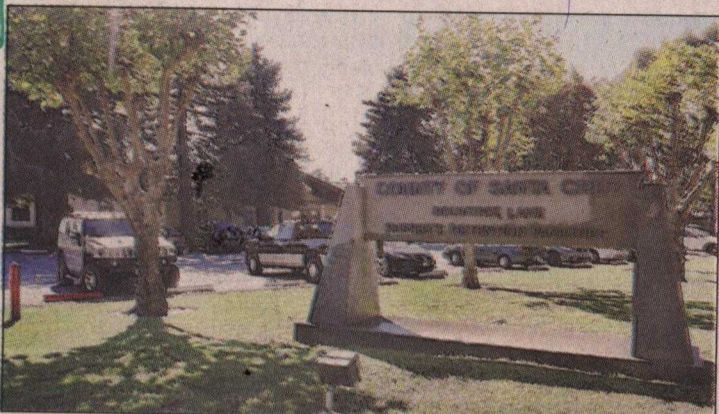


# State approves \$25M grant to overhaul Rountree facility



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Rountree Detention Center will benefit from a nearly \$25 million grant from the state.

By JASON HOPPIN

jhoppin@santacruzsentinel.com

**LA SELVA BEACH** — State corrections officials this week finalized a \$24.6 million award to overhaul the county's Rountree Detention Center.

One of several handed out statewide, the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office sought the award to revamp an underutilized minimum security facility in South County into a campus with classrooms and added counseling space to help inmates lead more productive lives on the outside.

"It is clear that the need for

infrastructure to support the goal of justice realignment throughout the state is critical," Santa Cruz County Chief Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello said. "These funds will support the work of the counties to achieve the goals of justice realignment and improve public safety as a result."

Mauriello is on the Board of State and Community Corrections that made the award, which was one of 15 conditional awards, totaling \$500 million, to upgrade local jails. The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors must formally accept the grant.

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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Rountree Detention Center's vast bunkhouse now sits empty but Sheriff Phil Wowak wants to transform it into an adult school with job training.

## ROUNTREE

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But those awards were the subject of a protest by dozens of people at Santa Cruz's Town Clock on Thursday night. Among them was Tash Nguyen of the group Sin Barras, who pointed out that Gov. Jerry Brown put another \$500 million for corrections infrastructure in his proposed budget.

"There's a trend of jails booming as our prison population is declining, and that makes no sense," Nguyen said.

The money is being handed out to help counties with the impacts of a statewide prison realignment, which has many nonviolent, non-sexual and nonserious offenders serving sentences in local jails.

Santa Cruz County officials, including law enforcement brass, have positioned themselves on the cutting-edge of justice system changes that include alternative custody arrangements and other programs designed to keep the local jail population down.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Rountree Detention Center will benefit from a nearly \$25 million grant awarded by the state this week.

By 2017, the county hopes to have completed the Rountree makeover, which includes 30,000 square feet of new treatment and educational space and a security upgrade, allowing some inmates to shift from downtown Santa Cruz' Main Jail and freeing up space there.

Nguyen questioned the need for the project.

"I think if we work on bail reform, if we work on sentencing reform, if the Sheriff's Department works more diligently with the prison system and asks questions like 'Why are people staying in jail so long?'

and 'Why are they staying in there for arbitrary reasons?' we will be able to free up extra space for space classrooms in existing areas," she said.

Chief Deputy Jeremy Verinsky, who oversees county corrections, said he agrees with some of the points made by groups like Sin Barras such as more money needed for mental health services. But Verinsky said jails are still an important part of the criminal justice system.

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