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Legislators are shown appreciation for supporting school project



The Dixie County High School Band performs the *Star-Spangled Banner* in the future gym.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Oct. 7, 2017 at 8:37 p.m.

CROSS CITY – The people of Dixie County through, their school system leaders, showed appreciation Wednesday (Oct. 4) to legislators who helped fund the final part of the future Dixie Middle High School.



Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas welcomes everyone to the Dixie County Middle-High School Legislative Appreciation event.

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Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas led the program and presented tokens of appreciation to the legislators. School Board Chairman Timothy W. “Tim” Alexander, Vice Chairman Paul Gainey, and members Crystal Bush, Charles “Chuck”



Farmer and Dwayne “Top” Rollison were in support of the short program.

Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas speaks with School Board Chairman Tim Alexander before the start of the event.

The project architect and manager is Paul Stresing Associates Inc.

Culpepper-Gray Construction Inc. is the project contractor, with Ryan Parker serving as the project manager.

Dixie County High School Band Director William Malloy led the band in performing the Star-Spangled Banner.

Held in the unfinished gymnasium, the environment provided an echo chamber for the music and speeches. Having the ceremony in the unfinished building reflects some of the true grit of the county and its representatives in the Florida Legislature.

Despite the less-than-ideal surroundings, the relatively short program went without a flaw.

Superintendent Thomas said it was through the overwhelming support of legislators that ensured Dixie County that the DCMHS project would be completed, through the \$8.9 million needed to finish it.

The show of public appreciation, Thomas said, reflects the gratitude of the people for what the legislators did for the staff, students and everyone in the community. The state leaders were each given a crystal apple as a memento of gratitude.

The DCMHS project is now scheduled for completion in spring of 2018 and that school is slated to be open for use in August of 2018, Thomas said.

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Rep. Chuck Clemons speaks about the project and funding.

The first person to be recognized by Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Thomas was State Rep. Charles Wesley "Chuck" Clemons Sr. (R-Newberry, Dist. 21).

Rep. Clemons was elected in 2016. His current committee assignments are as vice chair of Agriculture and Property Rights Subcommittee; and he is a member of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Appropriations Subcommittee; Commerce Committee; Insurance & Banking Subcommittee; and the Post-Secondary Education Subcommittee.

Putting this new project in perspective with history, Clemons said the celebration of the construction of the last section of Dixie County High School occurred when President Lyndon Baines Johnson (D-Texas) was in office.

President Johnson (Aug. 27, 1908 – Jan. 22, 1973), often referred to as "LBJ," was the 36th President of the United States. He held that office from 1963 to 1969.

This pending event of the new middle-high school is "a long time coming," Clemons said.

The unfinished school, Clemons said, "became an edifice of emptiness" and every time he would pass the construction that was not continuing, he wondered where did government fail the people to be like that.



Sen. Rob Bradley speaks about his colleagues.

Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Thomas next recognized State Sen. Robert "Rob" Bradley (R-Fleming Island, Dist. 5), who was elected in 2012.

Sen. Bradley's committee assignments are as

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chairman of Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development; chairman of the Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee; and he is a member of the Appropriations Committee; the Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education; the Banking and Insurance Committee; the Criminal Justice Committee; the Judiciary Committee; and the Rules Committee.

Sen. Bradley told the audience that the structure is being built to withstand hurricanes.

Bradley said when he saw the construction was stopped before it was completed, it broke his heart. He felt it did not make any sense to leave the construction project unfinished.

When Bradley saw that the people of Dixie County in 2016 had become part of the district of Florida that he serves, he was happy, he said, because Dixie County is a place where everyone stands for the National Anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Sen. Bradley said Sen. Bill Montford (D-Quincey, District 3) is his “favorite Democrat.”

“He (Sen. Montford) is always there when we need him for the kids,” Sen. Bradley said.

Montford’s committee assignments are chairman of Commerce and Tourism; vice chairman of Communications, Energy, and Public Utilities; and he is a member of the Appropriations Committee; the Appropriations Subcommittee on Pre-K – 12; the Education Committee; the Health Policy Committee; and the Rules Committee.



Sen. Bill Montford tells people why the leaders in Tallahassee can use Dixie County as a county that has an excellent school district.

Sen. Montford is the chief executive director of all 67 superintendents of schools, Superintendent Thomas said when he introduced him.

Montford has a very extensive background in public education, serving as a math teacher, an assistant principal and as a high school principal. As Superintendent

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Thomas went through Sen. Montford's long set of credentials in academia, he mentioned the state senator's previous 18-year stretch as a high school principal.

"Can you imagine anyone being a high school principal for 18 years?" Thomas asked the audience.

Sen. Montford said Superintendent Thomas is the third superintendent of schools in Dixie County that he has had the pleasure to work with.

Sen. Montford said Dixie County has such an excellent school system that the leaders in Tallahassee point to it and say this is how a rural county can have a great school district.

The total commitment of faculty, staff, parents and the community, Sen. Montford said, is what makes this county's school system excellent.

This is a "four-wheel drive concept," the senator said. This means that when students need help, people get in four-wheel drive trucks. They drive to the house and they say "We are here to help your child," Sen. Montford said.

Sen. Bradley asked to introduce Sen. Jack Latvala.

Sen. Bradley said the man who assured success for funding the completion of the DCMHS project was Sen. Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater, District 16). Sen. Latvala's committee assignments are as chairman of Appropriations; alternating chair of the Joint Legislative Budget Commission; and he is a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on the Environment and Natural Resources; the Commerce and Tourism Committee; the Environmental Preservation and Conservation Committee; and the Rules Committee.

Although Latvala's district covers Pinellas and Pasco counties, he owns a residence in Steinhatchee (Taylor County). He drives to Tallahassee and passes the construction site twice a week.

Sen. Bradley said Sen. Latvala told him that he is going to make sure the funding to complete construction goes through.



Sen. Jack Latvala helped assure the school project would be completed for the start of school in 2018.

Sen. Latvala said he is glad to

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have been among the legislators who helped assure the project was finished. He looks forward to seeing it open in August of 2018.

Thomas said he appreciates Sen. Latvala doing as he said he would do for Dixie County students. Everyone in Dixie County is thankful for the work of Sen. Lavalala, Thomas said.



Cake and punch were the key refreshments for guests at the event.



After the awards were presented, a photo opportunity was provided. Seen here (from left) are Mike Thomas, Chuck Clemons, Rob Bradley, Bill Montford and Jack Latvala.

Sen. Keith Perry (R-Gainesville, District 8) who used to serve Dixie County was not

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present to accept the crystal apple trophy as a token of appreciation. Sen. Perry's committee assignment is as chairman of the Ethics and Elections Committee; vice chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education; and as a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice Committee; the Appropriations Subcommittee on Finance and Tax; the Community Affairs Committee; the Education Committee; the Rules Committee; and the Joint Administrative Procedures Committee.

Superintendent Thomas said Sen. Perry was among the leaders who laid the first groundwork for the future DCMHS.

Former Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mark Rains, who was present, is another leader who helped start this project even before he was elected in 2008 to be the superintendent of Dixie County Schools, Thomas said.

Former Superintendent Rains comes from an education background, Thomas said, being the son of 1968-69 Florida Teacher of the Year Ruth Rains. And Ruth Rains was a finalist for National Teacher of the Year, Thomas said.