

'My mind is more at ease'

By [LEE HENDREN](#), T&D Staff Writer

Technicians have put the finishing touches on a state-of-the-art security camera network at the Orangeburg-Calhoun Regional Detention Center.

"This system has so many features, it's got everything we need," said Willie Bamberg, jail director. "My mind is more at ease."

"Nothing takes the place of good, experienced corrections officers," he said.

But the new camera system will give the officers "more eyes helping them watch these people that we're supposed to be watching," he said.

The old system "was put in probably when the facility was built in 1975" and did not have "enough cameras to cover the areas we wanted covered," Bamberg said.

So, last year, he began shopping around for a new system. "We got some quotes all the way up to \$200,000 and something," he said.

"TSC out of Charleston gave us a competitive quote. The total system was a little over \$56,000," he said. Installation of the system began about a month ago and is virtually complete.

Now the jail has twice as many cameras as before. "We have cameras to cover the roof, all the hallways, two cameras in every pod plus every control room," Bamberg said.

The system now includes the dormitory, where more than a hundred nonviolent Family Court defendants are housed. Before, the only contact with the corrections officer in the dormitory was by radio.

The new cameras continuously transmit color images to computer terminals in administrators' offices. Officials can watch on a real-time basis, zooming in or sharpening the image as necessary.

"If we see a problem, we can call that pod officer or the supervisor's attention to it right away," said Horace James, chief of security.

Recorded images can be replayed, and still shots can be printed out, to help document what did, or did not, happen at a particular place and time.

"The eye in the sky is watching now. We can monitor everything that is going on," said Lt. Albert Burton, training officer.

That includes the actions of corrections officers as well as inmates, but Bamberg said the new system's biggest benefit is that it will enhance the safety and security of "everyone" at the jail, including the officers, administrative staff and inmates.

There has been one confirmed escape from the facility in the past five years. Authorities say last October, Anthony Corey Stephens fled out a propped-open door, scaled a fence and was free for about a day.

Last month, Javon S. Smith showed up at a county office about two hours after his appointment at a mental health facility, according to police. His whereabouts during that time were unknown.

In a third incident, jail officials say Wyles Johnson escaped from custody while awaiting medical treatment at a Columbia hospital. He is still at large.

