

Umatilla School District shows renovations funded by bond

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

The students at Clara Brownell Middle School can see more clearly since a \$10.5 million 2016 school bond funded the construction of new double-pane tinted windows in classrooms, and much more for the school district.

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe was pleased with the additions to the school.

"The windows are nice," Sipe said. "Everything else is just what we needed."

Sipe led a tour of the school Friday, presenting the newly refurbished facilities to the public.

The Oregon Energy Trust conducted studies during the remodeling process, which allowed the district to see the long-term projected costs of renovations.

The studies focused on incorporating energy reduction and environmental protection into the new facilities. The process earned the district almost \$70,000 in rebates, which were presented at a check signing and dinner on Friday evening.

The rebates, Sipe said, will in part go toward fixing the air conditioning unit at Umatilla High School, which gave out just days before graduation.

McNary Heights Elementary, CBMS and UHS all received updated security systems, and updated HVAC systems with direct digital controls as part of the bond. MHES also received a new standalone gymnasium, complete with solar panels.

The majority of the changes, however, can be seen at Clara Brownell.

The basis for the reconstruction came from a privately contracted report from the Wenaha Group, a Pendleton-based project management and consulting firm that specializes in education, tribal, public agency and health care projects. The report concluded, ultimately, that while Umatilla High School and McNary Elementary schools were in "fair" or "good" condition, Clara Brownell Middle School was in "poor" condition and required major renovations or replacement.

The doors and windows,



Staff Photos by Jessica Pollard

Above, the gym at CBMS was recently refurbished as part of \$10.5 million bond project. Below, the hallways in CBMS now display the outlines of the Umatilla River.



have been replaced to provide better natural light and insulation.

The plumbing and heating systems called for a revamp.

After digging through 6 inches of concrete to reach the plumbing system at CBMS, the school has been reoutfitted. Students will now have regular hand-washing sinks in the bathrooms, which are replacing foot pump troughs.

The chimney on CBMS, which served as a landmark in some ways, according to Sipe, was taken down due to seismic concerns.

Other upgrades funded by the bond include new sound-reducing rubber flooring in classrooms, and hallway floors painted to look like the confluence of the Umatilla River.

The bond was the first passed in the district since 1998 when Umatilla High School was constructed.

In 2006, a \$6.5 million bond was proposed to help construct a new Clara Brownell school building. The bond was defeated 510-436.

In 2008, another bond was proposed which would help alleviate overcrowding at McNary Elementary School by building 14 new classrooms as well as four modular classrooms at Clara Brownell.

The potential to pass the bond seemed promising when 46% of voters claimed they would "fully or somewhat" support a school bond that May.

But, due to what Sipe thinks were economic stressors caused by job layoffs, the bond failed. The district forged onward with the renovations, using \$2.2 million in district funds.

"This time we knew not to ask for any more," Sipe said.

As Sipe walked the tour out from the CBMS cafeteria Friday afternoon, she pointed out to a patch of ceiling they couldn't afford to repair during renovations.

Twenty or so years from now, Sipe hopes that another bond could pass. This time, possibly to aid the construction of a K-2 building on a plot of land owned by the school district on South Hill.

Kicking and cattle ranching

New Hermiston graduate has a head start on chosen career

By JESSICA POLLARD
STAFF WRITER

Emilio Leal recently signed his letter of intent to play soccer at Walla Walla Community College in the coming fall. But fancy footwork is not the only trick up the recent Hermiston High School graduate's sleeve.

In fact, earlier in the day, before the Hermiston Herald came by to interview him, Leal had hopped on his horse Lucero to rope his neighbor's cow, which had jumped a neighboring fence.

"It's a Texas Longhorn, they're more wild," he said.

At 18 years old, Leal himself is the owner of 16 head of Angus cattle on his family's property in Hermiston. His neighbor, whom he fondly refers to as Grandpa, helped to pave the way.

When he was younger, Leal longed to be a veterinarian. After much thought, cattle ranching won his heart over.

"There's always something going wrong," he said. "We have to readjust, rethink, and solve the problem. I like the thrill of it."

He hopes he will be able to learn a lot about animals by continuing his ranch.

Leal will study business and agriculture this fall in hopes of one day expanding his cattle operation. He will be the first person in his family to attend college. After gaining his associates degree, he plans to go on to a four-year university.

"I never had the help that most kids have, [which] pushed me to get into it myself," Leal said. "This is all new for me and my parents. As much help as they can give me, they're right there."

A soccer scholarship will help cover some of the tuition next year.

Leal has been playing



Staff Photo by Jessica Pollard

Emilio Leal stands near his neighbor's steer.

soccer since he was 4 years old. He's known cows for a long time too.

"It got to the point where I grew up with them," he said. In his youth, his father would buy two new cows for Leal every year. The deal was, if he fed the cows every morning and night, one day they would be his.

Day in and day out, Leal rose early before school to tend to the cattle. He rushed home afterwards to feed them before sunset. By middle school, caring for the cows became more of a real job.

"The wintertime [was] hard because it usually got dark at 4:30. School got out at 3:25 and I had to hurry home," he remembers.

By age 16, the cattle were fully in his possession and he could start buying and selling steer.

It was a lot of work, but some of growing up was fun and games. He and his father would ride horses around the neighborhood during the summer.

Emilio remembers riding his horse to the corner store to get a soda, tying him up to a post like one might a puppy.

In the summer, the cattle require less attention, which leaves room for some much needed socializing. When he's feeling persuasive, Emilio has his friends come up to the farm to help out.

"It's usually lifting bales of hay," he said.

Emilio says his dad, who passed away last year, played a large part in his success as a soccer player and cattle rancher. He encouraged Emilio never to skip a practice, and to enjoy the wild ride that is raising cattle.

"Homework was always a hard thing. I'd come home and my dad would always have something for us to do," Emilio said.

But he graduated with a scholarship, and a "program completion" in marketing.

He will miss the tight familiarity of his soccer team, and happily recalls the three-hour road trips they used to take together to get to tournaments, back before Hermiston High School joined the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association.

He's ready, however, for his soccer team next year.

"Now it's at a point where you really have to work for a position," Emilio said. He's excited to live with a friend in Walla Walla during college, and to come back on the weekends, when he will continue to care for his cattle.

"I always keep forward. I'm going forward," Emilio said. "In soccer, my dad has always said the exact same thing: 'Don't go back! Go forward.' No matter what happens, keep chugging."

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