

## Public Safety building welcomes visitors

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In the early Saturday sunlight, groups of all ages stood in anticipation around an entrance to the Public Safety building.

Several young members of the groups wore what could have been early Halloween costumes, dressed as firefighters and police officers, though in this case the outfits conveyed their excitement to see the areas where their heroes spent their days.

“He’s a big fan of firefighters,” Teresa Patukonis said of her son, M.J., 3.

M.J., dressed as a firefighter, and his family had never been to the new facility before the Public Safety Building Grand Opening, held this past Saturday, Oct. 28. At the event, police and fire staff led groups on tours through the building, which consists of a connected fire department and police department, and firefighters provided demonstrations of the facility’s training features.

Located at 211 and 213 South Main Street, the departments debuted their new upgrades to the public. Though the police have been in the new facility since October 2016, the fire department had not moved in until very recently. Representatives from both sides of the force said the new building was a great improvement over the previous one, especially when it came to space.

Calling the new police station “a thousand times better” than the previous one, Sergeant Brad Fitzhenry led groups through the booking area and cells. The facility now has four cells, including two individual ones meant for those who must be kept from sight and sound of other people in the area, which the previous facility did not have.

Detective Scott Leonard next showed tour groups the evidence room, which includes a fuming tank, fingerprinting area, drying area for clothes or other evidence, and lockers in the hallway to keep items.

“The last evidence room was a third of the size,” he said.

Next along the tour, visitors saw the report writing room, a darker room with several computers and telephones bordering the sergeants’ offices, and the roll call room, a bright and clean room of rows of desks, chairs, whiteboards, and officer lockers, against a darker blue-accented wall. Throughout the police section of the facility, a mix of blue-gray dominated the color scheme, giving it a clean and organized flow. Officer Dean Santoli, who was leading this section of the tour, said the separation of the new facility was helpful in day to day operations. Previously, the roll call room, kitchen, and report writing area were all the same, making phone calls challenging. The new divides allow for increased privacy. Upstairs, groups saw the offices of the detectives, as well as that of Police Chief Tilden S. Kaufman.

Across the hall from the administrative portion of the police department, which includes offices and meeting rooms, are parallel rooms of offices for Fire Chief James Wright and the Deputy Fire Chief. The two buildings are connected by a corridor, and once on the fire side, the accent walls and colors switch from blues to varying shades of red. Like the police station, the previous issues with the fire station were centered around a lack of space and adequate separation.

“The quarters were very, very small ... It made it tough to store equipment and tough to train,” Lieutenant Tom Kenvin said. “The town has been incredibly supportive ... [we were] trying to get a building that can accurately provide for the needs of the town.”

Kenvin added that since the majority of the fire calls are actually medical, the department needed space to properly train paramedics and have safe quarters to avoid health risks from chemicals that may be on clothing after a job. The truck bays were significantly larger, with a separate area for clothing, proper ventilation, a training tower, and a laundry station.

As firefighters spend significant time at the station, to the point where it is a second home, the kitchen and living area was decked out with high end appliances, red tiling, armchair recliners, and a television. The living quarters consisted of brightly lit rooms, lockers, and beds.

Perhaps the most focal element of the fire department kitchen is a large table, freshly lacquered and made of cherry wood, with the firefighters' prayer around the edge and the Sharon fire symbol on the top. Captain John McLean explained that the table was the union's gift to the town, as the kitchen table is such an important part of a firehouse.

"[The kitchen table] is where the camaraderie comes from, it's where everybody tends to gather," he said. "The union wanted to build something special for the new station."

Jill Gold, a Sharon resident, said she and her family often visited the old facility and was excited to see the new one.

"This [facility] is very impressive, it's amazing," she said.