

Bureau of Indian Affairs commits to funding support for Justice Center

FORT HALL — Shoshone-Bannock Tribes and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) officials signed two contracts today paving the way for the tribes to receive operations support for the law enforcement and corrections components of the new \$19.7 million Justice Center when it opens early next year.

"This is a very historic day for the tribes — it's been a long time coming," said James Glaze, tribal legal counsel, at the signing ceremony. "The tribes are truly taking control of their own justice systems."

While exact funding amounts the tribes will receive from the BIA have yet to be determined, the contract signing acknowledges the BIA's commitment to providing significant recurring funding for operations and maintenance of the new center. The BIA has also agreed to reimburse the tribes for a portion of the construction costs.

"This council is progressive and on a fast track to get the

Justice Center completed. They are going to set standard for other tribes wanting a justice center on what it entails — how did this happen, how did that happen — so other tribes will be able to make it happen faster the next time around," said Matthew W. Pryor, BIA District 5's Office of Justice Services special agent in charge, on the BIA's endorsement of justice centers as a way for tribes to address their law and order needs.

The BIA has agreed to provide start up and operational costs based on what it would have cost the BIA to construct and maintain a new detention facility for 25 adult inmates, the facility size the BIA has determined necessary for the Fort Hall Reservation based on BIA statistics, said Majel Russell, a consultant with Elk River Law, who is coordinating efforts to open the center.

The center's detention facilities are being built to house 80 adults and juveniles. The tribes are still ex-



From left, BIA's Timothy Brown, FHBC Chairman Alonzo Coby and Beverly Wadsworth. (Carmencita Mejia photo)

ploring opportunities to generate revenue by filling the additional 60 adult beds, which is why the tribes proposed to the BIA earlier this year that the justice center be designated as a regional detention facility for tribes.

The BIA has also proposed to develop a lease of approximately one third of the corrections space and a majority of the law enforcement space in the Justice Center as the mechanism to allow the tribes to recoup approximately one third of their costs

to construct the building, said Russell.

Exact funding levels for the proposed lease of space and for the corrections and law enforcement contracts are yet to be determined.

At the signing, Tribal Vice Chairman Nathan Small noted that "serious" discussions about the construction of a new justice center began two decades ago when it became apparent that the tribal jail was wholly inadequate. The BIA later told the tribes that their police, jail and court facilities

were in poor condition and should be vacated.

Because the BIA has a trust responsibility to tribes to provide law enforcement services, it was hoped that the agency would be able to come through with some funding support despite the chronic underfunding BIA receives from Congress, Small said. When federal funding never came through, the tribes took it on their own to obtain a \$15.9 million loan from the Native American Bank last year.

"It's taken us 20

years and a lot of frustrations but we're finally close to making this center a reality. With the help of the BIA, we hope to make our Justice Center the best of its kind in the West," said Small.

The Shoshone-Bannock Justice Center is about 75 percent complete and on schedule for completion in December 2009 with the opening of the center in February 2010, said Laverne Beech, tribal public affairs manager.