

The ceremonial groundbreaking for the South County Justice Center in Porterville was a long time coming. Folks in Tulare County have been planning for this for 14 years, overcoming one obstacle after another.

Including concern that there might be historical artifacts buried here. So in June 2011 there was a 4 day dig over 9 acres of land, just to make sure. They found nothing significant. The site is the old Porterville fair grounds and municipal ballpark, both since relocated.

The old courthouse is literally falling apart, security is seriously lacking, and it's way too small to serve the current population which has ballooned in recent years.

Hon. Glade Roper, Tulare Superior Court *"The need for this facility here is incredible. I cannot tell you how difficult it is to work in this little tiny courthouse that we've been working under."*

Staff are crammed into tiny work spaces. On many days more than a thousand people pass through security. Sometimes 200 squeeze into an old courtroom built to seat 60.

Hon. Glade Roper, Tulare Superior Court *"There've been many days in the last 22 years when I have handled pretrial calendars in excess of 300 defendants. Now no judge should have to hear 300 cases in a single day. No litigant should have to be part of a calendar involving 300 people."*

The new full service courthouse will solve many problems, with 96,500 square feet, 9 courtrooms, a comfortable jury assembly room, a waiting room for kids, plenty of parking and more customer service windows. Plus, it will be far more convenient for folks who live in the southern part of the county. Under the direction of the Administrative Office of the Courts, the total project including land, fees and permits will cost about \$93 million dollars, paid for by court user fees and fines.

Hon. Glade Roper, Tulare Superior Court *"We have gone through literally hundreds of hours to make sure that every square foot of this building is functional. There is no fat in this building; there is no fluff in this building."*

And this building promises to bring good fortune to a county with a 16% unemployment rate.

Ron Irish, Porterville Mayor *"The annual impact to our community from the jobs that are created will be almost \$3 million. This is a big deal for Porterville."*

Hon. Melinda Reed, Tulare Superior Court Presiding Judge *"This is a win win for the community as well as for the court."*

Mike Ennis, Tulare County Supervisor *"What a great day for Porterville, for Tulare County."*

But most important, when the new courthouse opens in 2013, it will significantly improve access to justice in a safe, comfortable environment.

Hon. Glade Roper, Tulare Superior Court *“I look forward with great anticipation that you come back in 18 months on an open house day and take you on a tour to show you how our new court facility will help us effectively administer justice in Tulare County.”*

Applause.

I'm Leanne Kozak reporting from Porterville, Tulare County, for California Courts News.