

Millions must be raised for Ogden High historic restoration

By Amy K. Stewart

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OGDEN — Half a dozen black birds circled the crowd then swooped off toward the east mountains while below — with a drumroll, clang of cymbals and unfurling of a huge banner — Ogden High School launched its \$9 million fundraising effort.

The goal is to restore and preserve historical elements of the school, built in 1936. The work will focus on the auditorium with its intricately carved and painted "art deco" designs. The old-time doors and windows are also on the restoration list.

"It's our heritage. It's where we came from and what our parents knew. It tells us our history," said Carolyn Nebeker, Class of 1956.

Friday, hundreds of alumni, students and community leaders gathered on the west side of the school to celebrate the fact that \$6.8 million of the Ogden High School Capital Campaign has been committed by major donors.

Based on these pledges, restoration work is already under way, but \$2.2 million still must be raised.

"This is an icon in our state. It is an icon in the community," said Spencer Eccles, the new executive director of the governor's Office of Economic Development, speaking to the group. He represented the Hayward Family Foundation, as well as the George and Dolores Dore' Eccles Foundation, each of which donated \$1 million.

Constructing a new school building for Ogden High students would cost up to \$55 million. Renovating the historical building is estimated up to \$70 million. The Foundation must make up the difference above what Ogden District's bond will fund. A total of \$9 million is the goal — \$15 million would take it to the top.

Completing a fundraiser during a recession may seem an impossible dream, but supporters point to the passion of the community and the number of Ogden High graduates from past years.

"It's always difficult to have a capital campaign any time. But there is a lot of support for this," said E. LaMar Buckner, Class of 1940.

Eccles announced Friday he will add to the student fundraising efforts, giving \$1,000 if the teens can raise \$5,000.

Ogden High student body president Kel Robbins told the Deseret News the student body has no problem taking on the challenge. "We know how special Ogden High is. We know it's really old and how great it is. It's an amazing building," he said.

Many teens also think it's cool there have been several movies, including "Three O-Clock High," filmed at the school since it makes a great movie set. Student government officers will be launching hefty fundraisers within the next few weeks, Robbins said.

Lt. Gov. Greg Bell, Class of 1966, told the crowd Friday his parents and his seven siblings all are Ogden High grads. During his school days he appreciated the diverse sociologic mix that crossed lines of class and race. "That's the spirit of Ogden High," he said.

Voters approved a \$95.3 million bond proposal in 2006 for Ogden district. Phase 1 of renovation, costing \$25 million, is already completed. There is a new gym and commons area, upscale cafeteria, reconfigured parking lots, landscaped courtyard and upgraded heating and electrical systems.

Phase 2 will focus on the south end of the main building and will include renovating classrooms on each floor. The old gym space will be converted into science classrooms and labs, as well as a fine arts/theater space.

Phase 3 will finish the restoration of the entire north wing of the school. However, due to increased construction costs,

the district will have to bond again for this last phase. When and how much is yet to be seen, district officials say.

Meanwhile, the money-raising campaign for the historical elements has been in its "quiet stage" for the past two years while Foundation officials presented details to individuals, as well as contacting alumni.

"So far, a few have given a lot. Now it's going to take a lot to give a little," Dean Hurst, Class of 1944, told the crowd Friday. He represented the Stewart Education Foundation, which donated \$1 million.

"I know times are tough," Hurst said. "But this is your home."

"No donation is insignificant," said Janis Vause, executive director of the Ogden School Foundation, the fundraising arm of the district.

Ogden district Superintendent Noel Zabriskie donated \$4,000. Daughter Lauren Zabriskie, 15, an Ogden High sophomore, said, "It's an amazing building with incredible architecture. To tear it down would be to take away the historical part of Ogden."

Ogden High librarian Marilyn Taylor, Class of 1964, has volunteered countless hours to compile a list of graduates to call upon. "There are enough people out there who want to help save this building," she said.

The potential is definitely there, said George B. Handy, Class of 1939. "Ogden High graduates are important people who made huge contributions to our community, our state and our country," he said.

All donor names will be placed on an honorary list. Large donors are recognized with naming rights, including \$3 million for the athletic complex; \$1 million for the student commons; and \$250,000 for the dining hall.

Buckner points out, however, even \$5 or less is "a welcome contribution" that will be added to the mix.

The school was created between 1935 and 1937 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Project Works Administration economic recovery effort.

Residents volunteered their time and filled a boggy marsh one wheelbarrow full of soil at a time to create a solid foundation for the school.

During the Great Depression, workers took time and effort to make the art deco architecture and interior design come to fruition. The school with its distinctive crenellated walls was designed by Leslie Hodgson, the most noted architect in the Ogden-Weber County area from the late 19th to mid-20th centuries. Ogden High was the first \$1 million school in the United States. It is on the National Register of Historic Places.

There will also be a sale of items that have been salvaged so far in the school's remodeling project, including plaster work, moldings, solid wood doors and 1930s door hardware. The first of many fundraising events for the Ogden High School Capital Campaign, a tour of eight historical homes and the school will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 19, with parking and \$15 tickets available at the school. For more information on the campaign, contact the Ogden School Foundation at www.restoreogdenhigh.org or call 737-7304. E-mail: astewart@desnews.com

TWITTER: AKStewDesNews