

[Smith County](#) added [6 new photos](#) — with [Ross Worley](#).

October 25 ·

Unveiling the sign to the David Spencer Vocational Trades Building on Wednesday was a culmination of what Smith County Juvenile Services Director Ross Worley has been working on for more than three years.

Worley, along with the late David Spencer, came up with the plans for the Juvenile Services vocational program, which includes woodworking, auto mechanics, welding, gardening and life skills classes for kids going through their residential program.

H.O.P.E. (Helping Others Pursue Excellence) Academy, is a six-to-nine-month residential program for male juvenile offenders, focusing on behavior modification and family/parent relationships. The children work with probation officers, counselors and volunteers, including a chaplain.

Spencer was a community services officer and became the vocational instructor for Juvenile Services when he was diagnosed with cancer. Worley said they worked together on coming up with the idea for the vocational program before Spencer passed away a couple of years ago.

Ross said Spencer had a passion for helping kids.

On Wednesday, Juvenile Services employees and Spencer's family unveiled a sign dedicating the building to Spencer.

His widow, Beverley Spencer-Elrod, said Spencer would be very proud of the program.

"He was humble," she said. "He would not even want a building named after himself. It was all about the kids and all of their work."

Mrs. Spencer-Elrod attended the ceremony, along with her mother and Spencer's son, Bennett.

Spencer milled the cedar used in making the sign, which was constructed by the kids going through the vocational program. As they worked on the sign, David Peters, the vocational program's supervisor, told the kids what kind of man Spencer was, Worley said.

County Court-At-Law Judge Floyd Getz, who presides over juvenile cases, said he thinks Smith County has the best Juvenile Department in the state.

And Spencer played a big part in making it that way.

"David Spencer was a blessing in so many ways, to people he worked with, to kids that now benefit from what he envisioned ... We are fortunate to have worked with him."

The David Spencer Vocational Trades Building is a metal building that was renovated and expanded to house a wood shop, as well as an auto mechanic and welding shop. Grant money was used for the construction, and a fence was built around the facility so kids in the H.O.P.E. Academy, a residential program on the Juvenile Services campus, could participate.

Worley said the program has continued to grow since they started it.

"We're going to add to this program as it grows," he said.

David Peters now oversees the program. He had retired from owning his own construction contracting business when he learned about what Worley was working on.

"Becoming the vocational instructor was a way to do construction and give back and teach the kids," Peters said. "I have always loved construction."

Peters has worked with the juvenile probationers on several projects, including building cedar benches and convertible benches, which can be turned into picnic tables; pouring concrete, building stairs, walls, sheds and other items for the Juvenile Services Department; and constructing ramps for disabled people at homes throughout Smith County with the Texas Ramp Association. They have also refurbished old chairs and court benches taken out of the Smith County Courthouse.

Also brought into the vocational program were Jody Gooch, auto mechanic and welding teacher; Rafael Vera, horticulture/gardening instructor; and Karla Bautista, who teaches life skills such as financial and career goal planning and helps kids prepare for college and the workforce. All four instructors are classified as community service vocational instructors.

Worley said they have recently added small engine repair to the classes offered through the program and they hope to build a tiny home in the future.

Peters said participating in the vocational classes allows the H.O.P.E. residents to leave their pods and classrooms.

Judge Getz said he is selective when deciding what kids to place in the H.O.P.E. Academy. When they complete the program, they want them to have the tools, skills and knowledge to do something decent with

their lives.

“And that’s what they’re doing with them,” he said.

(The last photo is of the late David Spencer milling the large cedar tree used to make the sign)