

Senator Joyce Fairbairn Middle School officially opened to students at the beginning of the 2018/19 school year.

A place to collaborate

Senator Joyce Fairbairn Middle School opens in West Lethbridge

By Shayna Wiwierski

Students in West Lethbridge now have another option when it comes to choosing a middle school.

Senator Joyce Fairbairn Middle School officially opened to students at the beginning of the 2018/19 school year and is located at 301 Rocky Mountain Blvd. on the western side of the city. The Lethbridge School District No. 51 spearheaded building the school since the area's other middle school, GS Lakie built in 2002, was overcrowded.

"We have an increased student population on the west side of Lethbridge, as well as access to middle school students with the expansion of the north and south, as well as the west," says Daniel Heaton, director of facility services for the Lethbridge School District No. 51. "The access to GS Lakie was starting to cause us concerns, so the board decided that a new middle school in West Lethbridge was necessary."

The \$23.9 million school is named after Lethbridge-born journalist Joyce Fairbairn, who was legislative assistant to former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the first woman to be named government leader in the senate. The school is divided into six pods, each with its own collaborative space, so that students from each grade have their own area to work together. Opening into each pod are five classrooms and one maker space with a sliding glass wall, which is designed to be more conducive to project-based learning with its connection into the group area that the five classrooms surround. Between each pod of five classrooms there is also an outdoor classroom to facilitate outdoor learning during the fringe seasons. Also adjoining these permanent pod teaching spaces are 10 modular classrooms with the capacity to add more and increase the overall student capacity of the school.

The 6,532-square-metre one-storey school features a central gathering space that acts as a town square which is surrounded by all major functions. The administration office, gymnasium, drama room, band room, and cafeteria all branch off of this space and many of them are connected to the gathering space by large sliding partitions so multiple functions can occur at once. For example, the band and drama rooms each have a sliding wall that can open into the gathering space and they can perform at the same time with the audience members sitting centrally.

"We felt that it was important to bring students together on a daily basis. The gathering space makes it more conducive to developing community in the school. It also goes with the educational goals for Alberta Education right now, which includes developing ethical citizens," says Dan Westwood, principal with FWBA



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Architects, as well as the managing architect for this project. He adds that this area helps students feel like they are interacting with the overall community in a meaningful way, making them feel more accountable and part of a larger community.

The school was funded through Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure. The City of Lethbridge also provided money to the school district through the joint-use agreement to create a gymnasium that is larger than most new middle schools. The gymnasium will be used to accommodate community functions such as badminton groups, volleyball groups, and more.

The school is designed to attain LEED Silver certification, which is mandated by the Province through the Canada Green Building Council. The school features several sustainable elements, such as an improved building envelope, daylight harvesting through an abundance of windows, energy-efficient lighting,

and energy-efficient mechanical systems, which includes state-of-the-art boilers.

Dawson Wallace were the general contractors on the project, and other LCA members included ISL Engineering and Land Services Ltd., Inland Screw Piling Ltd., Ground Breakers Construction Inc., Rite-Way Fencing Inc., Brincon Construction Ltd., Burnco Rock Products Ltd., Maverick Concrete Ltd., Steve's Urethane Inc., Shanahan's Alberta Ltd., Lethbridge Door Systems Inc., KDH Painting, Allmar International Ltd., DMT Mechanical Ltd., Charlton & Hill Ltd., and Neu-lite Electrical Inc.

Construction on the project began in January 2016, and although it was scheduled to be completed in May 2018, it was not finished until August of that same year. There were several challenges that the contractors experienced on this project.

"We had to figure out a way to gain access to the site since there were no roads yet

developed so that during construction [the contractors] could gain access to the site," says Westwood, adding that they had to set up fire protection and coordinate with the fire marshal since there was also no water service to the area. "The city and contractor were good in terms of working together and collaborating so these programs could be figured out in a way that maintained safety to the site and allowed for construction to occur."

Now that the school is officially open, the school is helping to alleviate overcrowding at GS Lakie and has been a very welcome addition to the community.

"People are very excited about it and the building is bright, light, and airy," says Heaton. "The amenities provided in it are 21st century because it's the first middle school we have built since GS Lakie opened. It has capacity for modern curriculum in it, less traditional in some senses, and a lot more collaborative." ♦

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