

Nation will be watching success of meth treatment center

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Lewistown civic leaders for the first time Wednesday met the new program administrator of the Nexus meth treatment center which has been built at the Lewistown Municipal Airport.

Schroeder said that building and opening the \$10 million treatment facility has gone well. He said the only struggle has been to find housing for his 44 employees.

As of Wednesday, he still had six employees "who are homeless," Schroeder said. He noted they have been staying in a house in Lewistown purchased by Community, Counseling and Correctional Services Inc., the Butte-based firm which will operate the state-funded center.

Some of the new employees are renting, he said, while others want to buy. But finding suitable houses to buy has been difficult.

Schroeder, who was accompanied to the meeting by Joe Zigmund, treatment program manager, and by Rick Barman, security director, thanked the Port Authority for its role in bringing the meth treatment center to Lewistown.

"We would like to have had a 12-month treatment program, or even 18 months, but nine months is a good starting point and we can see how that does," said Zigmund. He noted that patients will spend nine months here and an additional six months in a pre-release center elsewhere before being released back into society.

After 15 months, officials think meth addicts should be ready to re-enter society. If not, there are provisions to keep the addicts in treatment longer, he said. He added that such long treatment programs are needed because crystal meth addiction is so severe.

Both Zigmund and Barman said security will be tight but the center will rely more on keeping the patients busy than on the high fence which surrounds the building. Barman, who said he has had eight years security experience in the prison system in North Dakota, said the men in the facility here will have almost no free time.

The only time the patients will leave the building is if they have to be taken to a hospital for treatment. Any time a patient leaves the facility he will be accompanied by two staff members, Schroeder said.

"They are not to be in front of TVs or playing games," said Barman. "We will occupy their time. We want to open their eyes so they understand why it is that they have been doing what they have been doing."

Zigmund said "this is Club Med to these guys. Their other choice is five years in prison. If we can make them comfortable they will open up."

He said a lot of the men destined for the Lewistown facility grew up too fast and did not have childhoods. So they will have toys and things that make them feel like kids again. Treatment will occur seven days a week, Zigmund said.

Schroeder described the new building as "real nice." Because of the comfort patients feel being in the building it should have a huge impact on those who receive treatment there, he said. He noted they will spend their entire nine months inside the building.

On June 1, 10 to 12 men will arrive to begin treatment. Another 10-12 will arrive each week following until by July, the 80 beds will be filled, Schroeder said. After that there will be a waiting list of those who want to get in. Because it is a nine-month treatment program, it may be nine months before there is space for someone to get in.

The new administrator said CCCS made every effort to buy everything locally. He said beds, desks, washers and driers, cars and other items were purchased from Lewistown merchants.

"We appreciate very much how the community welcomed us and we want to give back to the community as much as we can," Zigmund said. "We would like to become a big part of the community."

The University of Montana will conduct an outcome study which will take two or three years, Schroeder said. Because that institution is outside the correctional system, it will provide an honest report on how well patients do after treatment here.

"You always hear about those cases where treatment doesn't work, but we believe treatment does work," said Schroeder. He said other CCCS treatment facilities have a 72 to 75 percent success rate and the firm is shooting for 75 percent here.