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PHOTOS BY WILLIAM BRADLEY

Ohio Supreme Court Justice Judith French speaks at the groundbreaking ceremony for the joint justice center Friday on Courthouse Square.

Giant step

Stakeholders break ground on joint justice center

By WILLIAM BRADLEY

Staff Writer

wbradley@advertiser-tribune.com

Seneca County is one step closer to having a courthouse again, as elected officials from the county and Tiffin celebrated the groundbreaking for the joint justice center in a ceremony Friday morning.

In her dedication remarks, Ohio Supreme Court Justice Judith French said the courthouse and those who work within it are vital to the community.

"As I've traveled around the state, I've gotten to visit all 88 counties in the state of Ohio over the last few years," she said. "One of my favorite things to do is visit the courthouse — sometimes old, sometimes new. It always reminds me of a time when the court-

house itself was the center of the community.

"Now I can't say that that's always the case around Ohio, but I can tell you that the people who work within those courthouses are the center of the community. You are very, very well-served in the city and the county by the judges that you have."

Tiffin-Fostoria Municipal Court Judge Mark Repp said he was proud of city and county officials who worked to make the joint justice center a reality.

"There was a time, not so long ago, I wasn't very proud of some of the things that were going on," he said. "You would go to other communities and they would say, 'Oh, where are you from?' 'Oh, I'm from

■ please see STEP, 3A



This model was displayed during the joint justice center leadership task force meeting following groundbreaking Friday. It was created by Tiffin resident Jim Robenalt.

Step

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Tiffin. 'Hah. You guys still fighting about that courthouse?'"

He said those days are past.

"Today, I'm proud," he said. "I'm proud in my mayor. I'm proud of my city council. I'm proud of the commissioners. I'm proud of my fellow judges."

Seneca County Commissioner Mike Kerschner said he agreed the collaboration among stakeholders was important for the project's success.

"Henry Ford said, 'If everyone is moving forward together, success can take care of itself,'" Kerschner said. "Now, may we all move forward together."

Tiffin Mayor Aaron Montz said that even though he had supported renovating the 1884 Seneca County Courthouse, which was razed in 2012, he was glad to see the community moving past old disagreements in building the new justice center.

"Today, there is no reason to rehash the fate of the 1884 courthouse," Montz said. "Instead, today is about rebirth. It is about the beginning of a new era in our history."

Later, in a meeting of the joint justice center project's leadership task force, Chad Stevers of Gilbane, the project's construction manager at-risk, said a

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guaranteed maximum price for the first phase of the project — which consists of site and foundation work — had been submitted to county commissioners. He said it came to "\$782,000 and change."

The guaranteed maximum price for the second phase of the project — which includes every other aspect of the building's construction — would be ready soon.

"We're shooting for mid-August, the third or fourth week of August," he said. "That will be everything else."

He also announced plans to close the west half of Court Street, from Washington Street to the alley, during construction.

Preliminary groundwork is to begin next week. The project is scheduled to take 16 months to complete.