

# Ground broken on long-awaited courthouse project



**By Lauren Keene**

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WOODLAND — The grand scale of the project is evident in the numbers: 14 courtrooms. Six stories. More than 163,000 square feet. A \$161.4 million construction budget.

But the real crowd-pleaser at Friday's groundbreaking ceremony for the new Yolo County Courthouse was the promise of abundant parking, for court employees and the public alike. "You don't have to move your car *every two hours*," pledged Yolo Superior Court Assistant Presiding Judge Kathy White, referring to the strict parking limits around the existing courthouse that have many scrambling to change spots during court breaks.

Her remarks met with a round of applause from the audience of judges, attorneys, court employees and elected officials who gathered on a gravel lot where the project will one day sit.

White and other court officials said there will be a lot to like about the new courthouse, a project slated for the city block bordered by Main, Lincoln, Fifth and Sixth streets that will consolidate court facilities currently spread among six buildings in the city of Woodland. They include the main courthouse on Court Street that opened with just two courtrooms in 1917.

"We truly love our historic courthouse ... but it was built five generations ago for another time and another era," said Judge David Rosenberg, who was lauded throughout Friday's ceremony for his efforts to bring the updated project to fruition. "We have outgrown that historic courthouse in every conceivable way."

The new building will serve as a “temple of justice” that holds both literal and figurative meanings, said Tani Cantil-Sakauye, California’s chief justice and a graduate of UC Davis’ King Hall School of Law.

“For me today, this building means so much more than the magnificent edifice that it will become,” Cantil-Sakauye said. “What I know about this project is that it was the subject of incredible collaboration by smart and intelligent, dedicated people who had a vision for the future and could see what Californians were capable of.”

Artistic renderings of the concrete-and-granite project unveiled by designers Fentress Architects and Dreyfuss & Blackford in November 2011 featured a pillared portico that court officials say will be reminiscent of the existing courthouse, with large windows symbolizing openness and transparency to the courts.

Inside the six-story building — five of them above ground — will be 14 courtrooms ranging in size from 1,700 to 2,000 square feet, as well as an expanded jury assembly room, a children’s waiting area, conference rooms for private attorney-client conversations and easily accessible clerks’ offices for the public’s court-related transactions.

Gone will be the days of inmate “chain gangs” walking across the street from the court holding facility to the courthouse, where they potentially come into close contact with victims, witnesses and jurors. Instead, a private elevator will transport them from a sallyport to the courtroom holding cells.

Funding for the project comes from Senate Bill 1407, enacted in 2008 to provide up to \$5 billion in funding for new and renovated California courthouses using court fees, penalties and assessments with no impact to the state’s general fund.

State Sen. Lois Wolk said the new courthouse “will be a powerful symbol of the importance, the centrality, of law in American society.”

“Rich or poor, justice must serve all equally and publicly, and our public buildings should reflect those goals and priorities,” Wolk said. “This courthouse will do just that for yet another century.”

“This new courthouse facility will surely give truer meaning to that statement, ‘liberty and justice for all,’ ” Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada added.

The symbolic first turning of dirt for the project occurred not with shovels, but with a backhoe, with the court’s longest-serving judge, Stephen Mock, at the controls.

Five of his fellow judges — Rosenberg, White, Steven Basha, Tim Fall and Samuel McAdam — have served on the project’s advisory and design group along with retiring Court Executive Officer Jim Perry, incoming CEO Shawn Landry and Cathleen Berger, senior court analyst.

The anticipated two-year construction phase, overseen by the Hensel Phelps Construction Co., is expected to bring 450 jobs to downtown Woodland, court officials said.

As for the existing courthouse, it will revert to county ownership once the new courthouse opens its doors in March of 2015 — or December 2014, if Rosenberg’s ambitious prediction Friday becomes reality. What will occupy the building remains uncertain.

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A backhoe takes a bite out of the ground at the site of the future Yolo County Courthouse on Friday in downtown Woodland. The 163,000-square-foot facility will house 14 courtrooms and is expected to be completed in March 2015. Sue Cockrell/Enterprise photo



Tani Cantil-Sakauye, chief justice of the California Supreme Court and a UC Davis graduate, chats with Woodland Vice Mayor Tom Stallard, left, and Jim Corbett of Davis, one of her longtime friends, at Friday's Yolo County Courthouse groundbreaking ceremony. Sue Cockrell/Enterprise photo