



NEWS

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Job fair, walking tour is Wed.

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Moving the entire Georgia Department of Corrections (DOC) to Forsyth is now a done deal.

That after the legislature finalized a 2009-10 budget on Friday that includes \$13.1 million in bonds to finish the renovations to Tift College.

"Thank the Lord," said Rep. Jim Cole (R-Forsyth), who's spent the past four years working to secure funding for the project. "Thanks to (DOC commissioner) Brian Owens and the people of Forsyth. It was a team effort."

Cole also sent special thanks to Gov. Sonny Perdue, who first proposed the move and has put it in his budget for the past four years.

"When all those (DOC) people move in, it'll be a different day in Forsyth," said Cole. "It's going to double the size of Forsyth."

Owens joined in the celebration. "This is pretty exciting," said Owens. "It's good to get the final piece in place. Now it's full steam ahead."

Owens said lawmakers cut \$2.5 million out of the \$15.65 million originally approved by the House for Tift. Owens said they will be able to get those funds, which were for furniture and fixtures, next year. A Forsyth resident, Owens said he's excited about the possibilities the DOC is bringing to the community.

"What I hope is that the Tift relocation will be the hub of growth for Monroe County," said Owens. The DOC move will bring to town 400 white collar jobs carrying an annual payroll of \$24 million. Owens said they'll soon be erecting large signs on the campus announcing the pending move and completion date.

Monroe County commission chairman James Vaughn said he too is happy to hear the good news.

"That is a milestone," said Vaughn. "It's good news for Monroe County. I would think they should be able to stay on schedule." Vaughn thanked the county's legislative delegation, especially Cole, for making sure the project was funded.

Forsyth Mayor Tye Howard said he's ecstatic.

"It's absolutely super," "It's superb that the state recognized the investment by the state was too great ... and the project needed to go forward."

The \$13.1 million expenditure is the fourth and final major installment of funds for the Department of Corrections' move to Tift College. Gov. Perdue is expected to sign the budget. The money will fund Phase 3



of the Tift project, which includes renovations of the historic circle at Tift, which will house the administration offices. Phases 1 and 2, which include the renovations for dorms, training and classrooms, had already been funded.

Lawmakers have now approved \$53.9 million over the past four years for moving the state DOC headquarters to Forsyth.

With the state facing declining revenues, a handful of lawmakers had protested the expenditure. But Gov. Perdue and legislative leaders have remained supportive of the Tift project. It is expected to save the state lease money for 80,000 square feet of downtown Atlanta office space, and will put the headquarters closer to its prisons, most of which are in South Georgia. DOC will bring 400 jobs to Forsyth.

Meanwhile, at Tift, the first building, the Rutland Hall cafeteria, has been approved for temporary occupancy. Three dorms are expected to be ready for training cadets this summer. The DOC administrative offices are expected to complete the move in October 2010, said Owens.

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Those interested in working for the Georgia Department of Corrections when it moves to Forsyth may want to attend an informational fair on Wednesday, April 8. DOC officials will be discussing potential job openings involved with its relocation to Forsyth in late 2010. The event will be held in Aldermen Hall from 10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Resumes will be accepted and put in a electronic database for future consideration. The DOC is currently under a hiring freeze resulting in a limited number of jobs available statewide.

Meanwhile, also on Wednesday, about 70 DOC employees will be taking a walking tour of Forsyth to get to know the community. Welcome, DOC.

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