

## SCHOOLS: Some projects underway when school starts

*Continued from page 1*

School beyond the original scope of the project to repaint all of the classrooms — “basically a facelift for the whole interior of the school,” according to project manager Brett Hudson.

The SES bathrooms have been revamped — and long-undiscovered problems like unconnected floor traps and the like have been corrected.

While they are coming in below budget on many aspects of the projects, some are stretching beyond the schedule — mostly due to delays in receiving materials or permits. That is down to a burst of growth in construction.

“We’re seeing some pretty good growth right now,” said Sisters Superintendent Curt Scholl.

That means some projects are carrying on into the school year.

“We’re going to be installing windows (at SES) while kids are there,” Scholl said.

The new entryway at SES, designed for enhanced security, is near completion, but doors and windows and hardware are still being shipped to Sisters. That means completion on that project is delayed till about October 1 — a month behind schedule.

Construction of a redesigned entryway at Sisters High School — again for security purposes — has also been delayed.

“The doors are the huge delay on that one,” Hudson said. “We have elected not to even disrupt that area till we have the materials and then break ground and knock it out.”

That project is expected to start on about September 4, and run into November. Scholl notes that “we’re not

interrupting instruction” with the entryway work.

New speakers are enroute for the auditorium and the lighting system will be up and functioning for the start of the school year.

One project that has been under consideration with the availability of additional funds is the installation of a turf field at Reed Stadium. The price tag on that is estimated at roughly \$750,000. That’s been tabled for now.

“We’ve delayed those discussions as a board,” Scholl said. “(We) wanted to make sure we’re going to execute on everything we promised.”

Hudson notes that “most of the work is behind the walls at the high school.” That includes getting a problem-plagued and controversial roof in decent condition. Repairs and improvised design tweaks should make the roof last through its originally designed lifespan.

“That was the goal — to get us to the 20-year marker,” said Scholl. “And (the repairs) should do that.”

Hudson noted that there are funds budgeted for further repairs as needed.

Improvements at Sisters Elementary School are more visible. Other work that goes beyond the original scope of bond projects includes the addition of a staff bathroom (there had previously been only one), a quadrupling of the drop-off area at the school and a replacement of playground equipment instead of simply repairing what existed.

All of that is funded through cost savings.

Wilkins noted that the kids at SES participated in the selection of their playground equipment, giving them a sense of ownership.

All three men noted that the district’s IT chief Todd Pilch did a great deal of work to reduce the cost of IT improvements in the district office and at the school buildings, resulting in considerable

savings.

The district has enjoyed good financial fortune since voters approved the \$10.7 million bond in November 2014. The district caught what Wilkins describes as a “tailwind” in selling the bonds, earning additional money to the tune of nearly \$1 million from “favorable market timing.”

That will allow the district to establish a significant reserve fund to take care of maintenance going forward so that it doesn’t run into the deferred maintenance trap that has plagued the schools for many years.

The district is also the beneficiary of a windfall from a \$4 million state matching grant — one the school board had pretty much given up on during the bond campaign. The grant pool was based on need — which put Sisters at the bottom of the list based on demographics — and a lottery for those that did not qualify on a needs basis.

Fortunately for Sisters, several districts that were ahead of Sisters in the lottery did not pass their bonds and thus fell out of the running for matching funds. Sisters moved up the list — as did other schools that succeeded at the ballot box.

The Sisters School Board approved tapping into the grant funds to fund construction of a new bus



PHOTO PROVIDED

School officials toured Sisters’ facilities to get a look at bond-funded projects that have been recently completed or are still underway.

barn/shop near the high school. The new facility will serve a number of purposes: improving maintenance facilities for the district’s buses and providing easy access and shop facilities for high school CTE (Career Technical Education) students to work and take classes in.

About \$2.5 million of those funds currently remain unallocated. Wilkins said that the district wants to initiate a process involving stakeholders from the schools to the broader community to determine what projects those funds should contribute to.

Sisters Middle School hasn’t seen much work — yet. Remodeling for enhanced security at Sisters Middle School is extensive enough to be disruptive to staff, so it will be undertaken

during Phase 3 in the summer of 2018, when the impact can be managed and minimized. Hudson anticipates continued savings and efficiency in that phase.

“I’m really happy where we’re heading with Phase 3,” Hudson said. “I’m a lot more optimistic in terms of the building climate.”

He believes the work planned there will “bring (SMS) back to a 60-year building.”

Scholl is anticipating looking at eventually moving the elementary school out to the west end of town, along with the middle and high school. But the high school and middle school need to last for decades — Hudson says they will.

“Overall, they’ve got good bones to ‘em,” he said.

*Great hair doesn't happen by chance. It happens by appointment.*

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