

WMCI on track for 2010 opening

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Panoramic view... This photo of the new Wyoming Medium Correctional Institution was taken from the water tower on May 28. The transition team is busy readying the facility for a projected opening in February 2010.

The new Wyoming Medium Correctional Institution (WMCI) is not scheduled to open until February of next year, and there are many milestones to meet before the facility becomes functional.

WMCI is a 700-plus bed facility for medium security inmates located east of Torrington. The Wyoming Department of Corrections (WDOC) will employ 351 staff at the facility performing a variety of jobs from security to food service to education and housekeeping.

According to the WDOC June newsletter "Main Line," the staff members who have been hired and are working on a transition team to open the facility are: Michael Murphy, warden; Michael Pacheco, deputy warden; John Rinaker, assistant facilities operations manager; James Smith, OSHA specialist 1; Bernice Madvig, human resources manager; Jennifer Tysdal, executive assistant to the warden; Polly Helzer, fiscal specialist 5; Dee Herdt, administrative specialist; Kevin Edwards, correctional lieutenant; Monte Fibranz, warehouse manager; Barb Tuttle, casework manager; and Sam Azad, business manager.

"I am very pleased with the team we have hired; each person was selected for their knowledge, experience and commitment to excellence," Murphy said. "All are working hard to hire staff, develop programs, write procedures, acquire equipment and, in general, help make sure that we have not overlooked anything and are ready to come on-line as soon as practicable."

According to the WDOC newsletter, hiring for the bulk of the positions at WMCI will begin in late summer and training for employees is beginning in September. The length of training depends on the employee's job description. All training is paid for by WDOC and will take place at Camp Guernsey.

A key step to opening the facility took place May 13, when Murphy, Edwards, WDOC Facilities Operation Manager Bob Kiser, Layton Construction manager Doug Brown and WMCI staff members Fibranz, Rinaker, Herdt and Tysdal inventoried the WMCI keys. Work on the facility is progressing well, and according to Murphy, it is scheduled to be substantially complete by late November.

To help meet budget constraints, Murphy said Wyoming state surplus property is assisting in acquiring desks,

chairs, file cabinets, tables and other goods to furnish and equip the prison. Before acquiring the equipment it is inspected to ensure it is suitable for the prison environment and meets safety standards.

Murphy said he plans to receive his first inmates in January 2010 and expects the facility to be over half full by late February. Most inmates will be brought to WMCI from Virginia, which is the only state with a sizable number of Wyoming inmates. Murphy said approximately 300 inmates will come from there and the remainder will transfer from other state institutions.

He said the Wyoming State Penitentiary in Rawlins is full and some of their inmates will be transferred to WMCI to free up beds there.

Each of the correctional facilities in Wyoming has a service industry that provides jobs for the inmates, helps develop a good work ethic and provides training for job skills. The industry allows the inmates to earn money to support themselves or their families, provide restitution and build a financial reserve to help when released from prison. Murphy said several discussions have been held about the type of industry for WMCI but the industry will probably not be ready at the same time the institution opens.

He said an industry start in the spring or summer is a realistic goal.

In addition to an industry, each prison in the WDOC has a specific mission. Murphy said WMCI would be a multi-purpose prison that will serve as the reception and diagnostic center for all inmates, provide mental health services and substance abuse treatment, provide for special needs inmates and prepare inmates for their eventual release.

While ensuring staff and inmates' safety, WMCI will also provide personal and professional improvement opportunities for staff and inmates.

Murphy said he is still excited about the opportunity to bring a new correctional facility on line.

"This has been an interesting professional challenge that can test problem-solving skills," Murphy said. "However, I have so enjoyed meeting the people of the Torrington and Goshen County communities. The community support and the opportunity to work with Deputy Warden Pacheco and the WMCI transition team have been very gratifying."

Updated information about the WMCI opening will be available at the next meeting of the Prison Community Partnership Committee on Aug. 12.

Job information is available at <http://www.wdoc.jobs/>.