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Out with the old, (almost) in with the new

Wet early summer puts Lutheran High music center debut on hold

By Helen Clarke
Herald Times Reporter

MANITOWOC — Manitowoc Lutheran High School is back in session this week, but not a student is in sight inside the newly constructed music center.

Instead, the halls and classrooms of the west side parochial school's newest addition are filled with fans and construction workers, diligently working to reduce the moisture in the floors and walls so paint can be applied and tile can be laid. The 10,000-square-foot facility was expected to open its doors at the start of this school year, but was pushed back about a month thanks to a wet early summer.

"We just have to wait a little longer," Principal Dennis Steinbrenner said Monday, offering nothing but optimism on the state of his school's most recent upgrade. "There are plenty of other things in the world to stress about."

"It's a good lesson in patience," added Development Director Scott Reinhard. "By Thanksgiving, it all will be a memory."

Still, this act of God — or perhaps Mother Nature — has put a bit of a cramp in the back-to-school atmosphere at Lutheran. The institution will serve 206 students this school year — about two-thirds of whom will participate in a music program. And for the next month or so, all of those kids will be shuffling elsewhere for practice space.

"They can rehearse in the gym, the commons or the front lawn," Steinbrenner said.

"Maybe serenade the neighbors."

Adapting to different work environments is a tactic most Lutheran musicians have mastered in the past.

In fact, it is precisely that, which made the music center addition such a necessary element of the school's greater master plan.

As recently as last year, the four choirs at MLHS were rehearsing in the building's original 1966 band room — a 3,000-square-foot space that met less than 50 percent of commonly accepted minimum band room standards, band director Randy Kramer said last September. At its fullest, it held 70 concert choir students. Band students routinely set up their stands and instruments on the school stage for rehearsal.

"The music department has been used to practicing in different spots for at least 10 years now," choir teacher Joel Ungemach said. "The students realize how big of a blessing this is for us."

The final cost of this project is roughly \$2.25 million. The music center includes two large rehearsal

rooms for band and choir, several practice rooms for individuals and ensembles, and sufficient storage space for robes and instruments.

Also included in this project was replacement of the main water feed, creating a centralized computer hub and upgrading the HVAC system in the addition.

"It definitely exceeds my expectations," Ungemach said of the "state of the art" addition. "It's exactly what we need, and then some."

The building also was created with environmentalism and efficiency in mind.

Towering windows in the practice rooms were designed to offset energy costs by providing natural light and heat.

The interior walls in those rooms were bowed for acoustic value.

The HVAC equipment was installed inside — a more costly move, but one that will be more efficient for workers in the long run. A reflective, aluminized roof surface was installed to cool the roof.

"We want to make sure that the footprint we leave now is one that is responsible for the future," Reinhard said. "We are so much more prepared to continue moving forward."

The music center project is being funded completely by voluntary gifts. A total of \$2 million in gifts and pledges has been committed to the project, Reinhard said, including a \$1 million donation by an individual who asked to remain anonymous.

Appeals were conducted to the 11,000 members of the 23 congregations in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod federation, as well as to 3,000 alumni.

Lutheran High's master plan began eight years ago and most visibly led to the 2004 construction of a \$1.3 million commons, which also allowed for study hall space to be turned into classrooms. In a similar "trickle-down effect," last year's music rooms now house the school's art department.

Future renovations and additions include improved technical education facilities, a new gymnasium, new locker rooms, the transformation of the existing gym into a chapelorium, and moving offices from the west to the north end of the building.

In the next 10 to 15 years, efforts could expand to include exterior athletic fields, security upgrades and general remodeling.

"I see the kids' excitement for what's to come," Ungemach said.

Added Reinhard: "It's neat having freshmen come in and seeing big things being done."

The official dedication of the music center will take place at 4 p.m. Nov. 2. For more information and updates on the project, visit www.mlhslancers.com.
