

October 4, 2007

## **GROUND BREAKING FOR NEW STATE CRIME LAB**

BISMARCK – In a ceremony today hosted by Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem, several dignitaries broke ground to begin construction of the new building for the North Dakota State Crime Laboratory, a division of the Office of Attorney General. Participating in today's event were Governor John Hoeven, Bismarck Mayor John Warford, Senator Bob Stenehjem, Senator David O'Connell, Senator Ralph Kilzer, Representative Al Carlson, Representative Ron Carlisle, former Crime Lab Director Aaron Rash and Hope Olson, current Director of the Crime Lab.

"This is the first time in the state's history the Crime Lab will have its own dedicated building," said Stenehjem. "The new facility is desperately needed. The existing crime lab is so short on space that three employees are sharing one desk and other staff members have resorted to cutting mouse pads in half to make them fit."

At approximately 19,000 square feet, the state of the art facility is almost four times the size of the existing Crime Lab. When completed, the new building will have 7,300 square feet of dedicated laboratory space and more than double the evidence storage area, as well as separated administrative offices and classrooms. The Crime Lab provides ongoing training for law enforcement officers but does not have classroom space so training currently is held off-site.

"This new building will provide adequate work space, evidence storage, and room to keep pace with the growing technological advances in forensic science and crime analysis. The new laboratory space will serve the needs of law enforcement and the citizens of North Dakota for many years into the future," said Hope Olson, director of the Crime Lab.

The crime lab was originally created in the 1960s under the State Laboratories Department. The State Lab was moved to the Department of Health in 1987. In 1993, the Legislature moved the Toxicology department from North Dakota State University to the state Crime Lab. Since then, the state Crime Lab has been comprised of two major areas: Forensics and Toxicology, both of which provide assistance to the state's criminal justice system. The Forensics Section works with law enforcement agencies in the investigation of crimes, and includes DNA, fingerprint, arson, firearms and drug analysis. The Toxicology Section concentrates its efforts in blood and breath alcohol programs and questioned death samples.

In 2003, at the request of the Attorney General, the Legislature moved the State Crime Laboratory to the Office of Attorney General. During the 2005-2007 biennium, the Crime Lab received 12,697 cases and 2,220 convicted offender samples. Funding for the new crime laboratory building was approved in the 2005 legislative session, but construction and building costs increased beyond the appropriation. The 2007 Legislature approved additional funding, which made possible the construction of a new Crime Laboratory building.

Four local companies are involved in the construction of the building, which will cost \$5.3 million. Northwest Contracting of Bismarck is the General Contractor. Robert Gibb & Sons, City Air Mechanical, Inc., and Skeels Electric Co, all of Bismarck, will provide plumbing, HVAC, and electrical work. Construction is expected to be completed in October 2008.

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