

Smith: Meaningful Yolo County courthouse groundbreaking

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California Chief Justice Tani Cantil-Sakauye referred to the new Yolo County Courthouse as being a "Temple of Justice" no fewer than six times during a ground-breaking ceremony Friday.

Yolo Superior Court Judge Dave Rosenberg was nearly beamed by a state flag that blew over in a light wind.

And Yolo Superior Court Presiding Judge Steve Basha used the occasion to hug Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada and state Sen. Lois Wolk.

But at the end of a relatively short ceremony under partly cloudy skies, streaked by brilliant sunshine, work on Yolo County's new \$161 million courthouse officially began.

I attend a lot of groundbreaking ceremonies and many are always full of speeches, the content of which is usually quickly forgotten. Such was not the case this time.

Many of those praising the new 163,000-square-foot structure that will dominate the eastern entryway to downtown Woodland, expressed remarkable insight.

The event was attended by nearly 300 people -- dominated by a large number of attorneys, law enforcement officers, and business owners.

Canti-Sakauye said the future five-story building -- scheduled for completion in two years -- a "grand, grand edifice" that will service the judicial system in the "literal, physical and figurative" sense.

Wolk praised the community -- and Rosenberg specifically -- for their "strong and unceasing advocacy." She noted that everyone loves the existing courthouse, but noted it was built for another century.

Yamada said that in the 20th century, the current courthouse "might have been good enough" but that the new courthouse is built for the 21st century and make it possible to provide "justice for all."

The remarks about Rosenberg were not mere jests. Rosenberg has pushed this project for nearly 10 years. Wolk said she has changed her phone number and email address. She may not have been joking.

In speaking, Rosenberg said it was "four score and 16 years ago that we built a courthouse," and noting that it had served five generations of Yolo County residents but that today it was "inadequate in virtually every single way."

"We trust that the new courthouse will last four score and 16 years -- or more" and that best of all it was being built not with taxpayer dollars but revenues generated user fees coming from fines and penalties paid by those actually using the local judicial system, he said.

Rosenberg also predicted that people would be back in December 2015 to use a courthouse that was "well built, user friendly, and under budget."

For me, the remarkable thing about this project is how it has evolved over time. For example, once it was considered for the north side of Main, between Sixth and Fourth streets. It was also once eyed for Davis.

It should also be noted that because of its construction, downtown businesses -- indeed, businesses citywide -- will be better off. Already some stores have been contacted by workers who are relocating to the city and need home furnishings. Restaurants and hardware stores will also be primary recipients.

It will be an exciting two years.