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# More room for every body at new Sheriff's Office morgue

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By Joe Johnston | The Tribune | purchase prints  
Detective coroner Jeff Nichols gives a tour of the autopsy suite inside the new morgue.

By Cynthia Lambert | clambert@thetribunenews.com

For the first time in its history, the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office will have its own, separate facility to conduct autopsies or medical examinations.

The 2,600-square-foot medical examination facility, in a modern, tan-and-white building at 835 Aerovista Place in San Luis Obispo, will give the three-person coroner's team better ventilation, a larger refrigeration system and an autopsy suite with two exam tables.

More photos: Click thumbnails to enlarge



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The coroner's team currently conducts autopsies and medical examinations once a week at Los Osos Valley Mortuary. The team's current offices are at the Sheriff's Office on Kansas Avenue off Highway 1.

"This is huge," said Jeff Nichols, a detective coroner who has worked nearly six years with the team, which investigates every suspicious death and signs off on every

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County coroner's team faces death every day

death certificate those areas of the Sheriff's Office that flew under the radar for most people."

The new facility will allow detective coroners to work faster and more efficiently, Nichols said.

"Now, if we have to re-examine someone, we have to leave our (office), drive 20 minutes, do the exam and drive 20 minutes back," he said.

Sheriff Ian Parkinson said the improved ventilation system will protect employees and other investigators who visit the facility. A separate room allows investigators to view an autopsy through a window without having to be in the same room.

Nichols said the Sheriff's Office plans to hire someone, likely a retired mortician, on a part-time contract basis to clean up on days in which autopsies are completed.

The county will pay \$60,000 annually to lease the facility from WestPac Companies — a little less than the county is paying now to use the private mortuary's facility.

Funds to purchase and install the specialized equipment, the refrigeration unit and the ventilation system came from the nonprofit San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Advisory Foundation and asset forfeiture funds, or money from the seizure of illegally gained assets from suspected criminals.

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mrpeabody

Love that headline TT. I wouldn't want any BODY to show up at the county morgue and get "stiffed".

Yesterday 08:29 PM 1 Like Report Abuse Like Reply

Non\_Sequitur

Syria could've use one of these. At least our county will be prepared when they start slaughtering us.

Yesterday 05:13 PM Report Abuse Like Reply

marty1951

Before, it was standing room only.

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BreatheSLO

Oh, how nice to have a dentist that shares his office with the medical examiner.

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"Funds to purchase and install the specialized equipment...came from...money from the seizure of illegally gained assets from suspected criminals".

If they are certain the assets were gained illegally wouldn't the people be proven criminals, not suspected? And if they are suspected, their assets are sold off before they are proven to be criminals?

(Edited by author 21 hours ago)

Yesterday 10:21 AM 1 Like Report Abuse

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**TomHandley**

Yeah, it's called asset forfeiture, which is a loophole around criminal due process that essentially allows the government to permanently seize anything they want from anyone they suspect of a crime. They also have tremendous incentive to be forfeiture-happy and strongly encourage its use at all times, because individual departments can directly use most of the proceeds gained to buy high end toys. This attitude is exemplified by a taxpayer-funded run of custom engraved Leatherman multitools distributed to BATFE agents inscribed with "ATF-Always Think Forfeiture". It's been around for a good while and it's a key component to supporting the vast scope of criminal law and law enforcement operations that - cough- some folks around here routinely advocate for.

Yesterday 08:18 PM in reply to top Report Abuse

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**beachgal**

Not sure why the corner office needed this facility. The morgues at Sierra and French are hardly ever used. Maybe those private facilities wanted to charge the local govt too much \$ for use?

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**beachgal**

Just looked at the other photos...when in the world would this little area need to 'frig 24 bodies at the same time? And Ok that the space is \$60,000/yr now - but that's never going to stay the same. Then all that equipment when the space is sold or the rent is too high needs to be pulled out and where to put it then? To me not good long range planning went into this project.

Yesterday 10:11 AM in reply to beachgal 1 Like Report Abuse

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**HughJassSpeaking**

"when in the world would this little area need to 'frig 24 bodies at the same time?"

PSA Flight 1771 crashed in Cayucos in 1987, killing all 43 people aboard. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to think of plenty of accident, disaster or terrorism mass casualty scenarios where the corner would be dealing with far more than 24 bodies.

Yesterday 01:58 PM in reply to beachgal 1 Like Report Abuse

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**top**

The estimated population of SLO county at the 2011 census was 271,969, and the county is a fairly high tourist destination with wineries and the 101 artery. You don't think there could ever be 24 bodies waiting for an autopsy or re-examination?

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