

News StoriesFor June 17, 2009

Author: Erin Boeckman**Date:** 06/17/2009**OK-State courts' new home could be ready next summer**

(OK) Movers for the Oklahoma Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals may have to endure the July heat next summer if work on the Wiley Post Historical Building goes as scheduled.

Renovations to the Wiley Post building should be substantially complete by July 2010, said Paul Haley, the Department of Central Services architect on the project. Depending on the courts' schedules and other move-in arrangements, the courts could relocate shortly thereafter, he said.

The renovation of the Wiley Post Historical Building and the subsequent move of the courts have been in the works for some time. Original planning for renovations began in 1999 as a shell project. In 2005, the Legislature initially approved the issuance of bonds in the amount of \$21,650,000 for the project. But in 2008, that amount was increased to \$32,650,000.

During that time gap, the building sat waiting. When work resumed, additional work was required to bring the Wiley Post building into compliance with new code standards, Haley said.

"That was a big hiccup we had to overcome," he said, explaining that code adjustments affected the entire design of the project.

Additionally, there were other infrastructure issues that had to be addressed on the aged building.

"We have a building that's nearly 100 years old," Haley said. "The plans and building specifications were much more brief. We had an approximation of what was there. Once we began working on the building, we discovered things were not built as the plans originally showed, which is not unusual for buildings of that age."

Workers found that structural modifications had to be made because of the differences in what was in the original plans and what was actually built, he said. Asbestos remediation also had to take place, he said.

With all the demolition complete, structures tied together and a roof in place, DCS is prepared to begin work on the last leg of renovations. According to DCS' Web site, the agency will begin accepting new bids on the completion of the Wiley Post building's interior package. Bids will be accepted for paving, landscaping and other finishing touches like carpet, Haley said. Once those bids are received, Haley said the completion timeline will become more finalized.

Oklahoma Supreme Court Justice Yvonne Kauger said she looks forward to the July 2010 move-in date. She said that after the structural defects and asbestos issues were addressed, things began moving smartly along.

Because of the scattered nature of the justices and their clerks in the Capitol, Kauger said she also looks forward to having the courts' staff in one central location.

Once the courts vacate their current space in the Capitol, the Legislature will assume control under legislation approved during the 2009 session.

SB 643, by Sen. Glenn Coffee, R-Oklahoma City, and Rep. Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, grants the state Legislature control of all space in the west wing of the state Capitol building's second floor that is occupied by the Supreme Court and all space in the north wing of the second floor that is occupied by the Court of Criminal Appeals and any other space in the building that is occupied by the appellate courts prior to relocation to the Wiley Post Historical Building. The bill provides for the Supreme Court and the Court of Criminal Appeals to continue to have access to those courtrooms and robbing rooms when the chief justice of the Supreme Court or presiding judge of the Court of Criminal Appeals deems necessary and appropriate.

The language of the bill is contingent upon the completion of the renovations at the Wiley Post Historical Building.

Tracked Bills Related To Story: None