



The new justice center required a lot of demolition because it is being built over the old structure. <<

A Perfect Match

MIRON CONSTRUCTION IS OVERSEEING THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MONROE COUNTY JUSTICE CENTER THAT WAS DESIGNED TO RESEMBLE THE TOWN'S HISTORIC COURTHOUSE. BY JANICE HOPPE

Miron Construction

www.miron-construction.com

- Project Cost: \$30 million
- Location: Sparta, Wis.
- Employees on site at peak: 80

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— Tom Zahalka, project manager

western Wisconsin. The courthouse design is the inspiration for the new Monroe County Justice Center that Miron Construction is overseeing the construction of. "The historic courthouse is a beautiful building and is on the National Register of Historic Places," Project Manager Tom Zahalka says. "It is the inspiration for the new complex from a cosmetic standpoint."

The Monroe County Justice Center will replace the existing jail and annex facilities that were built in the 1960s and located directly adjacent to the historic courthouse, connected by a hallway. "The county has been debating back and forth as to whether to approve this project for years," Zahalka explains. "It was originally going to be built on the outskirts of Sparta,

but ultimately the county decided to build the facility in town."

Because the new justice center is being built in downtown Sparta over the existing 1960s facility, the \$30 million project was split into two phases and requires a lot of site demolition. The top two floors of the building will consist of 91,500 square feet of new construction and the 11,500-square-foot basement will be renovated. The first floor will contain the jail and Huber unit – a portion of the jail designated to inmates who by order of the court have been granted privileges to be temporarily released for work, child care or other reasons, the main public entry lobby, the sheriff's administrative department and support services for the facility. The second floor will include

A historic Romanesque Revival-style courthouse built in 1896 has become the focal point of its hometown of Sparta, a small town nestled in the rolling hills of

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the upper level of the jail and Huber unit, administrative support departments for the courts, four courtrooms, judges' chambers and jury deliberation rooms.

Totally Indestructible

Phase one of the Monroe County Justice Center project includes the demolition and construction of the new Monroe County jail with greater square footage that will allow the county to increase the number of beds from 69 to 180, which will eliminate the need for the county to continue outsourcing 40 beds. "Right now, the jail facility is pretty old and whenever [the county] runs out of room in the existing jail they have to rent space from neighboring counties for the housing of their inmates," Zahalka notes.

Miron Construction worked with Atlanta-based Tindall Corp., a leader in the design and manufacturing of precast, pre-stressed concrete products to construct the jail cells. "One noteworthy element on the project is the precast jail cells," Zahalka says. "Tindall built prefabricated jail cells; so the floor, walls, ceiling, insulation, plumbing fixtures and the paint is all ready to go. We had those shipped to the site by train where they were lifted into place like Lego blocks."

By using prefabricated cells, Miron Construction saved the county money during the competitive bid phase and was able to complete the cells much faster than if it had casted the concrete cells in place. The company has shaved off days of work by using innovative techniques such as precast jail cells on the project, which help keep the company on schedule, Zahalka notes. Miron Construction will complete the construction of the jail this year.

Getting it Right

The biggest challenge Miron Construction faced on the Monroe County Justice Center project – and the most important – was ensuring the jail finishes are indestructible so no human hands can break anything such as a light fixture in an attempt to obtain a weapon. "Miron has built a number of jails, so we had our more experienced members review the plans using their past experience to ensure everything met requirements," Zahalka says. "By working on this project we furthered our knowledge of the security and detention-grade measures needed when building a jail."

For example, Miron Construction noticed areas that should have been dedicated as "secure" but were not. The county then re-designated the intended secure area, highlighting the perimeter, which resulted in significant changes to the original contract documents. For example, the plans called for light fixtures that could have been easily broken, so they were swapped out. "Everything must be detention-grade and there must be at least two locked doors between every inmate and the outdoors," says Zahalka, joking that "it's harder to break out of jail than it seems in the movies."

Ensuring security measures were met in the jail was not the only challenge Miron Construction has run into so far during construction. The company installed precast exterior walls after the foundation was laid that consist of three layers. Each two-story-tall precast wall was shipped from Wells Concrete in Minnesota by truck, arrived complete and was set into place with a crane.

"The other biggest challenge we've had was matching the color and texture of the exterior with the existing courthouse," Zahalka says. "The specs required the color to emulate the outside of the historic courthouse by calling-out a very specific dyed mix design, but sandblasting the surface of the specified mix design exposed the wash stone aggregate which created a bluish-gray color instead of red. The county wanted the entire depth of the concrete to be red, so in order to make that possible, we had to switch the aggregate from the specified wash stone to granite, which is a premium aggregate."

The exterior color debate was not a high point of the construction, Zahalka notes, and ended up adding \$22,000 to the project. "It has been a challenge being constrained to the plans and specs while striving to deliver the product needed by the end-user," he adds. ♦

Bahr Electric

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We appreciate this opportunity to work with Miron Construction and Monroe County on the new justice center project.

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