

Alexandria, LA – Town Talk

Public support earns Bunkie juvenile care facility

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Comments



Mary L. Livers (left), deputy secretary of the Office of Juvenile Justice, announces Monday in Bunkie that the Avoyelles Parish town will be home to a new therapeutic secure care facility to serve southern and central Louisiana youths. Melinda Martinez/mmartinez@thetowntalk.com

Written by **Jeff Matthews**

BUNKIE -- Bunkie submitted a list of very practical reasons why the state Office of Juvenile Justice should locate its new therapeutic secure care facility there, as did the other communities vying for the project.

What it came down to, though, was the small Avoyelles Parish town just wanted it more than everybody else.

"There was great public support," said Mary L. Livers, OJJ deputy secretary.

"It was overwhelming. There was so much support, we knew we had to take a hard look at Bunkie."

"What they didn't have in those communities is the support you have in this community," said state Sen. Eric LaFleur, D-Ville Platte.

"This is a huge project for this area and the whole parish."

The \$20 million facility will be located at 1536 Bordelon Road on the southern outskirts of Bunkie. Livers said construction is projected to be done within two to three years, and it could be finished sooner.

It will be able to house 72 youths who are in need of intensive therapy in a secure environment.

It will employ 85 to 90 people, with an average salary of about \$50,000, bringing badly needed, well-paying jobs to the area.

The city is purchasing the 20-acre property and donating it to OJJ. It has also pledged up to \$1.5 million in site improvements.

"This is a great day for Bunkie, a great day for Avoyelles, a great day for these children and a great day for Louisiana," said state Rep. Robert Johnson, D-Marksville.

"It's a win-win situation," Bunkie Mayor Mike Robertson said.

Bunkie was not originally considered among the contenders to land the facility, partially because it is farther north than OJJ wanted to locate to service youths from the southwest part of the state.

The city won out over 12 other bidders because of the quality of its site and, perhaps more important, universal support that other communities could not demonstrate, officials said.

To get that support, city officials mounted a concerted campaign, starting with people who live near the site and spreading out from there, to convince the community the project was a good thing.

They printed brochures, held meetings, answered questions and soothed concerns, officials said.

"I knew if we could explain to people what this facility would be, they would accept it," Robertson said.

"I'm sold on Bunkie," Livers said. "It's a great place and a great community. I'm excited we're going to be here."

Lafayette, LA – KATC TV

Why St. Landry Lost New Juvenile Center to Avoyelles Parish

<http://www.katc.com/news/why-st-landry-lost-new-juvenile-center-to-avoyelles-parish/>

click on the link above; when it opens, click the second arrow to view the story.

Posted: Jul 18, 2011 10:28 PM by **Maddie Garrett**



The Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) celebrated a landmark Monday with the start of a new therapeutic center for juvenile offenders in Bunkie, LA. The center will be the first of its kind in Louisiana, and it could have been built in Acadiana. Now, what was St. Landry Parish's loss, is now Avoyelles Parish's gain.

"Very excited, I wish we could break ground tomorrow," said Mary Livers, Deputy Secretary of OJJ.

A new, state of the art juvenile facility will soon sit on a 20 acre plot of land just south of Bunkie on Highway 71. The center will not only bring about 85 high paying jobs to the area, but it will offer a different approach to helping troubled youth.

"We're going to be able to play a role in changing the lives of a lot of young people," said Bunkie Mayor Mike Robertson.

But the City of Bunkie wasn't the only place vying for the center. St. Landry Parish spent over two years trying to get it built there, but residents had trouble getting behind the project.

"Well community support is a very big part of it, you know we want to be in a community that sees the benefit of us being here. And Bunkie was very, very outspoken about how supportive they were of us being in this community," explained Livers.

Several communities in St. Landry Parish weren't supportive of the juvenile center. But Mayor Robertson said his community was, including a church and several homes that sit right next to the property.

"I just felt like that if the citizens of our community understood what the facility really was, that it's not a jail, it's not a prison, it's not a correctional facility but a therapeutic center for youthful offenders, they would be better accepting of what we wanted to do in locating this facility in Bunkie," said Robertson.

The City of Bunkie is in the process of purchasing the plot of land and then will donate it to OJJ. OJJ will then put out bids for the project; and once construction begins it will take about 18 months to complete.

Opelousas, LA- Daily World Juvenile jail goes to Bunkie

1:21 AM, Jul. 19, 2011 |

It was made official Monday. The juvenile justice center that could have created 90 jobs inside St. Landry Parish will instead be placed in Bunkie.

St. Landry Parish officials have been pushing for the project to be built in the parish since 2009, but repeated push-backs from various communities derailed that hope.

"We looked at everything. We looked at existing facilities that were built and we looked at land. We were looking at proximity to the families that we serve, and, of course, community support for the project," Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice Assistant Secretary Girard Melancon said. "And we also cared about staffing and how far they were from colleges and community colleges."

Although St. Landry Parish, which was the state's first choice for the facility and met all the state's requirements, residents near proposed site after site fought against having it next to their neighborhood, citing concerns ranging from increased traffic to security.

The first proposed site was an area near the St. Landry Parish Airport, then came another near the Walmart Distribution Center between Opelousas and Washington.

Yet another proposed site for the \$20 million facility designed to house about 60 juvenile offenders in a therapeutic setting was on La. 104 in the Prairie Ronde community and a last ditch effort was made late last year to located the facility in Morrow.

After two years of trying to find a place where the facility would be welcome, the state finally gave up and began to look elsewhere earlier this year.

"Bunkie had the best overall proposal that had all the amenities that we needed for our center," Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice spokeswoman Jerel M. Giarrusso said.

The official announcement came Monday afternoon at the Cecil J. Picard Education and Recreation Center in Bunkie. Bunkie was chosen about a week ago after a review committee spent weeks sorting through proposals, Giarrusso said.

Sen. Elbert Guillory, D-Opelousas, who had been a strong supporter of the facility and jobs and money it would have brought to the parish, informed The Daily World about the decision on Thursday.

"We had it. It was ours. It was in our hands. It was a done deal for St. Landry Parish and we decided as a parish that it was not something that we wanted," Guillory said.

The facility would have brought \$28 million in construction revenues and 90 jobs, generating an annual payroll of \$5 million, Guillory said.

Of the 12 parishes that were eligible to make proposals, Avoyelles, in which Bunkie is located, was the most northern.

The other qualifying parishes were Acadia, Allen, Cameron, Evangeline, Iberia, Jefferson Davis, Lafayette, St. Landry, St. Martin, St. Mary, and Vermilion.

Staff Writer Judy Bastien contributed to this report.