry brick and cast stone was used to humanize the building scale.

The center’s overall look is contemporary because the sheriff asked for something nontraditional. “The county has the health department across the street that’s very, very contemporary, and they hated it,” says Turpin. “It has so much going on-colors and materials that are odd-and I think it’s a very interesting building with too much

fairly efficiently. The center’s exterior perimeter fence wouldn’t have to be relocated to accommodate an extra pod and the kitchen and laundry facilities were designed from the start to have enough space to service double the number of inmates. “The kitchen wouldn’t need any more equipment and in the laundry room, the only thing we’d have to do is drop in a washer and dryer or two,” explains Turpin. In addition, he says that the visitation area was located in an area that is easily expandable, should it need to grow. “It’s in a wing that can just extend on out,” says Turpin, “but it may not need to be extended. It depends on how they schedule visitation.”

Equipment and Maintenance

Final gestures toward maximum efficiency are the hardware and equipment choices and maintenance planning.

“Our goal was to keep everyone involved in all the decisions being made,” Turpin explains. “Gary Brown, head of the building and grounds, was at all the meetings and he consulted on everything from locks on the doors to glazing to sliding doors. The goal was to be able to go down to hardware and pick something off the shelf. We have quite a bit of attic stock in the project so he had materials from the get-go to make replacements.”

The county’s IT consultant also was involved making sure the facility had enough conduit in place to accommodate future technology.

Even the local fire department was involved from the beginning. Their input lead to the creation of an access road that runs through the back of the facility to bring emergency vehicles on site. The access road turned out to be very useful, as it serves as an additional entrance and exit for sheriff’s department staff. And, the access road leads to the evidence garage where the department can bring in impounded vehicles and work on them; an evidence lab is adjacent to the garage.

“That’s something we don’t normally include, but it’s a nice feature to bring into that secure environment,” Turpin says. And it was a nice feature to be able to include under one roof.

**PROJECT DATA
WHITFIELD COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER**

Architect: *Pieper O’Brien Herr Architects*
Construction Manager: *Turner Construction*
Owner: *Whitfield County Board of Commissioners*
Owner Representative: *Brad Arnold, County Administrator*

Detention Equipment Contractor: *Norment Security Group*
Security System Consultant: *Jordan & Skala Engineers*
Food Service Consultant: *Camacho Associates*

going on. Any one thing would have been very strong and this one [the Whitfield County Law Enforcement Center] is an attempt to consolidate it into one strong statement.”

The Center

The sheriff’s department occupies 30,000 square feet, 15,000 square feet per floor, and there’s a very defined line between the sheriff’s department and the secure areas. The initial appearance court, visitation, and central control straddle that line.

Once inside the entrance, visitors approach the central control, which Turpin refers to as the facility’s brain and heart. Central control is staffed 24 hours per day and, while the area is protected behind secure glazing, the officers working there have the ability to interact with the public. In an effort to maximize efficiency, as Turpin explains, the officers also do a little double duty as receptionists.

“Staffing is the gift that keeps on giving,” says Turpin. “Construction costs are nothing compared with what it costs to staff [the facility] over the next 10 to 20 years. We worked very diligently to provide flexibility so a person can do one-and-a-half to two jobs when conditions require it.”

The public entrance itself also serves double duty. Aside from its role as a reception space, it serves as a refuge or a “safe haven.” The entrance is the first one people see when approaching the facility and, should a citizen need immediate safety, if they’re being followed or chased while driving, for example, they can run into the well-lit lobby past the second set of doors equipped

with magnetic locks and an officer in central control can immediately lock out the threat. In addition, the entrance’s non-structural, decorative, vertical steel beams, which are found at all entrances, add security against vehicle intrusion, should anyone try to ram what looks like a vulnerable entrance. Luckily, no one has had to make use of this feature, but Turpin says it was the sheriff’s goal to have people see the center as a safe environment even though there’s a jail attached to it.

And it’s that attached jail that makes up a majority of the facility. At 109,789 square feet, 78 percent of the structure is dedicated to incarceration.

The facility has two, two-story housing pods, one housing pod has 256 beds and the other has 248. Forty beds in a trustee dormitory near central booking bring the facility’s total to 544. The trustee beds are used by inmates being rewarded for good behavior. The layout is designed to maximize the available beds; with 20 total dayrooms (10 dayrooms per pod-the facility allows 20 possible classifications.) Areas can be setup for minimum security, medium security, women and administrative segregation, as needed. Each pod has two external courtyard recreation areas.

“We used the steepness of the site to our benefit, basically allowing for future expansion of housing to step down the hill and go to a three-level facility,” says Turpin. “We have space for this third pod that would step down the hill to the west. Basically, at three levels you’re adding 484 more beds.” Future expansion would bring the facility’s total bed count to 928.

Expansion could be accomplished

PRODUCT DATA

Cabinet Steamers: *Crescor*
CCTV: *Pelco; Silent Witness; Blonder Tongue*
Correctional Furniture: *Panel Specialties*
Detention Accessories: *Panel Specialties*
Exterior Finish: *Sto*
Floor /Wall Tile: *Armstrong*
Food Service: *Atlanta Kitchen Equipment Associates*
Gypsum Wallboard: *USG*
HVAC: *Trane*
Intercom: *Rauland*
Ovens: *Blodgett*
Personal Alarm System: *Rauland*
PLC: *Omron*
Plumbing: *Damron Plumbing*
Raised Access. Flooring: *Tate*
Roofing: *Firestone*
Sallyport/Doors: *Karavan Doors*
Security Bunk Embeds: *Steel Block*

Security Cell Doors: *Norment Security Group/Independent Steel Products*
Security Cell Lighting: *Kenall*
Security Fencing: *American Landmark Fence*
Security Glazing: *GE Lexon*
Security Locks: *Southern. Steel*
Security Penal Plumbing: *Willoughby*
Security Sprinkler Equipment: *Fire Sprinkler Inc.*
Security Systems: *SouthWest Communications*
Security Windows: *CM Security*
Sewer Grinder: *JWC Environmental*
Smoke Detection System: *Notifier*
Steam Kettles: *Groen*
UPS: *Best Power*
Ventilators: *Greasemaster*
Walk-In Coolers/Freezers: *Thermo-Kool*
Weapons Detection Systems: *Perkins-Elmer*



WHITFIELD COUNTY LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER

"We have found POH Architects and its staff to be both professional and responsive, and we are very pleased with their performance. They have consistently met our deadlines, and most importantly, they really listen to our needs for the project."

POH Architects has been a vital part of the overall project team and we are looking forward to having the project completed. I would highly recommend POH and suggest that strong consideration be given to retaining them for anyone in need of architectural services."

Sheriff Scott Chitwood
Whitfield County Sheriff's Office



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Correctional Profile

The Justice Studio of Pieper O'Brien Herr Architects (POH) has not only been a part of the trends in the planning and design of correctional facilities in Georgia, but has pioneered numerous innovations such as the small jail prototype. We apply this extensive experience and knowledge to creatively solve our client's problems. As professionals dedicated to the correctional industry, we are very familiar with the issues facing communities today from the initial ability to fund capital construction projects to operational issues such as direct and indirect inmate supervision management.

