



District unveils \$20.7 million high school renovation project

By Lissa Blake

A \$20.7 million Decorah High School renovation and expansion project is on budget and ahead of schedule.

To highlight the updated facility, the Decorah Community School District will host a community open house Sunday, Sept. 8, from 1 – 3 p.m.

Sunday's event begins with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 12:45 p.m., followed by a 1 p.m.

assembly in the auditorium to recognize those people who played a prominent role in the design and completion of the project. Beginning at 1:15 p.m., representatives from StruXture Architects from Waterloo, Larson Construction, the Decorah Board of Education and the administration will be on hand to assist in tours and answer questions.

Maps of the current building will be available, and staff, students, the Board and administrators will be

available to provide information and perspectives about the project.

Refreshments will be served in the commons area.

Community vision

The project has taken just over two years to complete and will be finished four months earlier than expected, with the exception of a small punch list and some landscaping.

Decorah Superintendent Mike Haluska is quick to acknowledge





the commitment from the people of Decorah.

"I want to say thank you to our patrons (residents) for having faith in us to create the best possible educational environment for our young people we could," he said.

Haluska said he thinks of funding for the project as a three-legged stool.

"It was paid for through the combination of a \$10.4 million voter-approved bond issue, renewal of the \$1.34 (per thousand dollars of

taxable valuation) Physical Plant and Equipment Levy (PPEL) and our portion of our statewide penny (sales tax)," said Haluska.

Innovations

Haluska and Building and Grounds Director Greg Schaller said there are many ecological and educational improvements, which will be realized as a result of the renovations.

"From an ecological standpoint, the difference we'll be able to make

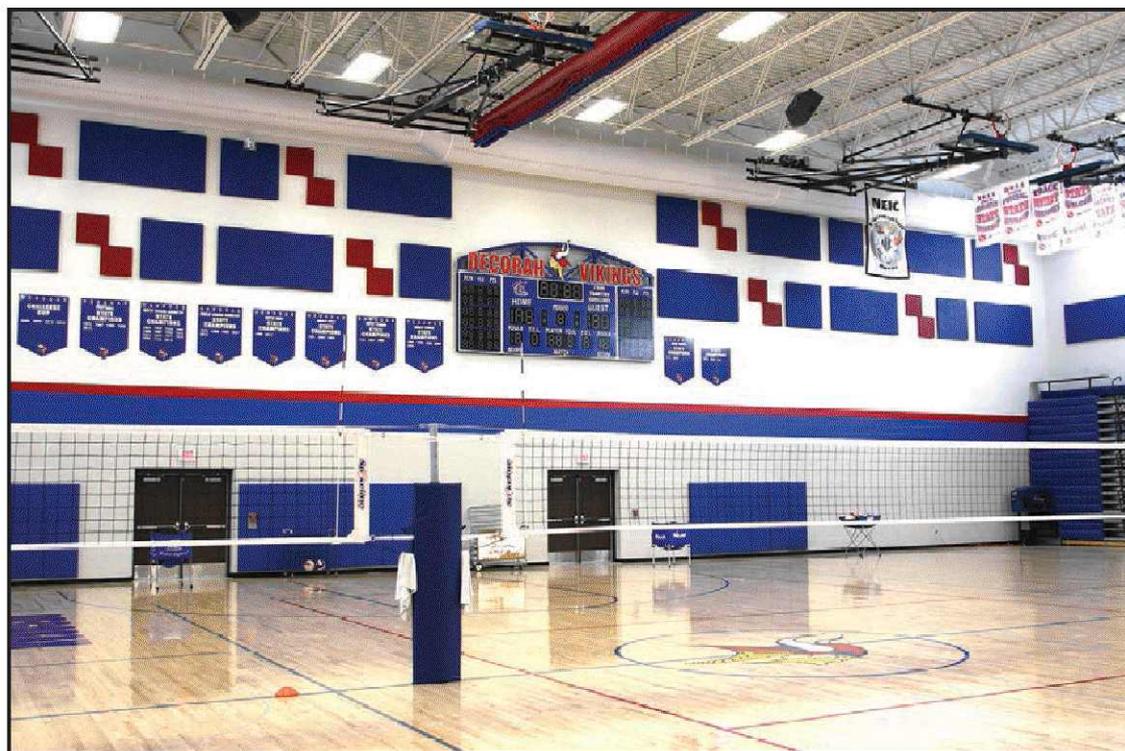
and the dollars saved will be impressive," said Haluska.

Haluska explained with regard to the building's carbon footprint, the new heating, ventilating and cooling systems will be able to operate at a combined cost that is lower than the school's current heating system by itself.

"It's a geothermal hybrid system," explained Schaller.

School

Continued on page A-2



High School

Schaller said the new system is set up to be able to "transfer loads" from one system to another when needed.

"Last year, the motor went out on the well (used to provide water to the geothermal system). While the motor was coming, we were able to use the heat produced on the geo-loop from the compressor on the freezer and walk-in cooler to heat the office area.

Schaller said Decorah High School is home to the second largest hybrid heating and cooling system in the nation.

Haluska said while the District is in preliminary talks about eventually adding some solar panels to generate electricity, the recently completed renovations are already helping with the District's lighting.

"There are solartubes (round skylight tubes) in the hallway and interior classrooms," explained Schaller.

He said light meters have been installed in the hallways and on sunny days, they shut off the lights.

"We're harvesting natural lighting and we really don't need the lights on in many of classrooms on nice, sunny days. It's helping us hold down our lighting bill," said Schaller.

Haluska added when students are exposed to natural light, it creates a better learning environment and they perform higher than students in artificial light.

Most of the windows in the building have also been replaced with high efficiency ones.

Security

Other enhancements include 86 cameras inside and outside the building.

"There will be keyless access for staff and every exterior door has one camera facing the doorway and another direction. If anyone is to break in at night, there are infrared capabilities. You're going to be able to track that person on camera," said Haluska.

At 8:30 a.m. each morning, the exterior doors to the building are locked, with the exception of the front door, which funnels visitors into the office.

Haluska said the school's new tornado-safe spaces, comprised of both locker rooms, the locker room hallway and weight room, hold a capacity of 1,200 people and are built to withstand an F-5 tornado.

Technology

Haluska said the level of technology and the degree to which the building is wired is going to allow the District to make a variety of technological upgrades which will last for some time.

"The use of fiber optics should be able to carry our telephone, computer and TV technology for many years," said Haluska.

He said the school will have the "technology backbone" and hardware to allow for every individual in the building to have his or her own wireless device.

He said he can foresee a time when instead of carrying 40-lb. backpacks, students will have all of their textbooks digitally loaded on a wireless device.

"That's why it was so important for us to have the infrastructure in place to allow that," said Haluska.

He also mentioned the upgrading of technology in the ICN (Iowa Communications Network) room, which is located at the front of the school and can be locked off from the rest of the building.

"It's used by the public for anything from continuing education for nurses and realtors to court cases, professional training, video conferencing and remote teaching opportunities.

"There are also times when you have a small school that doesn't offer calculus on an annual basis, and we could easily offer calculus courses, which could be purchased by other schools," he said.

Life skills

Another classroom which has been upgraded significantly to benefit a greater number of students is life skills.

The state-of-the-art area includes a functioning kitchen and washer and dryer.

Haluska said these will enhance students' abilities to learn the skills they need to be independent in so-

ciety.

"We have the opportunity to provide that education in a way we simply didn't before," said Haluska.

Other advantages

Haluska said additional improvements include separate orchestra and vocal rooms, 35 additional parking spaces, a greenhouse and more.

With regard to the décor, Haluska said "We wanted to be sure we created a building that was, in a sense, timeless, so we went with neutral color schemes and earth tones."

Haluska said in addition, they worked with HON Manufacturing in Muscatine to purchase furniture for students and teachers that came with a lifetime warranty.

He said all of the contractors and subcontractors were outstanding to work with.

"Larson's (the general contractor from Independence) will be the first to tell you this has gone as smoothly as any job they've done of this size," said Haluska.

Local contractors on the project include Perry Novak Electric, Berg Construction, Storey Kenworthy, Casper Plumbing and Heating, Calmar Manufacturing, Roger's Lock and Key, Singing Hammers Construction, Voltmer Electric and LB Masonry.

Other contractors on the project include: Midwest Glazing of Grimes; Pro-Foamers, Inc. of Green Bay, Wis.; Service Roofing Co. of Waterloo, SGH of Urbandale; La Crosse Overhead Doors of La Crosse, Wis.; E.J. Terrazzo and Tile, Inc. of Glidden; Commercial Flooring Co. of Dubuque; BK Tile Inc. of Cedar Falls; ASI of Grinnell; Wenger of Owatonna, Minn.; Jones Library Sales of Carlisle; Sports Con of St. Louis, Mo.; Daktronics of Brookings, S.D.; Holland Contracting of Forest City; Seating and Athletic Facility Enterprises, LLC of Ellendale, Minn.; Custom Enterprises of Burnsville, Minn.; Nexus Corporation of Northglenn, Colo.; Lane-Aire Manufacturing Corp. of Carson, Calif.; Doors Inc. of Swaledale; Newline of Plano, Texas; EPCO of Council Bluffs; Alpar of Minneapolis, Minn.; Medina Construction Sales, Inc. of Medina, Minn.; Johnson Specialty Sales of Des Moines; Huntco Supply LLC of Portland, Ore.; and Midwest Automatic Fire Sprinkler of Des Moines.

"Thank you to all of the contractors and to all of our patrons," he said.

"We talk about Decorah being such an outstanding community. Our patrons really were willing to put their money on the line," said Haluska.

Continued from front page



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Clockwise from top left: A new computer lab; the weight room; the newly revamped main entrance; a view into the new commons area/lunchroom; one of the locker rooms that can serve as a tornado-safe room, built to withstand an F-5 tornado. (Photos by Rick Fromm and Lissa Blake)

