

STHS high-tech theater arts building to open in August

By Kathryn Reed

It's the best theater on the South Shore.

That was the overriding sentiment heard Wednesday night as members of the Measure G Bond Oversight Committee toured the Theatre Arts and Design Academy that will welcome students in August at the start of the next school year.

Also overheard were comments from committee members being happy either their children or grandchildren would be going to South Tahoe High School one day – to experience the facilities and programs.



The Theater Arts and Design Academy is changing the look of South Tahoe High School. Photos/Kathryn Reed

While the seating at the theater is slightly less than the old theater (350 vs. 265), everything else about it makes it look like a metropolitan performing arts center – albeit scaled

down.

Eliminating seating had to happen to accommodate use by disabled people, improving visibility and making the necessary acoustical enhancements.

A spiral staircase is to the audience's left – which could be incorporated into a production or just be used to access the rafters for lighting needs. What looks like bed springs have give to them to eliminate noise from the production crew walking overhead during a performance.

The 28,000-square-foot building is one of several being built at South Tahoe High School as a result of the voter-approved \$64.5 million facilities bond (known as Measure G) and subsequent state matching grant dollars totaling \$32 million.

While the whole sum is not being spent on the high school, the bulk is – \$44 million.

The Stadium View building opened this school year, while the Construction, Arts and Transportation Academy opened in April 2010. More are still to come.

Steve Morales, facilities director for Lake Tahoe Unified School District, said the final touches on the TADA building would be made this month, with staff being trained in July and students occupying it starting Aug. 29. Seats in the theater will arrive about June 20.

“This is the hardest one-story building I’ve ever built,” Joe Stewart of SMC Contracting told *Lake Tahoe News*. “I doubt I’ll ever build something like this again.”

It’s all the small details and abundance of technology that made it more intricate than the average classroom. Subtleties like installing oversized doors facing the CAT building so theater sets can be brought in were not left out.

About 17,000-square-feet of the original performing arts

building was used, with 11,000-square-feet being new.

“If we don’t do this, we lose this generation,” Angela Swanson said walking from one high-tech room to the next. She was on the school board when Measure G was passed and is now a consultant helping continue to secure grants for LTUSD.

What she was speaking about is all the high-tech components incorporated into this building.

Morales said they like to call it a mini Pixar Studios.

Some of the doors are so heavy one needs to be in good shape to open them. This is all about the acoustics.

There are multiple walls to deal with acoustics, too. One might be a structural fire-rating wall, with a wall on either side to keep noise from the outside out.

“There is acoustic treatment in every room. Some are higher than others,” Morales said in the TV studio. No echo could be heard. It was like a flat, true sound of his voice resonated, or rather didn’t resonate.

Principal Ivone Larson said much of the design concept is the result of years of trips to Hollywood by students and staff to learn about jobs in Hollywood.

“Everything you see today is a replica of actual studios,” Larson said.

The whole idea is students will be ready for a job when they graduate high school. With the No. 1 industry in California being entertainment, STHS is equipped the mold the next crop of creative geniuses.

“We have rooms that reflect the programs. You don’t often have that,” Superintendent Jim Tarwater said as he tagged along on the tour that revealed sound rooms, editing areas, a TV studio, music room, media lab, sound mixing area and more.

LTUSD is reaching to the lower grades to get them on a career path that ties into the high school and might lead them to Lake Tahoe Community College. There are 11 areas where the district wants to link South Tahoe Middle School to South Tahoe High.

Digital arts will be one of the first electives for eighth-graders. Culinary arts is another area.

While the TADA building is nearing completion, work on the Blue and Gold gym next to it has started with the removal of asbestos. SMC should be able to start its work on it Saturday.

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