

Clark/Dixon Architects design expanded \$3M firing range for Shelby County Sheriff's Department

By Tom Bailey Jr.

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An architecture firm has designed not only new facilities for the Sheriff's Office firing range, but a stilted way to keep the Wolf away.

Clark/Dixon Architects was chosen from among 10 firms seeking the contract to design the \$3 million project.

"Their proposal just seemed to be packaged well," said Maurice Denbow, administrator of planning and research for the Shelby County Sheriff's Office. "It gave us, the review team, a feeling that they they understood our needs up front."

The project doubles the number of outdoor firing-range positions from the existing 50 by building another 50 at a separate spot nearby.

It also builds a new operations/classroom building for training, administration and storage.

The firing range is at 800 Dovecrest Road in the northwest corner of Shelby Farms. The nearby Wolf River ruined the old classroom/administration building during the May 2011 flood, pouring 4 1/2 feet of water into it.

Since then, the Sheriff's Office has been making do using a trailer for classes and offices.

Clark/Dixon principals Dianne Dixon and Larry Clark have designed 8,500 square feet of new space, mainly of glass and metal.

"I think it's going to be a very handsome building," Dixon said.

Denbow praised the design both for its functionality and its appearance.

"It had an approach that looked attractive," he said. And the floor plan has a "very clean flow."

The front meets the ground, but stilts raise the rest of the building 12 feet above the flood plain, Dixon said.

Clark/Dixon partnered with engineering firm Allen & Hoshall and firing-range specialist Clark Vargas. Dixon describes the Jacksonville, Fla.-based Vargas as the "guru" of firing-range design.

The existing range of 50 shooting stations is 50 yards long. The new range also will be 50 positions of up to 50 yards from the targets, but will be designed with the latest baffling and lighting requirements.

Clark/Dixon designed the classroom/administrative building to provide views of the firing range from windows and decks.

Onlookers will see other officers besides sheriff's deputies using the range. Other law enforcement agencies in the region use the range for training and certification.

"At any given time the range is completely occupied," Denbow said, adding that scheduling can be difficult.

Among other officers using the facility are FBI special agents. In fact, the Sheriff's Office hopes that the FBI will pitch in as much as \$1 million of the costs for the new facilities.

Still, the construction project will provide a no-frills facility, Denbow said, adding, "In a perfect world, we'd probably opt for an indoor firing range."

But tacking on millions of dollars to the project "doesn't make sense when we have something already working." The project as designed "enhances our operation, but it's not overkill," Denbow said.

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