School board members tour new Walhalla High

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

WALHALLA — Members of the Oconee County School Board recently donned hardhats and joined school district officials for a tour of the new Walhalla High School under construction on S.C. Highway 11.

Conducting the tour was maintenance director Richard Alexander, who took the board to the auditorium, science labs and computer room. Alexander also led the board to the balcony area of the auditorium, saying the overall seating capacity is 750.

"There's really not a bad seat in the house," Alexander said, adding the balcony is handicapped accessible.

The new school, which will open in August 2015, will feature 12 science labs — similar to Seneca and West-Oak high schools. A prep room will also be featured for every two labs.

Alexander said the new school will also feature four business labs, with two upstairs and two downstairs, and the ROTC will feature two classrooms.

Board members also viewed the completely enclosed courtyard area, similar to the one at Seneca, where students can access walking out of the lunchroom.

"It has some tables outside, and most students prefer eating outside when the weather is nice," Alexander said.

Alexander said a four-pipe system will help with heating and cooling for the school designed for up to 1,300 students. He also pointed out the facility has extra classroom space if needed in the future.

"That way, if a principal was to have a meeting, this is a place they could use," Alexander said. "We could put partition walls up later, and it would only take half a day to divide it into two rooms."

While there will be numerous activities at the school in the evenings, Alexander said unused portions of the building will be secured.

School Board Chairman Andy Inabinet said the new Walhalla High "is going to be a really nice facility."

"It's going to be quality, and the architect has done a great job of designing it, and this is something I feel the community and county can be proud of," Inabinet said. "It's a complete package with everything in it. I'm really proud of it and the way it's coming together. I think we're setting a standard for other schools as we build them in the future. The students deserve quality as much as anyone else, but it's not wasteful or elaborate."

Rosemary Bailes, who represents the Walhalla area on the school board, said she was impressed by the facility and how it is progressing during the construction process.

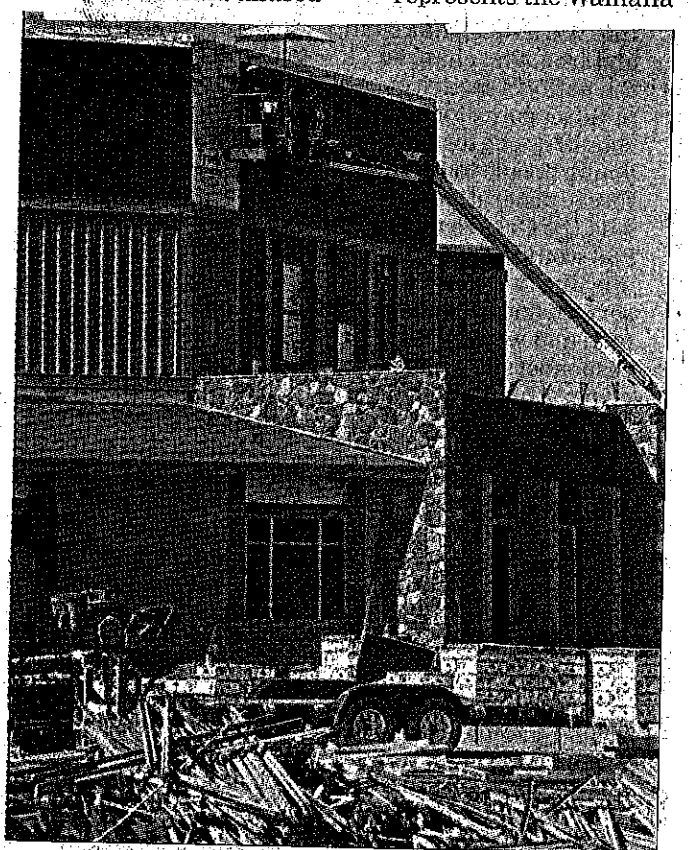
"I'm very happy about the fact we have a building that's going to be ultra-functional," Bailes said. "It's not elaborate, but very architecturally built and the students and faculty at Walhalla High have made do with what they've had for a number of years, such as the band room. But this is going to be good for them and for instruction."

Alexander told board members that athletic facilities on the site will be turned over to the district "within a month" while the football stadium will be ready for its first game next fall. He said the overall high school project "is ahead of schedule" and that the district could receive the keys to the building by May, if not sooner, so that the relocation process can begin.

Even though the Walhalla project is winding down, Alexander said he is already preparing for the next building projects in the additions at Fair-Oak Elementary School and Ravenel Elementary School.

"I'm just as excited about those – they're going to be great, great schools," Alexander said. "I have the best job in the school district. There's something new every day."

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The progress being made in construction of the new Walhalla High School that will be located on S.C. Highway 11 is visible even from a distance.