Folkman: Daniel High was greatest challenge

BY NORMAN CANNADA
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PICKENS — With about 18 months left in the School District of Pickens County's five-year, $374 million building program, Bob Folkman knows his work is not done, but he can also point to the day when he began to breathe a little easier and sleep better.

"August 21 (2012)," said Folkman, operations and building program administrator for the school district. "That's the day we opened the new Daniel High School."

Folkman said the construction of Daniel was the biggest challenge of the Pickens County project, which includes four new high schools, two new elementary schools, a career center, as well as the renovations of more than 20 school buildings. More than 90 percent of the work is completed, and the remaining projects are scheduled to be done by June 30, 2014.

In fact, in his 39 years of building schools in North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, Folkman said the challenge of Daniel was more difficult than any other because of the tight timeline and the fact that the new school was being built while classes were still going on at the existing school on the same property.

"It was a lot of sleepless nights," Folkman said of the Daniel project. "It was so tight. If one thing had gone askew, it would have been embarrassing not to get it done. I had not been involved in anything of that magnitude with the downside of being a disaster like it could have been. I mean, we had no other place for the kids to go to school."

The work at Daniel included tearing down the old football stadium and building a new one, which meant the school had to play all of its football games away from home in 2010 and then had 8 regular-season home games in 2011. Between June 15 and Aug. 21, the old school had to be demolished and ready for the next year. The construction company worked around the clock to meet the deadline.

"We had to get the new stadium done as quickly as possible, because the new school was going on the footprint of the old stadium," he said. "It was a lot of work in a short time.

Overall, as he looks over the construction program, Folkman said he is pleased with what has been accomplished.

"The fact we've completed 92 percent of the building program in a little over three years is something I am proud of; I'm proud of what we've accomplished," said Folkman. "I look at what they have now as opposed to what we had when we started and I think all the students are better off. They're all happier to be where they are. There seems to be a better spirit in the high schools and middle schools overall."

He said he has learned some lessons in the process.

"Everybody wants something, but the district only has so much money," Folkman said. "You may want the moon, but you can only get California. All of us would like to drive a Lexus, but we can only afford a Buick.

"We've given it our best shot with the money they gave us," he added. "Now we have to maintain what we've built. As we get more funds, we can address areas we couldn't do before."

Folkman said he doesn't know what he will do when the current building program is completed in 2014.

"I've gotten to know and love a lot of people in this district and I think there is an opportunity for me to stay," he said. "I also know I love the construction industry. I still have a fire in my belly to see things start from zero and be completed."

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Bob Folkman, operations and building program administrator for the School District of Pickens County, said the construction of the new Daniel High School, seen behind him, was the most challenging project of the $374 million school building program.