

PUBLIC SAFETY – POLICE BUILDING

By NANCY BERGERON

The Ruston Police Department is on the move.

After years of working in cramped quarters on the first floor of City Hall, the department is moving into a spacious, state-of-the-art facility. The new police complex on North Trenton Street is the result of years of planning by Mayor Dan Hollingsworth and the Ruston Board of Aldermen. Hollingsworth said the plan was to keep the Ruston Police Department adjacent to City Hall and central traffic arteries for quick access to all parts of the city.

The department hopes to be fully in the new facility by mid-May. The communications officers and records clerk have already re-located.

Officers say the facility will dramatically improve efficiency, provide much better law enforcement procedures internally, improve public safety, and ensure better communications. The 11,000-square-foot building that used to be Ruston's post office is over twice the size of the City Hall space that now houses the department.

"We've got people here stuffed in closets," said Laura Kent, a communications and records officer who's been with the department 21 years.

The fraud and forgery investigator presently works out of what originally was a janitor's closet, as does another officer down the hall. The juvenile unit occupies what used to be the department's break-room. Criminal investigators have no private place to conduct investigations.

The vehicle bay, meant as a space into which an officer could pull his patrol car for safe, easy transfer of a suspect to a holding cell, is crammed full of files and evidence. The holding cells are also full of files and equipment that must be kept under lock-and-key.

The three computers on which officers write their reports are in the same room that serves as a shift-change room, locker room, and training room.

"When I first started here in 1989, we'd almost outgrown this space," said Kent.

The new complex features more modern and up-to-date equipment, as well as room for growth. The department's receptionist will be separated from the public by a two-inch thick bullet-proof window. Access to parts of the building can also be controlled through a new keyless system.

Besides giving them room to work, the new building is a morale-booster, officers say.

“I’m so excited to be moving over there. It’s almost like I’m starting a new job,” dispatch communications officer W.W. “Bill” Sheridan said.

For most of his eight years on the force, Sheridan has spent his 12-hour shift sitting in front of multiple communications devices and computer screens.

In the new dispatch area, desks can be raised to standing height with the push of a button. Sheridan said the ability to shift position heightens alertness, which, in turn, heightens a dispatcher’s awareness of nuances in a caller’s voice, and thus enables a dispatcher to give the responding officer more thorough information about the call.

“All those little things come back to providing better security for the community,” he said.

Rogers said the new facility will improve the department’s ability to do work “just from the standpoint of operations, because you’re not standing on top of each other.”

Rogers said the impetus for a new police headquarters began before he became chief. .

“We identified this need in 1999 when I first took office,” said Hollingsworth. “The Police Department needed a much larger facility, one that really was congruent with the needs of the department and our service to the public. A facility that would adequately serve our needs far into the future. We’ve looked at many different options. This was the best location and the most cost effective choice.”

Rogers called the city’s acquisition of the old post office building “a very positive thing.” The police department needed to remain centrally located, and across the street from city hall is an ideal spot.

“I think it shows we’re committed to the downtown area, too,” Rogers said. “This is the core of the city, and we’re here in it.”

Nancy Bergeron is communications manager for the Ruston-Lincoln Chamber of Commerce.