

# P.S. duPont's \$44 million renovation masterfully melds old and new

By Antonio Prado

**Community News**

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Wilmington, Del. —

The largest renovation project in Delaware history is nearly complete.

Now that P.S. duPont High School is ready for a new beginning, Brandywine School District officials are eager to show off the grand, Georgian-style building that some call one of the most stunning buildings in the city or the state, for that matter.



Walt Mateja

The P.S. duPont library, with its wooden columns, was restored and expanded so that it can hold 18,000 volumes instead of just 8,000.

Designed by E. William Martin and built in 1934 and 1935 for \$1.9 million, P.S. duPont served high school students who lived north of the Brandywine River. It became an elementary school in 1978, then an "intermediate school" for fourth through sixth grades later. It will be transformed into a middle school by 2009.

The school was closed for renovations before the 2006-2007 year.

"It's the largest, purely renovation project in state history," said John Read, Brandywine's construction manager of the \$44 million project designed by Anderson Brown Higley Associates architects and completed by Bancroft Construction.

The project was made possible by the District's successful capital construction referendum in 2005 for 20-year bonds. Local funds will cover 40 percent of the cost. State funds will cover the rest.

When students return from summer vacation, they will enter a building that is filled with natural light, colorful hallway floors, a combination of refinished and new oak doors and trim, refinished heart pine and walnut floors, an expanded library, a revamped cooling and heating system, a new security system and other amenities.

Anderson Brown Higley worked closely with Bancroft to maintain the historical integrity of the school, which is listed in the National Historic Registry.

Bancroft Construction saved more than 90 percent of the original wood trim, a spokeswoman said. The woodwork in the main office comes from a combination of new oak and oak from an office that was adjacent to the library before its

expansion. In addition, much of the woodwork in the classrooms, including the trim around the brand new blackboards, came from recycling closet shelving.

New technology includes a computer control panel in the main office that shows the map of the school, and an alarm system that will alert the main office if any teacher props a door open for too long, Read said.

"It's an historic school. But our goals here are education first, history second or third. We're not Winterthur or Longwood Gardens," Read said.

Still, wherever possible – like in the auditorium – there are exquisite examples of combining the old with the new.

At the flip of a switch the curtains close. And the theater will feature video projection, wireless microphones, hard-of-hearing headsets and speakers hidden in the old return vents, Read said. A laptop can dim the lights up front, lower the projection screen and close the window shades. Yet, you couldn't buy the original wood floor or molded wooden seats that remain in the auditorium today.

"This is all hand-carved plaster above your head," he said, glancing up towards the three-story ceiling. "We were able to save it and still fit the sprinkler pipes in. And the whole back corner –30 feet was missing. So they made a mold of this side and repeated it over there."

Other areas of the school incorporate the old with the new as well. For example, the nurse's suite and other rooms in the basement have hospital caliber ventilation for infection control, with air blown past an ultra violet light that kills spores and cold viruses.

Another example: the library upstairs was built to hold 8,000 books, but a school this size should hold 18,000, so it was expanded with the fine craftsmanship of a seamless addition to the circulation desk that will hide wires from sight, Read said.

Brandywine Superintendent James R. Scanlon said he is very optimistic about P.S. duPont, which on top of its physical renovation will also undergo a programmatic renovation as well.

"We've got a lot of good staff and a great physical plant," Scanlon said. "I think we're in great shape for the future."



Walt Mateja

The main entrance's doorways were moved them back in order to give the school a security cushion, said John Read, construction manager for the Brandywine School District.



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Bancroft Construction and ABHA architects worked to preserve as much of the old as possible. For instance, the woodwork in the main office comes from a combination of new oak and oak from an office that was adjacent to the library before its expansion, Read said.



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The wooden seats are going to be refinished in place. The maple hardwood, curved floor – which the District couldn't buy today, Read said – has received a coat of urethane. In addition, all the heat for the auditorium will come to come out from air ducts underneath the seats as it was intended to work. But the reverse in the summer and become a return as air conditioning comes from the ceiling.



Walt Mateja

The decorative lattice made of plaster, which has a Greco-Roman look, was restored. Read said it had a fabric behind it that was the same color as the plaster so no one noticed it.



Walt Mateja

The plaster's centerpiece above the stage in the auditorium has the inscription "P.S. duP High School." Brandywine recovered the original drawings for the building, Read said, and architect E. William Martin hand drew each letter. He had intended for it to read P.S. duPont High School.



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Brandywine School District Superintendent Jim Scanlon, left, and District Construction Manager John Read discuss the newly renovated auditorium. In the background is part of the plaster decorative moldings "restored to their original beauty" in the theater.



Walt Mateja

Construction Manager John Read, left, and Superintendent Jim Scanlon examine one of the newly refurbished classrooms, which each have new, dustless blackboards. The wood used to trim the blackboards came from the closets that were used for book storage.



Walt Mateja

Jim Scanlon tries out one of the new lockers on the first floor. The lockers in the hallways were from the 1990s, John Read said. "Stuff in the 90s, 80s and 70s were crap," he said. "They had to be torn out. They were all ruined."



Walt Mateja

"The lockers upstairs are from the 30s," John Read said. "They're perfect. We just had to repaint them."



Walt Mateja

Reads shows where students kept their keys for their laboratory experiments.



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The chairs, which were tested by students, will match the wood décor of the classrooms. The chairs are also padded so they do not damage the floors when custodians are cleaning.



Walt Mateja

ABHA officials said P.S. duPont School's auditorium "is now on par with other theater venues throughout the state."



Andréa Miller

P.S. duPont School's historic exterior has been preserved, as has the basic structure of the classic, Georgian building. But heating and cooling, the plumbing, the electrical, the roofs and technology are among several things that are new.