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Delaware Family Court formally opens new courthouse in Dover

Public welcomed to new, larger, safer and modern facility

The Delaware Judiciary held a ceremonial ribbon cutting on Thursday to formally welcome the public to the new Kent County Family Courthouse at 445 S. Governors Ave. in Dover. Family Court Chief Judge Michael K. Newell acted as master of ceremonies at the event and welcomed the crowd to the three-story 106,711-square-foot building. "Today, we formally open this new, beautiful courthouse which will provide the citizens of Kent County and our litigants with a safe, spacious, and dignified place to handle the most personal of legal, emotional, and family issues," he said.

The new courthouse is three times the size of the 37-year-old facility it is replacing. It has nine courtrooms – as opposed to six in the old building – and those courtrooms are far larger with an average size of 1,400 to 1,800 square feet, versus about 600 square feet in the now closed courthouse at 400 Court Street.

The new building also features a large, covered lobby where the public can wait before security screening, and inside there are bright, wide hallways, benches and a number of small conference rooms allowing for privacy and appropriate separation between parties. There are also several play areas throughout the building, stocked with books and toys to entertain children while they wait.

Behind the scenes, there are more holding cells and more room to allow for the appropriate separation of individuals in custody and secure hallways and elevators to get them to courtrooms. There is also more secure space for judges and court staff, along with space for justice system partners in the building, including the Department of Justice, Office of Defense Services, and Office of the Child Advocate, among others. Finally, the building also has a 378-car parking garage.

Other speakers at Thursday's event included Delaware Supreme Court Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz, Jr., Dover Mayor Robin Christiansen and William J. Lenihan of Tevebaugh Architecture, the company that designed the courthouse and its sister Family Court facility in Georgetown that opened in November. The two Family Court buildings were designed at the same time from nearly identical plans as a cost-saving measure, though a number of external changes were made so each courthouse would better fit in with each community.