



Watsonville Police Chief Ray Belgard in front of graffiti-proof station

New Watsonville Police Station

By JAMIE MARKS
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From its graffiti-proof outside walls to the state of the art communications center inside, the new Watsonville Police station has Chief Ray Belgard smiling.

The \$3.4 million building took 1½ years to complete and untold hours of planning. The precision with which it was designed is evident everywhere.

For instance, in the holding cells, cameras will be able to pick up what the view from windows prohibits. Sallyports are equipped with emergency buttons and intercoms to prevent an officer from getting stuck behind automatically locking doors.

And the facility includes a photo lab, crime lab, spacious squadroom, work-out room with showers and lockers for men and women — even bullet-proof windows separating the public lobby from the dispatchers.

While the building contains a mini-jail, Belgard said it will be used for temporary detention only. Suspects will be held for no more than nine hours at the jail, he said, because it would cost too much to staff it.

But even the mini-jail comes well-

equipped. Separate cells have been built for male and female juveniles and adults, Belgard pointed out.

Other features include a detoxification room for drunken driving suspects, a "rubber" room for people bent on violence, an interview room for detainees to talk with their attorneys and even a bright-orange booking desk.

"I wanted to brighten the place up a little," said Belgard.

For the first time in years, the 39 sworn officers of the Watsonville police department and 16 support staff will have room to move around, said Belgard.

The new building dwarfs the old facility, located next-door on Union Street in downtown Watsonville. The old facility was built in 1935, Belgard said, and had an addition built in 1955.

But it has been apparent for many years that the department needed more space.

That's one item they got, said Belgard. The new building is two stories; the first floor is 14,500 square feet — ample room for the department's needs of today.

The second story is just a shell now, said Belgard. "General discussions" have

been held with the county administrator and Municipal Court staff about moving the cramped Watsonville courtroom to the new police station. No decision has been reached yet.

Meanwhile, the City Council has put out bids for the electrical, plumbing and heating work to be completed. "If we do it now, it will cost less," surmises Belgard.

The hub of the building is the new communications center. A new, 20-channel dispatch radio system, completely computerized, has been purchased for \$22,000, Belgard said.

Once it is completely installed, the department will be ready to move. Belgard said the move should be completed by mid-July.

Belgard is proud of his building, as are the men in the department.

Captain Terry Medina says unequivocally, "It's the best in the county."

Belgard, who became chief in February, credits the design to Captain Chuck Carter and former chief Al Williams, who worked closely with the architectural firm of Hope and Associates.

"They came up with a dandy," he said