

NEWS

Room for the arts

P.K. Yonge's new auditorium set to be done in fall

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Later this year, students at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School will be singing solos, performing plays and making music in their new P.K. Yonge Fine Arts Center.

"We're very excited about it opening," said Sherwin Mackintosh, the director of the performing arts at P.K. Yonge. "It's a tremendous facility for band, chorus and drama."

The 500-seat fine arts center, expected to be completed in October, replaces the old auditorium that was built in 1957, said Frances Vandiver, the school's director.

It will be equipped with a drama and chorus practice room, a set shop to build sets for plays, a band room, a larger elementary teaching room, and state-of-the-art sound and lighting.

Construction began about a year ago on the 22,000-square-foot, 6.5 million auditorium.

"At many schools the auditorium is the heart of the school, where they (the students) can all be together," Mackintosh said.

But P.K. Yonge students haven't had an auditorium since 2000, when the old one was condemned and demolished.

"Nobody realized how much we used it until we didn't have it," Vandiver said.

She said the band meets in a double-portable classroom with a high ceiling, and the chorus meets in classrooms.

But drama students may appreciate the auditorium the most - they were forced to do one-scene productions in the library, Vandiver said.

All the band, choral and drama performances were held off campus for the past three years, usually at the University of Florida's University Auditorium.

Although the UF auditorium was nice, Vandiver said, it was still not P.K. Yonge.

Mackintosh said they expect to begin using the auditorium in November and have the grand opening ceremonies during the week of Dec. 8.

He said that during the school year, students expect to perform traditional music theater, like "Annie Get Your Gun"; classical theater, like Shakespearean plays; and contemporary theater, like Tennessee Williams' "A Streetcar Named Desire."

Phillip Porter said this is his first year as the band director, but he's already heard the students complain about the inconvenience of not having an auditorium.

He also said the classrooms will give them more room, storage space and opportunity to practice without having to leave the P.K. Yonge campus.

"Hopefully, we'll be able to take care of the building too, so it stays nice," Porter said.

Vandiver said that fine arts is integral for students because it provides balance to academics.

"It's the fine arts that defines the person and feeds the soul," she said.

