

Juvenile center to open doors

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The 14-bed detention center at the Josephine County Juvenile Justice Center has been closed for nearly two years. A tax measure on the May 20 ballot would reopen it.

The lights have been turned off for nearly two years in the shelter and detention area of the Josephine County Juvenile Justice Center, at Fourth and F streets. What light there is comes from skylights and from the hope that a tax measure on the May 20 ballot will gain voter approval.

Opened 15 years ago at a cost of \$3.1 million, the 16-bed shelter and the 14-bed detention center closed in June 2012, due to budget cuts. The closure meant that the worst of the worst juvenile offenders have been shipped to a youth lockup in Medford, although typically only three were held there at any one time.

With the closure, more than 20 jobs were eliminated, including teacher jobs and a cook's position. The tax measure, if approved by voters, would reopen the shelter and detention area. An open house at the facility is set for 5:30 to 8 p.m. Friday, during First Friday events downtown.

On a typical night, about seven or eight youths were housed in the detention center, and another eight or 10 were housed in the next-door shelter area, according to Jim Goodwin, director of Josephine County Juvenile Justice.

"One day they'll have 10, the next day they'll have 24," Goodwin recalled last week. "We would often be full."

Compare that to three youths, which is how many were being held on contract at the Medford juvenile center last Friday, when Goodwin spoke.

"We are limping along," Goodwin said. "It's not enough. We are not meeting the need."

In the last full year that the detention center operated, 233 youths spent time there.

The shelter portion of the facility typically housed abused, neglected or abandoned young people — those without safe homes, probation officer Brad Kane said Wednesday. Children held in shelter also might have been drunk, acted out or possessed drugs or alcohol. Staff could help assess the needs of such youths.

Kane believes the public is not fully aware of the loss and what it means to the community.

He mentioned a situation last week in which a 15-year-old boy who stole \$1,100 from his grandparents was merely cited and returned to the home.

"Had (the detention center) been open, we could have lodged him and protected the grandparents more," Kane said. "He's right at home, where the problem occurred."

As an example of what he deals with, Kane had to rush off to deal with a court matter involving a 15-year-old girl headed to prison for slashing another person with a box cutter.

"It would be nice to have more resources, for this size community," Kane said, mentioning also that heroin was "surfacing again" in the community.

"It's a large, beautiful empty building that's sitting there idle," he said. "We'd like to get it open."

The tax proposal also would increase the number of inmates held in the Josephine County Jail — to an estimated 210, up from the current 130. It would impose a tax of \$1.19 per \$1,000 of assessed value, or \$238 a year on a home assessed at \$200,000.

Juvenile Justice Center

- Location: 301 N.W. F St. (Fourth and F streets)
- Built: 1999
- Cost: \$3.1 million
- Facility includes: 14-bed detention center; 16-bed shelter; Family Court courtroom/ offices, Juvenile Justice administrative offices.
- Open house: 5:30 to 8 p.m. Friday in the shelter/detention area, during First Friday events downtown.

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