

Construction zone greets STHS students on first day of school

By Kathryn Reed

It felt more like going to a construction site than school for students and staff at South Tahoe High School on the first day of school.

The campus on Sept. 8 looked a whole lot different compared to when everyone left for summer break in June. Building is under way, big equipment is everywhere and the sounds are not the usual quiet of Gardner Mountain.

A senior prank ended up being costly. A couple students put "2010" in chalk and mustard on the new concrete. The oil in the mustard stained the concrete.

"It was almost all cleaned up. The rest will be (today) by Leadership," student body President David Stewart told the school board Tuesday night.

Steve Morales, district facilities director, said seeing the "prank" was a heart stopper. But, he added, it's not permanent and they know who did it.

The career tech building that is under construction at the top of Viking Way has taken out a swath of parking places. Not all students have a spot. Those getting first priority are seniors who had good attendance records last year.

Auto shop, construction, architectural design and art will be taught there.

On the other side of campus by the tennis courts is a two-story, 15-room building under construction. Math, environmental science and ROP will be housed there.

Both buildings should be ready for use in the 2010-11 school year.

The tennis courts will be used in the winter to stage equipment. The district promises the courts will be repaired and resurfaced when construction is complete. Look for that to happen in June-July 2010.

Only one play will be performed at the school this year because the little theater is likely to be gutted in early 2010.

The district is using part of the \$64.5 million bond that voters approved in November 2008 to build the new facilities.

This summer Lake Tahoe Unified School District learned it was awarded a \$4 million joint-use grant for STHS. The school will erect a student union and classrooms, while the city of South Lake Tahoe can use the second floor for meeting space.

Lake Tahoe Unified walked away with one-third of the money the state allocated for joint-use grant dollars. November's bond had \$3.5 million allocated for a one-story building, so the grant allows a larger, multidimensional structure.

The district is at the top of the waiting list for a \$10 million interest free bond that is part of the federal stimulus package. Word could come this month if the dollars are rolling to Tahoe. The money would be used as a bridge to keep the construction project on track while the state continues to delay the matching money it owes the district.

"I have no doubt we'll get funded," Deb Yates, district CFO, told the board.

The 15-year bond is principal only. The idea is if the feds award LTUSD the bond, it will be paid back with what the state

owes the district. Part of the federal criteria is to show the project is ready to go “ something the district has no trouble proving.

It would also save taxpayers \$35 million in interest payments because it means \$10 million less in general obligation bonds.

Word from the state is that \$6 million of the \$15 million it owes LTUSD in grants could come this month for career tech education.

The first day was less dramatic at other school sites. There were the usual tears from the little ones. It seemed to be a bit of a fashion show at all levels.

Enrollment figures on the first day indicate there will be plenty of students to use the new facilities.

The kindergartners, or class of 2022, total 342 students. Previous kindergarten classes were in the 285 range. Tahoe Valley Elementary will hire another teacher because the numbers are higher than expected.

Overall, elementary enrollment was 1,712 on day one compared to 1,708 on June 12.

At South Tahoe Middle School, enrollment was expected to drop by 40, but on day one it was down 56. South Tahoe High is expected to lose 30-50 students from last year.

Jim Watson, director of human resources, said he is encouraged by the numbers because usually the district adds students after the first few days.

photos by Kathryn Reed