

New Sullivan County jail about 68% complete

ROBERT SORRELL
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. — The new more than \$90 million jail expansion in Sullivan County, Tennessee, is taking shape and construction crews are more than half done.

Construction began in March of 2022 and is expected to be completed in March of 2025, according to Doug Smith of Codell Construction, the project's construction manager. It is currently about 68% complete, he added.

Sullivan County's new jail site is located on about three acres of land adjacent to its current overcrowded facility

in Blountville. The new building is about 190,000 square feet.

The jail's inmate capacity will increase by about 600 inmates once the expansion project is complete, according to the facility's administrator, Sullivan County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy Lee Carswell.

On a recent Friday, there were 993 inmates in the current jail, which has 619 certified beds, Carswell said. The jail has housed a maximum of 1,086 prisoners.

The old jail, which was built in the early 1980s and includes an annex, has

Please see **JAIL**, Page A4

Jail

From A1

been overcrowded for years, even as Sheriff Jeff Cassidy and his office have tried to reduce the inmate population through various programs.

There are about 300 people currently on pre-trial release in Sullivan County, which is one of the measures taken to reduce inmate population.

Back in 2020, the Sullivan County Commission approved borrowing \$80 million to fix the jail's overcrowding problem. The county plans to use \$10 million more in federal funds to pay for the new jail.

The new facility features state-of-the-art technology, including rooms equipped for video arraignment and security with cameras and a modern control room. Staff should be able to see every inch of the building, Smith said.

Once complete, the new jail will connect with the old jail, which is also being updated. The new jail will house some administrative offices, a kitchen, laundry room, medical area and a new sally port. New arrivals to the jail will enter the facility through the secure sally port and then on to the booking room.

Each jail cell, which are now in place, will hold two prisoners and include beds, a table, chairs and a toilet, according to Smith.

An additional 200 beds will also be available throughout the facility, which will include the medical area and holding



EMILY BALL PHOTOS, BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A construction crew member works on the exterior of the new 190,000 square foot Sullivan County Jail that will be located adjacent to its current facility in Blountville, Tenn.



An inside view shows one of the finished jail cells inside the new Sullivan County Jail, which contains two beds, a table, chairs and a toilet.

cells.

There will be some natural light that enters the facility, he said. Fresh air will enter the recreation area, he explained.

Capt. Andy Seabolt said the layout of the building will allow maintenance to be completed without moving any inmates. Utilities are in hidden corridors that can only be accessed by staff.

A portion of the current jail will continue to

schedule.

With large jail projects, one challenge is "making sure you stay within weight limits," Smith said.

"This is the first time I've done prefabricated," Smith said. "It cut a year off construction."

Smith said prefabricated cells have been used during the construction of the new jail.

Even once the jail is complete, it won't quite be ready for inmates. Smith said the University of Tennessee Certified Technical Assistance Service is currently conducting a staffing study for the new jail. A certificate of occupancy will also be required.

If the county ever needs a larger jail, Smith said there is space for an addition to the facility.

be used to house inmates. Other areas of the current site will be remodeled and used for other purposes.

There has been one delay, Smith said. Crews discovered some rocky areas under the soil, which delayed the project, he said. The project, however, is on

TO PLACE AN OBITUARY visit
<https://ads.heraldcourier.com/bristol-adportal/obits/index.html>

It's been seven years since Southwest Virginia authorities found the body of Janina Jefferson



Jones



Jefferson

and community be able to truly begin the healing process. "

Law enforcement officers still periodically check in with the family and speak to them about

the investigation, he said. The Wise County Sheriff's Office and the U.S. Marshals Service continue to actively search for Eric Jones, Jefferson's ex husband, who is accused of shooting the 38-year-old woman and leaving her body at the plant. The woman's body was found in 2016.

Where is Jones? Officials believe he could be anywhere, including outside of the country. The Wise County case has been featured on national television, including Investigation Discovery with John Walsh. A monetary award has been offered for information that leads to his arrest and conviction.

Jones faces charges of first-degree murder, possession of a firearm by a convicted felon and use of a firearm during the commission of first-degree murder. He is also wanted on an outstanding felony probation violation warrant stemming from an attempted murder-for-hire conviction. The conviction stems from a 1998 incident in which Jones conspired to kill three people in Wise County by setting fire to a home, according to indictments.

Anyone with information about Jones is asked to contact the Wise County Sheriff's Office at 276-328-3756 or email crimetips@wiseso.net.
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The Blountville, Tennessee, community lit two Christmas trees on Friday evening in preparation of the holiday season and to remember those lost to violent crime.

Matthew Johnson, director of Sullivan County Archives and Tourism, opened the ceremony in front of the county's historic courthouse on state Route 126.

The ceremony, "One Special Town, Two Special Trees," included a Christmas message from Tennessee State Rep. Bud Hulseley, R-Kingsport, who recognized the families in attendance who have been affected by violent crime.

Hulseley's message discussed the meaning of law and justice.

"Law demands one thing: retribution," Hulseley said.

Please see **TREES**, Page A2

Trees

From A1

He explained, "This is what you did, this is what you get."

In addition, Hulse said justice "means what is due."

"It is absolutely imperative that victims through this system receive what is due by law," Hulse said. "That's justice."

Joan Berry, whose daughter was stabbed to death in a Knox-

ville, Tennessee, apartment in 2004, shared her thoughts about violent crime and its effect on families.

"We are here again another year without our loved ones," said Berry, who later directed families to place ornaments on the victims' remembrance tree.

The holidays can be hard on those who have lost loved ones.

"I wish could tell you it would get easier, but that's not been the case for me," Berry said.

This Christmas will mark the 20th year since Berry's daughter, Johnia, was killed. During the early morning hours of Dec. 6, 2004, someone entered her apartment. He went into her bedroom and brutally stabbed her.

An arrest was made in 2007, but the suspect died before going to trial.

"I am very grateful for the time I had with Johnia," Berry said.

Berry said the paid during the

Christmas season is "unbearable." "This is a family, a club, that you don't want to be a part of," Berry said.

One at a time, victims' families picked up an ornament, went to the podium, said the name of the victim and then placed the ornament on the tree.

Many names were mentioned, including Sgt. Steven Hinkle, a Sullivan County Sheriff's Office deputy killed in the line of duty in 2019; Jennifer Rooney, who

was shot and killed while driving along Volunteer Parkway in Bristol in 2016; Rowdy Yates, who was killed at a property in the Carden Hollow section of Sullivan County in 2017; and several others.

Following the lighting of the victims remembrance tree, the community lit the larger Christmas tree in front of the courthouse.

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