

California Courts News Transcript

Title: Portola Grand Opening

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Residents in this region of Northern California – Plumas and Sierra counties – enjoy the sounds of nature and perfectly beautiful scenery.

Leanne Kozak, Administrative Office of the Courts *“Another remarkable feature about this area is how spread out everything is. People live miles away from each other, and the courthouse.”*

For many folks, the drive to the courthouse has never been convenient, not easy, and during winter, certainly not safe. It snows from October through May, and there are mountain passes to navigate. So the two presiding judges from Plumas and Sierra counties devised a solution: build one courthouse that would be convenient for folks in the eastern parts of both counties. Eight years later, here’s the result – the first trial court construction project entirely managed by the Administrative Office of the Courts – on budget and 8 months early; a stunning architectural addition to Portola in Plumas County.

Deborah Norrie, Plumas CEO *“We wanted it to fit into this community, and so it couldn’t be too classical or too traditional but we also didn’t want it to look like a ski lodge.”*

There’s a spacious lobby for customer service. There’s one courtroom - with a graceful acoustical detail that hides electrical wires and projects the judge’s voice to the back of the room.

The audio visual system is state of the art. It allows the judge to conduct court business through videoconference – to courtrooms in Quincy and Downieville, as well as courts in Modoc and Lassen counties; which is an economical way to get things done.

And there’ll be money saved from no longer having to lease this service center in Loyalton. Plus the dilapidated old part time Portola facility is now history.

On this day, they celebrated the grand opening of their joint venture. It is California’s first multi-jurisdictional courthouse.

Hon. Ira Kaufman, Plumas Superior Court Presiding Judge *“The smartest thing we could do in terms of economy, efficiency is to build one courthouse in this region. And this is a unique idea. There are no other courthouses in the state that have a regional concept in terms of two counties occupying one courthouse.”*

One judge hears cases from both counties; civil, traffic, small claims, unlawful detainers, and family law. Administrative details were extremely complicated. The two courts had to meld case management systems, operational processes, employment issues, judges, staff, and cultures.

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(voice of) Hon. William Pangman, Sierra Superior Court Presiding Judge *“You’d think just bolting 2 court systems together, you know, big deal, you just sort of pull the books in. It’s not that easy, in fact it’s not easy at all.”*

Hon. William Pangman, Sierra Superior Court Presiding Judge *“This would not have happened without so much cooperation between the counties, the two courts, and the AOC.”*

Most important, this achievement represents the court’s commitment to serve the public in the best way possible.

Ron Overholt, Deputy Director, Administrative Office of the Courts *“Whether the population is along the county line or in the county seat or wherever it is, our mission is to be where the people are so that anyone who needs access to justice has access to justice.”*

And folks in the western regions of Plumas and Sierra counties will still be served by courts in Quincy and Downieville.

I’m Leanne Kozak reporting from Portola for California Courts News.

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