

'A great day for Seaside!'

Community enjoys celebration of new campus

By R.J. Marx
Cannon Beach Gazette

Visitors flocked to the Heights Elementary School in Seaside Saturday, Sept. 15, for a groundbreaking and celebration of the new campus construction project.

"What a great day for Seaside!" State Sen. Betsy Johnson said. "You guys have laid down an example not only for this town, but Clatsop County and this state in preparedness and visionary determination to bring this to a conclusion. Today's the start. We'll be back when we open the doors and cut the ribbon."

Johnson, U.S. Rep. Suzanne Bonamici, Seaside Mayor Jay Barber and others received welcome from Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley in the public groundbreaking for the project, designed to move endangered schools out of the tsunami inundation zone and to a safe site in the Southeast Hills.



PHOTOS BY R.J. MARX

Seaside School District Sheila Roley at the groundbreaking for the new campus. From left, in rear, Mark Truax, Dan Hess, Suzanne Bonamici, Betsy Johnson and Jay Barber.

"A community that cares for its children is where I want to live," Barber said. "And this is a testament of how we care for our children."

Representatives of the design and construction team, BRIC Architecture, Hoffman Construction and project managers DAY/CPM joined the event and hosted equipment tours.

Everything is falling into place, according to architect Dan Hess.

"We've spent so many years on these plans and now it's coming into place," Hess said. The steep site and soils

make it "technically challenging, but nothing insurmountable."

Project Manager Jim Henry agreed that this was a "challenging project."

"There are a lot of things that happen on a day-to-day basis, and it's important to have a great team," Henry said.

Former school district Superintendent Doug Dougherty received credit from speakers including Roley and school board member Mark Truax for Dougherty's nearly two decades of advocacy for the relocation.



Access to the construction site for visitors at the school district's public groundbreaking.

After an initial \$128 million bond was defeated in 2013, voters approved \$99.7 million for a revised plan in November 2016.

The campus will bring students from three schools located in the tsunami inundation zone to the new location on 89 acres just southeast of Seaside Heights Elementary School.

A new two-story building will house middle and high school students.

Gearhart Elementary School students will attend a renovated and expanded Seaside Heights.

Bonomici recounted her own advocacy for the new schools, inspired by a student-produced video demon-

strated that students didn't have enough time to evacuate to safer, higher ground in case of an earthquake and subsequent tsunami. The video prompted Bonamici to support the efforts of students, staff and community.

"I early on understood the need to move this to safer higher ground," Bonamici said. "It's all about these kids in school and the kids in school for generations to come."

Shovels hit the ground in June with grading, clearing, excavation and erosion control.

Phil Broome of Hoffman Construction said the project was making good headway and "we should be on target."

The opening for the new campus is scheduled for 2020.

Academy welcomes the school year

Academy from Page 1A

Leticia Campos, who teaches Spanish, is "thrilled we're going to have Spanish five days a week," in addition to a new Spanish curriculum. Her goal is for students to know short phrases, as well as sets of words like the months of the year and days of the week, by the end of the year. Introducing the students to a second language at a younger age, and giving them more practice, makes it easier for them to absorb the information and learn the language.

"I'm really happy the parents in the community are very visionary, you could say, toward their children's education," Campos said. "From what I've seen from last year and what I'm seeing this year, it's a wonderful community."

Building blocks

Dawn Jay and Ryan Hull, who teach the kindergarten through first-grade class and second- through third-grade class, respectively, are also looking forward to potential developments in their areas of instruction.

During the first week, the school conducts placement tests for all students that are precise and show to what level the students have mastered the material. Hull described the academy's program as "very much like steps in a house."

"You have to accomplish the first step to get to the next

step," he said. "And if you have holes, you fall through. So if a child has not mastered the material, we remediate and retest."

They also are introducing the students to a new program called Rocket Math, a curriculum that teaches math fact and math fluency. Hull used the curriculum for about a decade while teaching in Portland. If implemented properly, he said, it takes only 15 minutes per day, but it keeps students actively engaged during that time and allows each one to advance at an individualized pace.

"When they meet their mark, they get to the next step," he said. "No one gets frustrated that it's too hard, no one gets frustrated that it's too easy. It's right at their own pace, so it pushes them, but it keeps them busy."

Jay, who taught only kindergartens last year, is looking forward to her young students growing and learning. She feels confident about the team assembled by the academy and the cohesive environment they provide.

"We work well together and we have each other's back," she said.

A different option

As the academy moves forward, the board and administration are looking at ways to increase enrollment, as well as draw in more volunteers.

Each class is capped at a maximum of 25 students, but with the current attendance levels, there is room to grow while still maintaining small-group instruction.

"I love small groups and small class sizes, but we need to get our enrollment up," Frederickson said. "Even with 25, if we had full classes, that's smaller than many of the other schools in the area."

She added, "It provides a more well-rounded social interaction for students when there are more kids their age around."

Last year, the academy had grant money to advertise on a billboard at the southern end of Seaside, and that was successful, Dewey said. They also focus on maintaining a strong social media presence and promoting their events and activities through newspapers and other media. Some people remain unaware the

charter school is tuition-free and offers free breakfasts and lunches to students regardless of income, so the school is trying to clear up that confusion, Dewey said.

Jay and Hull feel they also have a role to play as teachers in promoting the academy through word of mouth, especially because it's located in a small community.

"I think it's vitally important for us to always be talking and being ambassadors for the school," Hull said. "Being a public charter school, we have a different option than what you'd get at a traditional public school, and we're proud of that."

Because of small class sizes and the ability of teachers to assume supportive responsibilities — such as providing technological assistance or lunch duty when they lack volunteers — in addition to instruction, the students get to experience consistency and closeness.

"I think it's beneficial for the kids to have that environment constant," Hull said. "That connectivity of proximity, that togetherness, is a huge benefit."



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