

# **Hartselle Enquirer**

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Gov. Robert Bentley shakes hands with Larry Murphree during the transfer of ownership ceremony at the Lurleen B. Wallace Development Center. | Brent Maze

## **Wallace Development Center transferred to National Guard**

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After sitting vacant for nearly 10 years, the Lurleen B. Wallace Development Center in south Decatur will finally get a new life.

The Alabama National Guard took ownership of the property from the Alabama Department of Mental Health.

Maj. Gen. Perry G. Smith, adjutant general for the Alabama National Guard, said they are planning to invest \$10 million to renovate the facility into a regional training facility, which will include barracks, a medical facility, a dining hall, a fitness center and classrooms.

“Acquiring this facility for the Alabama National Guard is a momentous occasion,” Smith said. “This location will serve as a great multi-purpose training site for the Guard and possibly others in the foreseeable future.”

Finding a new purpose for the development center has been a top priority of State Sen. Arthur Orr, R-Decatur.

“The people of Morgan County were disheartened to see such a beautiful facility of over 160 acres and 20 plus large brick buildings not being used and falling into disrepair,” Orr said. “We have today a great story of putting this facility back into service to benefit both the taxpayers and our military.”

Gov. Robert Bentley said he was first introduced to the facility in 2010 during a campaign trip to Morgan County. He’s also made additional tours of the campus after taking office two years ago.

“Sen. Orr is a very persistent person. He’s kind of aggravating at times,” Bentley said drawing laughter from the crowd.

The property for the development center was purchased in 1969, a few months into the term of former Gov. Lurleen Wallace. The center opened two years later and remained open until 2003.

“Because of the advancements in care for people with developmental disabilities, the need for the Wallace Center no longer exists for the Department of Mental Health,” Bentley said. “A transfer of this property will allow the Alabama National Guard to repurpose the property for a regional training center for our guardsmen. Our guardsmen deserve a first-class training center, and the Wallace Center is a perfect location for training. I appreciate Senator Orr for leading this process, and the Department of Mental Health and Alabama National Guard for making it a reality. Today’s announcement is a prime example of what government agencies can do when it works together.”