

County highway facility unveiled

By Alexa Zoellner Union staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, June 10, 2015 9:13 am

JEFFERSON — It was back in 2000 that Jefferson County first proposed building a new Highway Department facility. Now, 15 years later, that dream has become a reality — one that the public was invited to view firsthand during an open house Tuesday.

“After six studies during the terms of two highway commissioners, three county board administrators and four county board chairman, we have a new county highway facility,” Jefferson County Board of Supervisors Chairman Jim Schroeder said at the dedication ceremony held during the open house.

In addition to Schroeder, speakers at the dedication included County Administrator Ben Wehmeier; County Supervisor Donald Reese; Ron Buchanan, the previous chair of the Highway Committee; current Highway Committee Chair George Jaeckel; George Jones, chair of the Infrastructure Committee; Highway Department employee Russ Cooper and Highway Commissioner Bill Kern.

All expressed their thanks to everyone involved in the project, as well as and the citizens of Jefferson County.

“I would like to thank everybody that had a part in this. I look forward to the day when somebody says ‘that was not an expenditure; that was a great investment,’” said Buchanan.

Jones agreed.

“Being on the board, what we know about building a building is somewhat limited,” he said as he thanked the Maas Brothers Construction Co., which built the facility. “The finished product is just excellent; we’re very proud of it.

“The real winners are the citizens of Jefferson County,” continued Jones. “They have a great building here, a great place to keep our equipment, keep our workers safe and keep citizens safe on the highway.”

The open house included three ribbon cuttings: The first was for elected officials, followed by those for Highway Department employees and the project team.

The facility sits on a 40-acre plot of land on the southwest side of Jefferson and covers approximately 11 of those acres. Previously, the land was the location of the county’s former Countryside Home.

The site, purchased in 2013, cost the county \$200,000. Another \$12,000 was spent on an environmental study, along with additional monies for the abatement of environmental issues and the demolition of preexisting



Ribbons cut

RIBBONS CUT — A dedication ceremony was held Tuesday for the new Jefferson County Highway Department facility. The public was invited to tour the building, which will house the department’s entire 60-truck fleet. For more photos click [here](#). — Daily Union photos by Amy Smith.

buildings.

The purchase took place after six separate building and space needs studies were conducted, almost all of which recommended the construction of a new facility as opposed to remaining on the Puerner Street facility.

“I hope this facility serves our community well, hopefully at least half as long as the other facility did,” said Jaeckel, referring to the fact that the previous highway facility was in use for more than 80 years.

Kern also remarked on the lengthy use of the former facility.

“(The county board) went through a lot of years of discussions and debates and studies. We had a lot of members that are not members now that were heavily involved in it,” explained Kern. “It’s been almost eight decades of working out of our original highway facility and things have changed, times have changed and the equipment has changed a lot.”

One of the studies was a site analysis conducted by Barrientos Design. The study concluded that the Highway Department required roughly 112,000 square feet of space, almost half of which was for vehicle storage, a repair garage, shop offices, parts storage, restrooms that require locker rooms and administrative offices.

“We’ve had a lot of issues at the other Highway Department (site) — safety issues, air quality issues,” said Cooper.

The highway employee explained that workers began to move into the new shop this week, noting that a few have only been there for a few days.

“With this building, we’ll be able to do more employee training; this will help us interact management-wise with the employees,” Cooper continued. “We’re going to be a lot closer to them, bring us more together kind of like as a family.”

Reese commented on the significance of the dedication.

“This is a dream come true from a lot of people,” said Reese. “Hopefully, it’ll serve the people well.”

After the ceremony, two employees said they were looking forward to their new “home.”

“It’s going to be different,” said equipment operator Todd Berger. “I’m looking forward to it.”

Berger, who has worked at the Highway Department for eight years, said the general reaction of employees has been excitement. He described the old shop as tight, leaky with a bad roof and bad air quality.

Dennis Hummel, foreman of the asphalt paving crew, said that the new facility was extremely spacious with good lighting.

“It’s going to be a lot easier to work in here than it was in the old one,” declared Hummel, who has worked for the Highway Department for 25 years.