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New Sand Springs elementary embraces the arts

BY KEVIN CANFIELD World Staff Writer

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SAND SPRINGS - Anyone who knows Lloyd Snow knows he can talk.

Give him a beautiful new school set among rolling hills populated by prancing deer and the Sand Springs Schools superintendent will bend your ear to eternity.

And with good reason: Walking through Northwoods Fine Arts Academy, a visitor can't help but pause, again and again, to take in the multicolored mobiles hanging from the ceiling, the large video screens in the lobby and the curved stone walls covered with vivid vinyl images of leaves.

"Every school in America should have a facility like this with arts infused with the kinds of support staff and wrap-around services," we have, Lloyd said.

He was speaking from the entrance of the school, which sits on 45 acres at 81st West Avenue and the Old North Road.

Beginning Jan. 3, it will replace Central Elementary School at Roosevelt Avenue and Fourth Street downtown, which opened in 1945.

The school will serve 450 students from kindergarten through second grade, most of whom are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunches.

"Our kids don't get the same opportunities a lot of other kids do, so we are hoping this school will really generate a lot of pride and enthusiasm for school and the arts," said Jenny Chambers, principal of Central Elementary School.

The new school includes three pods - one for each grade - built around a public space that includes a gymnasium and cafeteria separated by a folding wall.

When the wall comes down, tables in the cafeteria can be reconfigured to provide seating for events in the gymnasium or on the gymnasium's stage.

Each of the 24 classrooms is equipped with a smart board and a front-row sound system that ensures that the teacher's voice reaches students' ears in the back row.

In keeping with the school's natural setting, each pod is named after a leaf, with matching vinyl images of the leaves covering the curved walls. Kindergartners do their learning in the Oak Leaf pod, first-graders in

the Maple Leaf pod and second-graders in the Red Bud pod.

And there is more.

"Most elementary schools, you're not going to have a cluster of classrooms with their own rest rooms, their own sitting area and their own work rooms," Snow said. "These are the gold standards in many ways."

Pat Keith, a principal with Kinslow, Keith and Todd, the architecture firm that designed the school, said it was one of his favorite projects to work on.

"One of the main things was to take advantage of the natural setting, the valley with the hillside around it," Keith said.

That will make a difference when the young students arrive next week, said second-grade teacher Glenda Richards.

"It just seems to calm everything down," Richards said. "You walk in the building, it's calm, soothing."

Lloyd speaks passionately of the district's goal of creating the best possible early childhood programs for its students and points to Northwoods Fine Arts Academy as the latest example of how the district is succeeding in that effort.

The \$14.5 million project was funded through a 2009 bond package approved by Sand Springs residents. In the last decade, voters have approved \$40 million in educational improvements, including the 2-year-old Early Childhood Center on 81st West Avenue.

Lloyd credits parents, teachers, community leaders and especially the district's school board with making it all happen.

"When it was show time, they said, 'Now let's build something,' " Lloyd said.

And build something they did.

Original Print Headline: A school to inspire

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Associated Images:



Sand Springs Superintendent Lloyd Snow pauses in one of the hallways of the new elementary school, Northwoods Fine Arts Academy, in Sand Springs. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World



A sculpture of a little girl reading greets visitors at the main entrance of Northwoods Fine Arts Academy. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World



Visitors chat inside Northwoods Fine Arts Academy in Sand Springs. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World



Kindergarten teacher Michele Smith prepares binders with help from her daughter Erin Smith, 8, in her classroom. JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World



Even an outside play area has some artistic appeal at the new Northwoods Fine Arts Academy in Sand Springs.
JAMES GIBBARD / Tulsa World

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