

Facelift, new additions at Farragut High School await returning students

Leslie Tucker - Thu, Jul, 29, 2004



In a FHS PTSO project three years in the making, Daniel Ismael of Acadia Landscape Company stacks blocks that will become a seating wall. In the background, Jim Vermillion of Best Window Cleaning works with a crew to shine the high school's front entrance. - Leslie Tucker/farragutpress

Hopefully students will be as fresh as their newly scrubbed schools when they return from summer vacation to start the 2004 - 05 school year.

Farragut High School received some improvements and changes above and beyond regular summer cleaning. One change is evident before entering the building. A new landscaping project is currently underway with completion scheduled before the start of school. Being built to the right of the front entrance around the flagpole are two walls, semi-circular in shape, that

double as seating — the main objective to the design of the project. Together, the walls are estimated to hold about 75 students.

Ellen Bundy, former PTSO president who spearheaded the project, said students lacked a gathering place outside and FHS needed a more appealing entrance. Students often stand in the grass, which Bundy said is causing erosion. The design will incorporate brick pavers laid in a pattern on the ground. It's a project more than three years in the making. After raising the needed funds and garnering donations, Bundy said she was "bound and determined" to see the project come to fruition. Some who helped contribute to what was dubbed the "flagpole fund," include former FHS principal Ed Hedgepeth and the graduating classes of 2003 and 2004.

Acadia is donating half of the labor costs and much of the materials came at a discount from Hardscapes owner Tim McManus. Bundy said additional companies contributed (more about this project in a future farragutpress issue) that made the project possible. Adding to the beautification project will be plantings including dogwoods, cherry trees and shrubs.

Upon a request of principal Mike Reynolds, the grounds around FHS also got a facelift. Bud McKelvey, Farragut public works director, donated a machine and an operator to help with the cleanup, trimming overgrown trees and shrubs.

McKelvey noted Reynolds' reputation as Fulton's principal. He was a "big advocate for cleaning up inside and out of Fulton," he said. "We're lucky to have him."

Lawrence Dixson agreed. He oversees the custodial work in 94 Knox County school facilities and said, "Fulton was a clean school." Dixson considered FHS a particularly challenging school to keep clean and maintained. The age and number of students make the difference. Farragut Primary and Middle, on the other hand, he said are cleaner schools. "At the middle school, when those kids leave for the summer, you could

almost start school the next day.”

Dixon will be working with the FHS custodial staff on a new cleaning system called, “teamwork.” FHS will be the first school in the county on this system. “We’re going to be the guinea pigs,” said Ken Fitts, FHS head custodian.

Jim French, supervisor of maintenance and operations for the schools system, said the team cleaning concept would not work for every school but he hopes to implement the system into the county’s high schools and middle schools.

Fitts supervises 11 staff to clean 230,000 square feet of school. “Add mobile classrooms to that. It keeps us busy,” he said.

Under the new system, custodians will work in teams, an already necessary method in cafeteria cleanup, which Fitts said is one of the hardest parts of his job. He is hoping to have new tables and chairs this year that will seat more students but also make the job more manageable. The chairs will be connected to the tables.

Currently, the cafeteria furniture is mismatched, much of it donated and not accommodating to the number of students eating lunch at one time, leaving some students to stretch out on the floor.

Fitts has been busy the past months with regular summer maintenance such as changing light bulbs, but also working on large projects like stripping and re-waxing floors, requiring the removal of the room’s furniture. Fitts and his crew must work around activities such as band camp when students break up into groups and spread into classrooms throughout FHS. Two Rivers Church, which uses FHS as a meeting facility, also sponsors church camp in the high school during the summer. Regardless, Fitts said, the school will be ready come August 12.

Jim Vermillion, owner of Best Window Cleaning, returned to FHS this summer to clean the inside and outside of the front entrance and gym windows. Vermillion used a crew of three, including himself, for the job, which took a day to complete.

The front sidewalks will be pressure washed to remove discarded gum peppering the walk.

Many Knox County schools received new carpet this year including FHS, where students and staff will find new carpet in the library, band room and choir rooms. The library also received all new shelving to replace shelves that had begun to sag under the weight of the books.

Some of the classes receiving new books this year are language arts, foreign language and health.

Perhaps the most significant addition at FHS is that of a new principal who will affect future improvements at FHS. Reynolds took over the reigns at FHS after Hedgepeth accepted a position in the Knox County central office. Reynolds began working almost immediately after accepting the top job. A former FHS economics and advanced placement history teacher, Reynolds is familiar with the campus and agrees something needs to be done to alleviate overcrowding, a challenge that will affect all aspects of FHS life.

He has some immediate plans for FHS including working to develop a business association with FHS alumni, as he did in North Knoxville with Fulton graduates. “We

need a strong endowment program," he added. Reynolds would also like to establish a PDS, professional development program. "One of my responsibilities is to teach educators to be professional educators," he said. "It's important for interns to know what's expected of them."

Reynolds also believes in keeping up with technology and wants to work on developing a long distance learning program. "Education is like technology," he said. "If you're not pushing forward you're getting behind. It's about giving kids more opportunities."