

THE GAFFNEY LEDGER

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2012-12-12 / Other News

County administration building provides glimpse of past, glance to bright future

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Barry Agnew PROJECT ARCHITECT “This building is a matter of paying homage to our roots while also turning our faces to the future and the bright days ahead for Cherokee County.

If you listen hard enough, the sounds of machines churning and coordination of mill workers can still be heard at the former Milliken “Big Mill” site.

While the days of bustling mills and factories employing large portions of a local population are long gone, the impression for which it left is not ignored by Cherokee County Administration building architect Barry Agnew.

“I can remember what (Gaffney) looked like 50 years ago and the progress up to this point is immense,” he said. “But the ‘Big Mill’ represented a lot of what our county was about; an important structure that reflected the workmanlike culture of the county.”

In the construction of the new county administration building, Agnew and Cherokee County officials sought the best way to pay homage to the ‘Big Mill,’ while also doing their part to show the progression of the area and its people.

“Our goal was to present a structure which not only represented the past, but also the present and future as well,” he said. “This building is a matter of paying homage to our roots while also turning our faces to the future and the bright days ahead for Cherokee County.”

Shielded by walls of brick while surrounded on all sides by two-story arched windows, the

Cherokee County Administration building will open this week to all. Under construction for the better part of the past two years, the 80,000-square-foot facility is scheduled to be unveiled to the public on Dec. 13.



Brian Beattie PROJECT SUPERINTENDENT “A lot of the guys working on the project were local subcontractors; while working for a living they also are seeing their taxpayer dollars at work. There was a lot of pride pumped into this effort.”

The building will house the vast majority of county departments and operations. The first floor of the structure houses an expansive council chamber which can seat up to 150 visitors, as well as the offices most used by citizens — veterans affairs, tax assessor, treasurer, indigent care, election commission and voter registration.

On the second floor are county administration offices as well as finance department and other personnel. Each floor has a large training room, which eliminates the need for county employees to venture to other counties for mandatory training sessions.

In addition, the basement of the new administration building will serve as the home of county E-9-1-1 department

operations and probate court.

“I’m extremely happy to serve the county and work for the past few years with them on this project,” Agnew said. “Being from Gaffney, I’m very proud of the facility that is now there. It will be a leading, cutting-edge type of building, one that will be a real benefit to residents and bring agencies once spread around town to one place. It really provides a central facility — a ‘one-stop shop’ of sorts.”

The building was excavated from the beginning for future expansion, the area making up at least half of the structure’s footprint, said project manager Matt Sossamon. Though the E-9-1-1 department and probate court are to be housed there, more than enough space is left in that area of the building as well as the second floor. The facility also has the latest in information system technology in addition to being energy efficient.

However, ensuring that such was done correctly was not the biggest challenge for Sossamon



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and other members of the crew.

“I’d have to say the toughest thing about construction was the front, which features a vaulted ceiling with capstone steps,” he said. “It was pretty difficult to put together. But once finished and saw what we had, we were pretty proud to say the least.”

Among the features for which Agnew, Sossamon and project superintendent Brian Beattie believe will awe local residents is the beauty of the council chambers and the 50- foot ceiling at the front entrance of the facility .“ The council chambers is a beautiful room that will be used to conduct county business, but walking in the front door and looking up and seeing how high and beautiful the ceiling is above them ... it’s beautiful,” Beattie said. “Every person that comes in might bump into things marveling at the entry way.”

As with any construction project, the primary nemesis for crews was Mother Nature.

“With a building of this size, you’re always going to contend with the weather; but with the group of subcontractors we had, as well as the teamwork held among the whole crew made it easier to get past any issues we encountered,” Beattie said. “We never had a moment where we said, ‘Man, how will we get past this hurdle or that issue.’A lot of the guys working on the project were local subcontractors; while working for a living they also are seeing their taxpayer dollars at work. There was a lot of pride pumped into this effort.”

“Several representatives from other counties have sought to tour the facility,” Agnew said. “That is what we want. This facility will be a prototype, one that is looked to by others rather than the other way around.”