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Letters



Whitman dedicates new police station

BY TRACY SEELYE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2011 03:00 PM



On a Sunday morning with the same clear, endless autumn sky as dawned on a fateful Tuesday 10 years ago, Whitman paused to remember what and who were lost on Sept. 11, 2001 — and to dedicate a new beginning for public safety.

The Fire Department held a short prayer and wreath-laying ceremony at the station's memorial bell and FDNY plaque at 8:30 a.m., the same time ceremonies were getting underway at the World Trade Center Site in New York City.

At 10 a.m., town, state and police officials took part in the dedication ceremony for the new Whitman Police Station. A public tour of the building followed the ceremony, which involved a wreath-laying and the playing of "Taps," by a representative of the VFW.

"On this day of national service and remembrance, it is an honor to open a public safety facility that will allow officers to work more safely and efficiently while providing better services to our town," said Chief Christine May-Stafford, thanking residents who supported the new station. She also singled out members of the Board of Selectmen and the Whitman Building Projects Committee, as well as the Whitman-Hanson Technology Services Department for their work on the communications and security systems.

"Ten years ago today, the nature of policing changed forever," May-Stafford said. "This police station was designed to meet the needs of the town in a post-9/11 era."

Town Administrator Frank Lynam noted in his remarks that some in the community questioned the dedication's scheduling.

"We survived and resolved that we would not be so vulnerable in the future," Lynam said of the Sept. 11 attacks. "Today,

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construction continues on the Freedom Tower in New York and America has found its sense of community as it honors those fallen heroes of 9/11. In that spirit, we dedicate this building — a new, modern public safety facility — to the citizens of Whitman.”

Selectmen Chairman Carl Kowalski said the dedication date was “a perfect choice” based on the job facing police since Sept. 11, 2001 and related the thought that there is no word to describe parents who have lost their children.

“A day that began with infinite visibility became a day of blinding grief,” Kowalski said. “As we remember the threats upon our society from outside, however, we can’t ignore those from within — and thus the appropriateness of our dedicating the new police station today.”

He cited the battle being waged against opiate drugs in which the new station will be “a great help.”

“That battle is for those parents in our community who have also suffered the loss that bears no name,” Kowalski said. “The loss of a child.”

He noted that, while the state lost 78 soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2002-2007, in that same period, 3,265 Massachusetts residents died of opiate-related overdoses, a rate of 42:1 over war deaths abroad. Whitman residents have felt the effects of drug crime in the theft of copper piping from homes.

“Our police officers can now battle this problem from a facility that bears witness to the seriousness of the issue,” he said. “They will have the tools to deal with addicts, tools to handle dealers, tools to deal with thieves and tools to handle junk dealers who turn stolen goods into money for drugs.”

One of those tools is the new array of computers and data links in the station’s dispatch room, according to officer Christopher Lee. Where once all dispatch communications were handled on a single screen, there are now six screens — in addition to security camera monitors — to handle 911 calls, open doors, monitor radio communications, look up wants and warrants or license plates and monitor televised news. On Sunday, the latter was tuned in to coverage of Sept. 11 ceremonies.

“It’s a definite improvement,” Lee said.

Computer upgrades and file storage have made the biggest difference to Katrina Patton, the department’s administrative assistant and records clerk.

“We had so much stuff, just boxes and boxes of files, out in the hallways,” Patton said. “If we needed something I’d have to go through the boxes.”

The interrogation rooms, with built-in audio and video recording helps the department better do its job, according to Sgt. Sean Roberts, police prosecutor.

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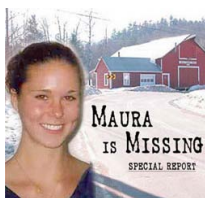


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"You still have to help them and this building gives us the tools to do that," Roberts said. "Most Americans come forward and say, 'Yeah, I did it,' and this allows us to do that safely. ... My whole goal is to get them not to do it again. That's what justice is."

Roberts also helped Sgt. Joseph Bombardier demonstrate how the one-way glass works for officers monitoring interrogations in the observation room.

"I thought it was great, said Whitman resident Joseph Boss of the ceremony as he began the tour. "I thought it was perfect."

June O'Leary, of the Friends of Whitman Park said she was impressed by the new station that she once felt the town could not afford. "I'm glad we have it," O'Leary said as she followed signs with arrows posted as direction through the building.

Also touring the building was architect Jeffrey Shaw and his mother Barbara.

Plymouth County District Attorney Timothy J. Cruz said the state-of-the-art building is a definite improvement for the department.

"I commend the town for being one of those few municipalities to get the money together to make sure you get a brand new police station after a new high school within the last few years," Cruz said. "It's 2011 — for this building we're like at 2015. We're in front of it here."

"Today is a very fitting day to dedicate this station which commemorates first responders of our town and our country," said state Rep. Geoffrey Diehl, R-Whitman.

Deputy Chief Scott Benton's remarks closed the ceremony.

"We now have a state-of-the-art police station that is equipped with technology and security that will allow us to operate more efficiently to serve the citizens of Whitman," Benton said.

Also participating in the dedication ceremony were color guards from the Whitman Police Department, the American Legion and Boy Scout Troop 22. The Rev. Jason Makos, pastor of Holy Ghost Church, delivered the benediction, and the national anthem was sung by 8-year-old Isabella Kashick. Refreshments were donated by Knights of Columbus No. 347 and balloon artist Joseph Berger of Balloon Fun in Whitman donated his time to entertain children attending the tour.

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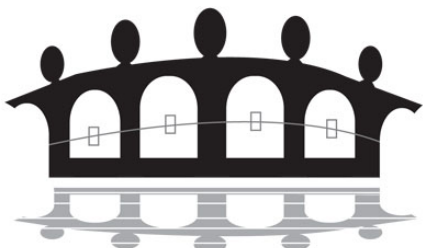
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