

Sparwood School's strong roots help it grow toward the future

By Dawn M. Barker

Sparwood Secondary School's motto, "Sempur Sursum" ("Going Forward") is one that the school is truly living up to these days, thanks to an \$18.4 million dollar commitment by the provincial government.

The school in the regional division of East Kootenay is undergoing a major revitalization, including total demolition of the existing school and its replacement with an energy efficient, modern structure which will serve the community for decades to come.

It had been apparent for years that while it provided an essential service and quality education, the old school, built in 1954, required a great deal of maintenance and wasn't as energy efficient as it should have been. It was time for a change.

School division Secretary Treasurer Rob Norum said that during the auditing and planning stages, certain important factors were kept in mind.

"We wanted to be able to maintain kindergarten through



grade 12 education in the community of Sparwood," he said.

"We do have the communities of Elkford and Fernie within a 25 kilometre radius of Sparwood, and both have secondary schools as well, but we wanted to retain the secondary school here."

Norum said that the community and the school staff and students have been very supportive and positive throughout the project to date.

"We did get out to speak with various community members and the staff during the planning stage, and various models for the school were brought forward, such as a K-12 model. We finally settled on changing the (current) grade eight to 12 to include grade seven. There are also two elementary schools in town, one of which is slated for closure in 2008 when the new school opens."

Norum noted that project coordinator Fred Lightfoot has been working with the division to ensure that good value is obtained for money spent.



The \$16 million construction contract with winning bidder Vector Projects was signed in November, 2006, but unseasonably heavy snowfall delayed the construction for six weeks. Robert Roy of Vector Projects said that the delay, while frustrating, won't hold up the project too much.

"It does make it challenging to meet or beat the schedule, but the project completion date has been fairly flexible. We started with the foundations in mid February, and we're proceeding on. At this point, the foundations are about two-thirds completed, and quite a bit of the site preparation and excavation is done," he said.

Roy estimated that there are between 15 and 20 workers onsite at present, including the subcontractors in charge of mechanical, civil and concrete areas, but when it gets into full swing in the coming months, there will be between 40 and 70 workers there.

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Gracom Masonry is looking forward to supplying the school with its exterior cladding. Brian Magowan of Gracom said about half the exterior will be treated this way, and that it's an excellent choice for a school division to make.

"It's nice to see masonry cladding used, since it's a low maintenance, high durability product. I'm sure that they'll be happy with the end result. It's a pleasure to be able to take part in a project like this," he said.

Although the school wasn't yet at the structural steel stage when this article was written, all the material was on hand. Dave Weinstein, of Warnaar Steel Tech Ltd., said it was ready and waiting for the footings to be complete.

"With the amount of steel going into this school, I'd say it will be there for a long time," he said.

Technological advances have made a great change in the construction industry. Roy said that computers on site create efficiencies unheard of two decades ago.

"Now the superintendent on site can take digital photos when issues arise, and send them by email to the architect to resolve any problems. It's quicker, and more cost efficient," he said.

"Job costing and staff timesheets can be sent on the Internet rather than by weekly courier, and surveying equipment is far more advanced. The equipment is much more efficient, right down to quality control testing methods. Overall, it improves the project and the end result."

Norum said that the division is very happy with Vector Projects thus far.



"They've been great so far – really topnotch to work with."

The new school will feature a gymnasium, energy efficiency, ample natural lighting and tasteful, modern design.

One wing of the old school containing six unused classrooms was demolished to facilitate the construction, but aside from that, the school has been operating as usual during the construction project.

Principal Jason Tichauer said that the staff has been keeping an eye on progress, and that both staff and students are looking forward to walking into the school once it's completed.

"There will be more student areas, a great multipurpose room, and it will be bright and new," he said.

In a November 2006 press release, board chairperson Keith Nielsen called the project "a positive step forward for

education in the community".

Norum agrees, saying, "We're always excited to replace an older facility. There are more opportunities to gain efficiencies and improve the quality of life for students in the division. Everything will be modernized. The air quality will be better, and there are advantages in energy saving opportunities too. It's a great project."

Other SICA members who are proud to take part in this project include MQN Architects (planning), Cranbrook Interior Woodwork (architectural millwork), Grayhawk Industries Ltd. (poly insulation), Heritage Roofing & Sheet Metal (roofing and sheet metal), Sunco Drywall Ltd (drywall, steel studs and A/C), Cranbrook Flooring 1999 Ltd. (carpet and flooring), Décor 8 Painting (1990) Ltd. (painting), and Strathcona Mechanical Ltd. (mechanical). ♦

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