

Prison to boost economy

Milton company will have a major role in construction

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When the Boca Raton-based Geo Group announced plans to build a 2,000-inmate, \$120 million private prison in East Milton last year, it promised local contractors a piece of that pie.

This month, West Coast Metal Roofing and Construction — located just miles from the prison site — got a tasty slice.

"We're providing the metal buildings — the recreational pavilions and the warehouse building — and we're doing all the framing and metal roofing for the cell housing unit and the guard shack," West Coast co-owner John Myslak said.

He declined to say how much the contract is worth but said it's "a tenth of our annual business, or maybe even a little more."

While many of the primary contractors are from out of town, including general contractor White Construction of Mississippi, other regional companies involved in the project include Universal Engineering of Pensacola, Starfish, Inc., of Brewton, Ala., and ABC Cutting Contractors of Daphne, Ala.

"All subcontractors, both out-of-state and local, will have a positive impact on the local economy for the next 16 to 18 months," said Greg Johnson, construction project manager.

White and its subcontractors have supported the local economy by purchasing local construction materials, renting equipment, employing temporary labor services, vehicle fuel and maintenance, storage facilities, housing rental, motel lodging, grocery stores, restaurants, Milton and Pensacola airports and local medical/pharmaceutical industries, Johnson said..

Santa Rosa County Commission Chairman Don

Salter is pleased with the overall impact of the project.

"I am impressed with their initiative to hire local contractors," Salter said. "I'm more excited about the permanent jobs that will be created when the prison opens."

County Commissioner Bob Cole, said he's not too impressed with Geo's efforts, so far.



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John Myslak, owner of West Coast Metal Roofing and Construction, is one of the area firms chosen to help construct a prison in East Milton. Myslak said he will hire additional workers for the project. (Tony Giberson/tgiberson@pnj.com)

The Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development

at the University of West Florida estimates that the construction

of the prison could inject an initial \$202.5 million into the local economy with an additional \$46.9 million generated annually from facility operations.

CONTRACTORS FOR THE GEO PRISON PROJECT

-- White Construction Co., general contractor, out of Ridgeland, Miss.

-- Ivey Mechanical Co., HVAC/Plumbing, out of Kosciusko, Miss.

-- A&B Electric Co., electrical, out of Meridian, Miss.

-- T&M Tilt-up, concrete/tilt wall, out of Bethlehem, Ga.

-- General Masonry of Northwest Florida, block placement, out of Fort Walton Beach.

-- Starfish, Inc., site work, out of Brewton, Ala.

-- Tindal Corporation, manufacture/install modular cells, out of Conley, Ga.

-- West Coast Metal Roofing and Construction, metal buildings/roofs, out of Milton.

-- D.C. Taylor, roofing/skylites, out of Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

-- R&S Corporation, installs security windows and doors, out of Baton Rouge, La.

-- Jonquil Steel and Construction Co., structural steel, out of Mableton, Ga.

"I know their electrical people are out of Mississippi," Cole said. "I'd like for a local electrical warehouse to get those sales. If there are, say, 500 people out there working, if 100 are low-wage, minimum wage people out of Santa Rosa County and the other 400 are people they brought in, that's not what we asked them to do."

-- Florida Detention Systems Inc., security fencing, out of Melrose.

Cole had hoped the project would do for other businesses what it is doing for West Coast.

Normally, West Coast employs between 35 and 44 people, but that could grow by 10 to 50 in an effort to meet the Geo contract, Myslak said.

The number will depend on how fast the general contractor wants the work done.

West Coast's work should begin in July and run through October.

The new jobs will pay an average of about \$15 per hour, according to Myslak.

No hiring date or application process has been announced.

The prison — to be called the Blackwater Correctional Facility — will house 2,000 medium- and close-custody male inmates with chronic medical and mental-health problems.

"The facility is expected to be completed in July 2010, and we would expect to begin receiving inmates after that date," said Pablo Paez, director of corporate relations for the Geo Group. "The facility will begin hiring for its approximately 470 positions a few weeks prior to the expected opening."

The average salary for workers at the prison will be more than \$37,000 a year.

The average annual salary in Santa Rosa is about \$30,680.

The prison's employees will include doctors, teachers, counselors and about 200 correctional officers, among others.

The Haas Center for Business Research and Economic Development at the University of West Florida estimates that construction of the facility could inject an initial \$202.5 million into the local economy with an additional \$46.9 million generated annually from facility operations.

-- SimplexGrinnell, LP, fire protection, out of Mobile.

-- Hotel and Restaurant Supply, kitchen equipment, out of Meridian, Miss.

-- Pellerin Laundry Machinery Sales, industrial laundry equipment, out of Kenner, La.

-- Universal Engineering, well abandonment, out of Pensacola.

-- ABC Cutting Contractors, core drilling, out of Daphne, Ala. Others providing services

-- L. M. Jacobs & Associates, soil boring and testing, of Pensacola.

-- Pensacola Testing Laboratories Inc., soils, masonry, concrete and steel testing, of Pensacola.

-- Pensacola Aviation, aerial photos, of Pensacola.

-- Southern Surveying, site surveys, of Navarre.