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## **New Arapahoe County courtrooms to open March 2**

*County Commissioners, Chief Judge “break the bank” as they call court to order during grand opening ceremony Thursday*

CENTENNIAL, CO --- Arapahoe County didn't break the bank when building three new courtrooms, so on Thursday the Board of County Commissioners and 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Chief Judge William Blair Sylvester did just that – smashing piggy banks, that is - during the grand opening celebration of Phase One of the Arapahoe County Court Expansion project.

Commissioners Susan Beckman, Jim Dyer, Rod Bockenfeld, Pat Noonan and Frank Weddig, along with Judge Sylvester, put oversized gavels to piggy banks in a symbolic gesture to call to order the grand opening of three new courtrooms at the Arapahoe County Justice Center, 7305 S. Potomac St., Centennial.

The new courtrooms, which will accommodate Arapahoe County's domestic court cases, will open to the public and a full court docket on Monday.

“With cooperation, innovation, ingenuity and creativity, Arapahoe County was able to scale down a \$193 million project into a \$13.8 million project that will accommodate four new judges and increased court caseloads well into the near future,” said Commissioner Susan Beckman, who serves as Board Chairman. “During these uncertain times, when people are facing economic hardships and families and businesses are tightening their belts, government must do more with less. Arapahoe County is very proud of finding an innovative way to solve this problem without increasing taxes.”

Arapahoe County, like most counties in Colorado and across the nation, is grappling with a shortage of court and jail space. Since 2005, Arapahoe County has been working to determine how best to meet the space needs of the courts and jails.

Faced with the addition of four new judges, a shortage of courtrooms and an overcrowded jail, the Board of County Commissioners in 2005 appointed the Judicial Facilities Review Committee – a 30-member group that spent two years researching the short and long-term needs for both the courts and jails.

The Committee wrapped up its work in 2007 and presented the Commissioners with three proposals, which included establishing a Justice Coordinating Committee, developing short and long-term space solutions to address court and jail needs, and finding creative solutions to manage court cases and the jail population. At the time, the committee projected that it would cost Arapahoe County more than \$500 million

over 20 years to address its court and jail space needs, of which \$193 million was designated for a new judicial center.

Thursday's ceremony celebrates the grand opening of Phase One of a \$13.8 million expansion project that by spring 2010 will provide 10 additional courtrooms, one expanded courtroom, a new jury assembly room, a self help center and improved court efficiency by consolidating most court functions within the Arapahoe County Justice Center – all without increasing taxes.

The Phase One expansion, which cost \$1.5 million and adds 12,000 square feet in additional court space, was designed by the DLR Group with Hyder Construction Inc. serving as the general contractor.

Construction of Phase Two, which calls for an expanded courtroom and a jury assembly room in the Courthouse, will begin this spring. The final phase, which includes the addition of six new courtrooms on the second floor of the Administration II Building on the Justice Center campus, will begin this fall. The entire project is expected to be completed by spring 2010.

"I would like to commend the Arapahoe County Board of County Commissioners for their hard work and dedication in providing a functional and practical solution to our current space needs," said William Blair Sylvester, Chief Judge of the 18<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. "The citizens who frequent this courthouse will be well served by this much needed addition."

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To download photos click on the following link:

<ftp://www.co.arapahoe.co.us/Pub/CM/Photos/Court%20Opening/>

Photo captions:

Commissioners Jim Dyer, Frank Weddig, Susan Beckman, Judge William Blair Sylvester, Commissioner Pat Noonan and Commissioner Rod Bockenfeld called to order the grand opening of three new courtrooms at the Arapahoe County Justice Center.

Commissioner Susan Beckman put an oversize gavel to a piggy bank in a symbolic gesture to call to order the grand opening of three new courtrooms at the Arapahoe County Justice Center.

Commissioner Rod Bockenfeld put an oversize gavel to a piggy bank in a symbolic gesture to call to order the grand opening of three new courtrooms at the Arapahoe County Justice Center.