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(Ken Martin / C-T)

Members of Person Counseling staff and county officials take tour of old Wal-Mart building that is undergoing renovations in order to become the new home of three county human services agencies this fall.

'Big box' morphing into Human Resources Center - 3/26/05

By **PHYLISS BOATWRIGHT**, C-T Staff Writer

"Awesome" was the way Person County Commissioner Larry Bowes on Thursday described the transformation of the old Wal-Mart building on Madison Boulevard in Roxboro. With work progressing at a dizzying pace, three county departments should be settled into the building by fall.

The 67,326 square feet building will house the Person County Department of Social Services, Health Department and Person Counseling.

Members of the Person Counseling staff toured the building Thursday along with Bowes and Person Board of County Commissioners Chairman Johnny M. Lunsford and County Manager Steve Carpenter.



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Office spaces, conference rooms and reception areas have been created on the south side of the building to house mental health staff.

Judy Batten, Orange-Person-Chatham Area Program local coordinator said she and her staff were packed and ready to move into the spacious new offices as soon as they receive the go-ahead from the county.

She and other mental health staffers in attendance Thursday “oohed” and “aahed” over the work already completed on the former retail site the county has leased for the next 20 years from New Plan Excel Realty Trust NC.

Asked if she were happy with the progress, Batten laughingly replied, “On a scale of one to 10, I’m an 11.”

Commissioner Bowes said he was happy to see the progress DLP Construction of Alpharetta, Ga. has made on the building and that he was also very proud that the county was able to take what was an empty eyesore and turn it into a facility that will benefit the entire county.

With the mental health section of the building almost ready for finishing touches, DLP also has framework in place for offices in the health department section of the building and is ready to start finishing touches such as lighting in the rear section that will house DSS.

Dennis Pigg, president of DLP Construction, said he had between 50 and 60 men assigned to the task and expected to have the job completed by June 30. He added that he would bring in extra crews if needed to meet the deadline.

Pigg said the facility will sport “342 doors” when the interior construction is complete.

Right now, said Pigg, he is two weeks behind on a section of the building because of rock removal the company did not expect. But while that delay was going on, Pigg said he moved crews to another section of the building in order to keep the overall project on schedule.

DLP began work on Feb. 14, Pigg said, after being awarded the contract on Feb. 10.

DLP spent the first two weeks on demolition and cleaning, Pigg said, then set about turning the massive structure of walls, floor and roof into an office complex that he said will make the property “look so much better than an old, blank Wal-Mart building.”

Ronald L. Bryson, director of construction for New Plan Excel, said he was pleased with the progress DLP had made, adding, “It is a wonderful thing to take one of these old big boxes and turn them into something that can be used for everyone’s benefit.”

What to do with empty store buildings, said Bryson, “is one of the biggest problems in retail” as companies like Wal-Mart, K-Mart and large grocery chains continuously move into larger buildings, leaving

behind the empty “big boxes.”

When the project is completed, DSS and OPC personnel will have gated parking areas. The parking lot around the building will get a face lift that includes the planting of trees. There will also be a courtyard area with benches where Wal-Mart’s garden section used to be.

Commission Chairman Lunsford said Thursday, after seeing the facility and viewing progress, “This is going to be nice.”

Commissioner Bowes said, “This is one of the best things to ever happen to the county.”

Pigg said he was using 25 different subcontractors on the project, most of which are located in North Carolina. MWP and C.M. Solomon of Roxboro are among the subs, as are other Person County companies. Pigg said that when his bid for the project was accepted, he planned to “keep as much money as I could in Roxboro.”

New Plan Excel is responsible for the renovations of the building and will be responsible for maintenance and utilities.

For the first five years of the lease, which is tentatively set to begin Aug. 1, the county will pay \$77,144. For the subsequent five years, the cost of the lease will be \$84,886. During the 10th to 15th year of the lease, the county will pay \$93,358 and the lease cost in the final five years will be \$102,678. Annual Medicare reimbursements will offset a portion of the lease costs.

