$24 million Public Safety Complex to be unveiled Wednesday

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LAFAYETTE — It was conceived during the look-forward-50-years exercises, designed with low-cost operations and future expansions in mind, then built over the past two years for $24 million.

On Wednesday, Lafayette Parish Sheriff Mike Neustrom will officially unveil the department's Public Safety Complex, a five-building corrections center wherein inmates on the downside of their sentences will reside. The building was financed with a $21 million bond sale and $3 million in department reserves.

On Saturday, the complex will be open to visitors interested in hourly guided tours, which will begin at 9 a.m. and end after the last tour, which starts at 2 p.m.

"We'd really like the people to come out and see what they bought," Capt. Kip Judice said. "In four weeks we'll have inmates here, and they (the public) will not be able come and see it."

The complex is on 29 acres bordered by West Willow — where the main entrance is — North Pat Street, Hebert Road and Raggio Road in north Lafayette Parish. In a month, hundreds of inmates living in the crowded downtown Correctional Center will start moving into the new facility.

The inmates have been deemed low-risk and are transported to work each day in the private sector.

Other inmates who will call the complex home are employed in work details that fan out each morning across Lafayette Parish for chores such as painting and landscaping.

Inmates that pose risks of escape or those awaiting felony trials or other court dates will remain housed at the facility in downtown Lafayette.

"We've been working on this project for five or six years now," Neustrom said.

Neustrom said his directive to Director of Corrections Rob Reardon and other corrections department officials from the beginning was the complex had to be durable, affordable and expandable enough to accommodate the growth in the number of prisoners over the next five decades. Reardon and others visited correctional facilities across the U.S. during the design phase.

During the project's almost two years of construction — it started in May 2012 — inmate labor was used to keep costs within the $24 million budget, Reardon said. On Monday, dur-

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A bunk room is nearing completion Monday at the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office Public Safety Complex in Lafayette.
Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office Director of Corrections Rob Reardon gives the media a tour Monday of the Lafayette Parish Sheriff's Office Public Safety Complex in Lafayette.

**COMPLEX**

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A media first-look tour, inmates were pouring concrete sidewalks and performing landscape work.

The almost-finished project that emerged was a five-building complex low on aesthetics — with drab gray cement floors and walls to remind inmates they reside in a prison — and high on functionality.

The inmates placed in the complex next month will be those on the downside of their prison sentences who are working toward getting out of jail and staying out, Reardon said.

The buildings, which range in size from 26,700 to 51,000 square feet, will each serve different functions. One will be the complex's main entrance building where classes of 20 to 400 corrections officers from across the region will learn the latest in best practices. Also in the main building is a bank of video monitors for family visits with prisoners.

Another building houses a huge warehouse where sheriff's supplies bought in bulk will be stored.

Two buildings serve as men's and women's inmate dormitories and the last is the processing center for inmates leaving and returning from work details.

Judice, who is the sheriff's media liaison, said a larger and more organized area to process inmates leaving and returning daily will cut down greatly on illegal drugs entering the prison.

He said drugs are brought into the downtown Correctional Center because some of the inmates returning each day are smuggling in the "contraband."

The Sheriff's Office will need more staff to keep the Willow Street complex and downtown jail running.

On April 5, Sheriff's Office officials will conduct a job fair at the complex, 1825 Willow St., for applicants seeking a career in corrections, Judice said.