

California Courts News Transcript

Title: Sisk Rededication

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The celebration in Fresno this day was a long time coming, starting when the federal government decided to vacate the 40 year old B. F. Sisk courthouse. Folks in the Fresno Superior Court launched a relentless campaign to acquire the building for superior court use. Leading the lobbying effort was then-judge Brad Hill, and CEO Tamara Beard. The feds finally agreed to give the building to the state – if it was used for the administration of justice.

Tamara Beard, Fresno Superior Court Executive Officer *“It was actually transferred to the state for \$1. And then we had to go to the state legislature to get the money authorized to remodel this building. So it’s been a labor of love for 12 year and it’s finally opening up. We couldn’t be happier.”*

Hon. Ronald M. George, Chief Justice of California *“Today we rededicate this building as a symbol of our enduring commitment to the rule of law.”*

This event also celebrated the productive collaboration among federal, state and local government. The renovation was begun in July 2008 and completed on schedule, and right on budget, under the direction of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Hon. Bruce Smith, Fresno Presiding Judge *“Every decision made and every penny spent was based on what would be best for the public, litigants, attorneys, and court personnel.”*

The 5 story building is more than 191-thousand square feet, room for 178 staff and 15 courtrooms to handle civil and family matters.

Hon. Brad Hill, Court of Appeal, 5th Appellate District *“We never had enough courtrooms, and now we do, and when attorneys know that there actually courtrooms that we can send someone to, cases start settling and the system works.”*

There’s the option to expand, as well.

Tamara Beard, Fresno Superior Court Executive Officer *“This actually will become a 16th courtroom if we ever need it.”*

The information boards in the lobby are tied into the case management system. The jury assembly room is spacious and comfortable, including a display of historic artifacts from early days in Fresno. The new self help center is ready for business – lots of business! And throughout the building, people can enjoy the work of 30 local artists who provided 450 photographs and paintings. The framing and mounting was paid for by attorney user fees.

Tamara Beard, Fresno Superior Court Executive Officer *“It’s actually very inexpensive how we’ve done it, mostly since all the work has been donated. So this was not done with taxpayer money.”*

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These are the names of the almost 600 construction workers who were employed on this job.

The design was a real challenge, working between pillars and supports placed 20 feet apart throughout the building.

The next project for Fresno is the renovation of the existing 45-year old downtown courthouse, where most criminal cases are handled. It's another project in one of the largest public works programs in the country – about 6-point-5 billion dollars, coming mostly from court user fees and fines.

Ron Overholt, Deputy Chief Director, Administrative Office of the Courts *"In the 57 new courthouse jobs that are being built around the state we will be at least partly responsible for putting over 100,000 construction workers to work. So the ability to put people to work now, invest in our communities, the timing couldn't be more perfect."*

But in the end, it's all about access to justice.

Hon. Bruce Smith, Fresno Presiding Judge *"This newly refurbished facility is not only a testament to that ideal, but it is also a testament to our daily fulfillment of that promise."*

I'm Leanne Kozak reporting for California Courts News.