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Ribbon is cut at new DCHS; *First set of students start there Aug. 10*



Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas speaks about the historic opening of the new school as he expresses his gratitude to the multitude of people who brought into being after being initiated as a vision 12 years ago.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 5, 2018 at 1:08 p.m.

CROSS CITY – There are some additions coming to the new Dixie County High School in the next few weeks, like a deceleration lane and a traffic signal on U.S. Highway 19 south of Cross City, however the new DCHS campus is open for the 2018-2019 school year.

<https://youtu.be/5yNZeapbPWU>

In this video, officials cut the ribbon with a pocketknife when the ceremonial ribbon-cutting scissors did not slice through the ribbon.

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(from left) Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher Sr., Dixie County School Board Chairman Timothy Alexander, Vice Chairman Paul Gainey, School Board Member Crystal Bush, Charles 'Chuck' Farmer and Dwayne 'Top' Rollison listen as Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas speaks about the school. There were many elected and appointed officials from the county and from the cities in Dixie County present for the event.



Former Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Dennis Wayne Bennett

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Former Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mark Rains



People (and the DCHS mascot) listen to speeches. {There is a member of the DCHS Student Government Association in that costume.}

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Rep. Chuck Clemons



School Board Chairman Timothy Alexander

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Everyone prepares for the ribbon to be cut. School Board Member Dwayne 'Top' Rollison is the most senior member of the board and he holds the scissors.



Rep. Chuck Clemons and the DCHS mascot show their approval for the completion of the project.

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Dixie County High School Assistant Principal Josh O'Neal (left) and Principal Paul Bennett stand near the front entrance to the new school.



DCSO Maj. Scott Harden (left) and Sheriff Dewey Hatcher Sr. are seen conversing just after the conclusion of the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The sheriff said he is happy to have worked with the School Board to be able to provide a deputy at each school in the county, where they are serving as school resource officers.

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Some photos of the outside of the school capture just part of the physical enormity of the campus and buildings.

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A ribbon-cutting ceremony on Friday (Aug. 3), complete with speeches and tours, heralds that the new school is ready. In fact, teachers started their first day on that same day at the new school, located at 17924 S.E. U.S. Highway 19, near Cross City.

On Friday (Aug. 10), there are going to be 550 students in grades nine through 12 entering the halls of the new facility.

The total cost for the school is about \$40 million. Gray Construction Co. of Gilchrist County and Culpepper Construction Co. of Tallahassee built the structures through a joint venture.

Todd Gray, president and owner of Gray Construction mentioned that Culpepper's part in the process was more about bonding than the actual work. Gray is also a county commissioner in Gilchrist County.

Ryan Parker of Gray Construction was the senior project manager.

"I feel excited for the Dixie County students and staff," Gray said. "It's been a long time coming. We are the local folks who built this school with our own people locally."

SPEECHES

Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Mike Thomas recognized all of the many elected and appointed people in the audience who have helped in this project.

The superintendent of schools also named a plethora of people from the maintenance crew to every member of the School Board, and the state legislators who were all part of bringing this project to fruition.

"Today is a milestone for education in Dixie County," Thomas said, as he mentioned that thanks to the work of Dixie County Sheriff Dewey Hatcher Sr. and the Dixie County School Board, each school in Dixie County will have a school resource officer.

Superintendent Thomas said the new buildings and campus are of excellent quality, however without the teachers and administrators, the students would have only some great buildings.

He congratulated the entire staff of Dixie County High School for scoring a "B" from the Florida Department of Education in its evaluation of Florida schools, as they are developing a culture of academic excellence at DCHS.

"Today is a huge victory for our community, our parents, our staff," Thomas said, "but especially the children of Dixie County. This is a place for your children and your grandchildren to have an opportunity to receive an education, and be prepared for college and careers."

This project actually began a dozen years ago, Thomas said.

Former Dixie County Superintendent of Schools Dennis Wayne Bennett and former Superintendent of Schools Mark Rains were among the initiators 12 years ago, Thomas said, before those two former superintendents spoke to the crowd gathered in front of the new school on Friday.

It is certainly a blue-ribbon banner day for the Dixie County School District, Bennett said as he began to speak.

He said the school will serve the community for generations to come.

The Florida Legislature, Bennett said, recognizes that the rural counties of the state lack the tax base to fund a new school like this one. Therefore, the state leaders created special facilities funding.

The Florida Department of Education has established, as a part of the Public Education Capital Outlay and Debt Service Trust Fund, a separate account, in an

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amount determined by the Florida Legislature, to be known as the “Special Facility Construction Account,” according to state law.

The Special Facility Construction Account shall be used to provide necessary construction funds to school districts which have urgent construction needs but which lack sufficient resources at present, and cannot reasonably anticipate sufficient resources within the period of the next three years, as noted in Florida law.

Former Superintendent of Schools Bennett said inventory reports from nine or 10 years ago showed the cost of repairing the former DCHS site exceeded the cost of constructing a new high school.

Bennett said one improvement is the higher level of safety for students as a result of this new school’s construction, in contrast with anything that could have been done at the old school. Bennett added that this better level of security at DCHS pleases him because three of his grandchildren will be among the students in the first set at the school.

When Superintendent Rains began his tour of duty, Bennett said, it was his staff that began working to have the new school built.

Bennett said Superintendent Rains and the School Board had the determination to see this project through to its completion. These leaders and the school system’s staff, the representatives in state government, all of the cities and county staffs, the architect and the builders worked together to make the dream of a new state-of-the-art Dixie County High School become a reality.

Former Superintendent Rains took the podium next.

“Persistence” is a word that comes to mind for Rains when he thinks about the school.

This project has been difficult at times, Rains said, and it has been challenging. There has been opposition at times.

“But praise the Lord,” Rains said, “we have been able to see it through.”

This process did begin back in 2006, Rains said as he concurred with Thomas and Bennett.

Rains was elected as Dixie County Superintendent of Schools in 2008, following Bennett’s service in that post.

The economy took a downturn and funding for new school construction was delayed by two- to three years. Rains said.

Rains’ first two years in office were difficult, he said, because as he was acclimating to the job of leading the school district, he was forced to make deep cuts to funding across the whole county, just as every other school superintendent in Florida was seeing the same demands.

In 2012, the process kept going, Rains said, and it is thanks to State Rep. Charles Wesley "Chuck" Clemons Sr. (R-Newberry, Dist. 21), State Sen. Robert “Rob” Bradley (R-Fleming Island, Dist. 5) and Gov. Rick Scott (Rep.) that the funding was designated for this project.

Rep. Clemons next spoke to the people.

Next to raising a house of worship, Clemons said, raising a house of education is the next most noble thing that can be done for a community.

When Rep. Clemons began his first term in the Florida House of Representatives in 2017, he saw that the Dixie County elected officials were doing their duty. They walked the halls in Tallahassee, Clemons said.

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During one six-month period, Dixie County School Board Chairman Timothy “Tim” Alexander would call Rep. Clemons two or three times a day, every day, to keep the school project as the uppermost thing on the state representative’s mind.

There was a budget fight for \$9 million to complete the school construction project, Clemons said. Clemons mentioned that Sen. Bradley had this as his Number One priority.

State Sen. Bill Montford (D-Quincey, District 3) and Sen. Jack Latvala (R-Clearwater, District 16), Rep. Clemons said, helped Sen. Bradley succeed in his efforts for needed funding.

Even with all of the legislators’ work, this school “...was truly a community effort.”

Clemons said he is happy to have had a small part in the success of this venture.

Before speaking specifically about the school, Alexander shared some broader thoughts.

School Board Chairman Alexander said he is thankful to the Good Lord to be able to gather as everyone did that afternoon.

He added that is thanks to the members of the United States military forces who protect American freedom that allows for the gathering that afternoon in front of the school.

On behalf of the School Board, Alexander said they are honored to be there with the people to celebrate this new school’s opening.

In addition to Chairman Alexander, the other members of the Dixie County School Board are Vice Chairman Paul Gainey, and members Crystal Bush, Charles “Chuck” Farmer and Dwayne “Top” Rollison.

Alexander said he is thankful to all of the people who were involved in reaching this point in history, where the school is being dedicated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

It is from everyone agreeing on a point that kept the project going, he said.

“Our children, our students, our staff,” Alexander said, “deserve to go to the best school that we can provide for them.”

After the ribbon-cutting, people dismissed to the cafeteria for refreshments.