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## **INSIGHTS FROM A RETIRED MICHIGAN SHERIFF ON BUILDING A LAW ENFORCEMENT CENTER**

I am extremely proud of the law enforcement facility that Ottawa County, Michigan built while I served as Sheriff. I have often said that “a county jail is essential for a local criminal justice system and enhances the quality of life for a community”. As Ottawa County, Michigan Sheriff for 24 years, I was knowledgeable about procedures and policies and, with an excellent jail administrative staff by my side, I was able to guide the design process. This allowed me to achieve the outcome of my dreams by having adequate jail bed space and the ability to properly classify inmates coming into our jail system—just two of the many factors essential for optimal day-to-day operations.

Since retiring from law enforcement, it has been rewarding to apply my knowledge by assisting other jurisdictions as a consultant working with Goldberg Group Architects (GGA). GGA has an exceptional justice architecture practice and I have come to appreciate that even the finest Sheriff and jail administrative team benefits significantly when the architect possesses a breadth of expertise in justice architecture that is equal to theirs. There are two areas where I have seen this recently highlighted.

Working through operational and space requirements is a critical planning process ideally accomplished by a team that consists of the Sheriff, his/her staff and the architect. Through good communication, decisions and designs that both the Sheriff’s team and the architect agree on, leads to the development of a facility which uniquely meets the county’s needs. When I participated actively with GGA in the planning and design process for a 511-bed law enforcement center, it was impressive to observe the give and take possible between a knowledgeable and experienced law enforcement team equally matched with the team of architects from GGA. These like-minded professionals worked through the design of this complex facility with a mutual respect that efficiently culminated in a final design in just a few sessions over a short duration of 3 to 4 weeks. It was an opportunity for all to roll up their sleeves and get the job done. Participants clearly understood the importance of their role.

Not only is the design process enhanced by the expertise of the justice experts at GGA, but their specialization in this building type indicates that they know the detention industry thoroughly -- from jail standards to equipment vendors. Recently I had the opportunity to meet with the owner of SteelCell of North America and tour the plant. SteelCell is the premier manufacturer of modular steel cells for detention facilities and I was impressed with the state-of-the-art features of this amazing product. Goldberg Group Architects has incorporated steel cells into their projects for the past 18 years, working closely with this specialized manufacturer from its inception and throughout the evolution of their cells. In addition, I had the opportunity to meet with the owner and management of Titan Steel Doors and was shown the quality and the safety mechanisms that go into the construction of their product. Quality, along with a mindset of safety and security, is paramount in the construction of a correctional product for a jail facility. My recommendation to any jurisdiction considering a justice project is to hire an expert in this field--not just any expert, but one with experience that spans several decades and who utilizes vendors and manufacturers with proven products.

Planning and building a new jail or a significant renovation will be a once-in-a-career opportunity for most Sheriffs and their design team. It is essential to get it right. From concept to design to project completion (and all of the processes in between), Goldberg Group Architects is committed to working with the Sheriff and his/her staff to develop a facility that meets the needs of the local criminal justice system and is both efficient and effective to operate.

County officials and Law Enforcement professionals are welcome to contact [info@gga-pc.com](mailto:info@gga-pc.com) for additional information.