

California Courts News

Title: Courtroom Construction Mock-Ups

Date: March 23, 2010

For years, many courthouses in California suffered from substantial neglect, as counties attended to other priorities. But now the State owns the courthouses. And the Administrative Office of the Courts is coordinating a multi-billion dollar construction and renovation program. The goal is to provide access to justice in secure and economical court buildings that will last 50 to 100 years.

Hon. Ronald George, Chief Justice of California: *"We do not want or need palaces. We require only solid, safe and efficient buildings to do the court's business."*

There are building and design standards for brand new courthouses or remodeling the old ones.

Pearl Freeman, Sr. Project Mgr, OCCM: *"You're designing for the current, but you're also designing for the future, too. So you have to come up with a standard that seems to work for everyone."*

But there can be variations, like customizing the interior of the courtroom, for example. So the Office of Court Construction and Management commissions full size mock-ups of courtrooms; this one in San Bernardino. They use inexpensive Styrofoam and plywood. Then the folks that are actually going to use these courtrooms every day can try them out and see how they fit.

Pearl Freeman, Sr. Project Mgr, OCCM *"It's about ergonomics and sight lines. Sight lines not only from the judge to the witness, or the clerk to the judge, the attorneys to the judge, but also the ergonomics of reach; the judge is frequently reaching over to the clerks. If that desk is too low or if the partition is a little too high, it creates problems for the people that are reaching."*

Drawings alone are too abstract. 3-D or computer graphics are inadequate to experience these very important features.

Pearl Freeman, Sr. Project Mgr, OCCM *"The architect showed 3-D mockups, visual mockups, but nothing beats sitting in the actual mockup and actually seeing how a corner of the mock-up blocks the view from a distance"*

If adjustments need to be made, they just lop off a few inches, put it back together the new way, and see if that doesn't work better. It's an opportunity to verify that they're making the best use of space – and that work will flow smoothly. It's not just a question of convenience. It's also anticipating the inevitable heavy work load.

Hon. James McGuire: *"What way will make the flow work the best during a crowded courtroom. If you have 40 matters on calendar, how is the room going to facilitate moving those 40 cases through the system. And that's the efficiency we're looking for at this point."*

Pearl Freeman, Sr. Project Mgr, OCCM: *"It's a quick way, an inexpensive way to actually demonstrate a real condition."*

Which allows the changes to be made now, rather than later.

Pearl Freeman, Sr. Project Mgr, OCCM *"If you use a temporary mock up you can save yourself a lot of money in the long run."*

Thoughtful planning that's good for the taxpayers, and good for the people who use the court every day.

Hon. Larry Allen Court Facilities Comm. Chair: *"This will be a court facility that from its inception will be designed with all of those modern concepts involved in it, which will make it much more functional for the court system but for the public as well."*

I'm Leanne Kozak reporting in San Bernardino for California Courts News.