



NEWS

Corrections dedicates new \$3.2 M fleet garage

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About 40 state and local officials were in attendance Wednesday at the Georgia Department of Corrections's (DOC) ribbon cutting for its new Fleet Management Service Center.

DOC commissioner Brian Owens thanked everyone who came to support the DOC's new center but gave special recognition to former DOC commissioner, Gen. James Donald, DOC engineering director Larry Latimer, former state Rep. Jim Cole and Forsyth-Monroe Chamber of Commerce director Tiffany Andrews.



Department of Corrections engineering director Larry Latimer clips a ribbon to commemorate the grand opening of the DOC fleet center Wednesday. (Photo/Richard Dumas)

"These are really four of the people who from the beginning turned vision into reality," Owens said.

Owens termed the opening of the new \$3.2 million garage and service center, located on property at the north end of the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC) off of Collier Road, the "last stage of the move." The DOC formally moved into its Tift College South campus in Forsyth in November 2010.

Fleet Management has been in existence since 1996. It manages about 1,900 vehicles, the third largest fleet of vehicles in Georgia, trailing only the Georgia Department of Transportation and the University of Georgia. Fleet Management was previously located in Atlanta on Constitution Drive in DeKalb County.

Latimer said the new central location of the agency's vehicles will be good for the DOC going forward.

"Most of our facilities are in Middle Georgia and South Georgia," Latimer said. "Very few of them are in North Georgia, and we've been operating from North Georgia for a long, long time and the inefficiencies. We even did a fair amount of study on that in the beginning to show the value of moving to Central Georgia. And it's a pretty compelling case that it's going to help us do our jobs better, more efficiently."

Frank Turner, the DOC's Fleet Management director, said the new complex encompasses over 19 acres, of which 15 acres are developed. The complex has two main structures: the warehouse, which contains 32,000 square feet of office space and storage area, and the fleet service center, which contains 19,060 square feet of office space and service bay area space. Turner said the parking lot between the two buildings is capable of parking 100 vehicles. Lord, Aeck and Sargent, Inc. of Atlanta served as the facility's architectural design firm.

Turner said there are 13 different bays, where different vehicle service management will occur. These include: automotive repair, wheel alignment and suspension work, engine and transmission removal and installation, diesel repair, detailing and washing, body repair and painting among other services, Turner said.

Turner said the facility will expand services to Pardons and Paroles within the next three months and to

other state agencies by 2012. He said the facility will also begin a state Express Lube Service by October and will implement an agency-wide "Vehicle Preventive Maintenance" program by the end of 2012. He added that the resident inmate detail will increase by 10 persons by Spring 2012, while also giving greater support to the "Work Ready" program.

Forsyth-Monroe Chamber of Commerce president Connie Ham served as the keynote speaker for the event. Ham thanked the DOC for being more efficient financially, which will save Georgians "substantial amounts of tax dollars."

Ham said of the DOC: "Y'all serve as a great example to the rest of us of how to do more with less. I wish y'all would go to Washington."

Monroe County commission chairman James Vaughn noted that the property where the complex sits once belonged to former Georgia Gov. Eugene Talmadge, who Vaughn called a "champion of rural Georgia." Vaughn said the deal between the Monroe County Commissioners and the Department of Corrections prior to his own tenure to bring the DOC to Forsyth has let the state know that "everything doesn't have to be in Atlanta." Vaughn said the perception of conducting business in rural Georgia was poor, but that "it's getting better."

Vaughn said, "Atlanta has been and is the economic engine of the state of Georgia, but rural Georgia has always been the frame for that vehicle, producing the things that we needed to carry the load for the rest of the state."

Forsyth Mayor Tye Howard said the new facility will benefit the DOC, but it will also save money across the board due to better planning and management of state vehicles moving forward.

Latimer said the center's completion will allow DOC leaders to finally "relax a little bit."

Latimer said, "We've finally got all of our staff moved down here. And we've got a facility we're really proud of both here at fleet and on the Tift Campus. It's all we hoped it would be, maybe even more that we hoped it would be. We love the community. It's starting to feel like home. So we're all feeling a bit better about what we've got ahead of us to do our normal jobs because we've got the resources in our facilities to do it now."

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