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## Local News

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### Sheriff gives Rotarians update on jail progress

Mitch Sneed / Staff Writer

May 4, 2007

Speaking to the Auburn Rotary Club, Lee County Sheriff Jay Jones said the new jail complex is on schedule, on budget and set for a June 4 opening.

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Construction is virtually complete on the \$21 million facility that will house inmates from Lee County, Smiths Station, Auburn and Opelika in one location. Until the facility opens, Opelika is operating its own jail. This will allow for a more efficient use of employees and make it a one-stop for all those incarcerated in the county, Jones said.

"It's a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week operation," Jones said. "Trust me, it's always on my mind. You could say it's our own little bed and breakfast without a lot of frills for our guests and no need for reservations. All joking aside, I know this isn't something that you think of as nice, but it is a necessity to keep our citizens safe and this will allow us to be more effective and efficient."

Jones said the new facility will mean that there will be less wire and fencing on the outside and a more effective use of personnel. Jones said the capacity will go from its current level of 160 prisoners to the eventual ability to house as many as 435 inmates.

Other new features are a video visitation program where inmates and visitors will be linked by video so that movement will be kept to a minimum.

"The most significant risk in a detention facility is in transit," Jones said. "We had to limit visitation at the current facility to just weekends because we didn't have the people. This system will mean that an inmate will not have to be moved and be watched and still be able to be in contact with family for friends as they visit."

Jones said the project has been in the works for almost seven years, trying to stay ahead of federal mandates.

"This has been a very involved process," Jones said. "I tell people it's like building a house, it's just that we are building a very big one. It's an 83,000-square-foot facility. I know it's a government project, and unlike some of them, this one is on schedule and on budget, and we're very proud of that."

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