

Valley School gym building unveiled

by Robb Fulcher

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Officials made speeches, received plaques and listened to children sing and play musical instruments at the grand opening of a gymnasium-library-classroom building on the southwest corner of Hermosa Valley School. The ceremony last Wednesday evening was the culmination of an \$11 million project seven years in the making. The gymnasium portion was the subject of heated public hearings and a failed lawsuit by critics concerned about noise and parking problems near the campus on Valley Drive north of Pier Avenue.

Standing on a makeshift stage in front of the modern, glass-fronted building at third-through eighth-grade school, Hermosa Beach City School Board President Cathy McCurdy told a crowd hundreds strong that the ceremony deserved the description "grand opening." "Grand is an appropriate word because this is a grand building," McCurdy said. "We definitely had a long road, and it was definitely worth it." Hermosa Mayor Sam Edgerton, a vocal supporter of the project throughout, waxed Napoleonic.

"Like Napoleon said, if you want to make an omelet you have to break a few eggs. Well, you broke a few eggs, but look what you accomplished," Edgerton said, waving a hand toward the building. Words of praise were showered by representatives of Congresswoman Jane Harman, state Sen. Jenny Oropeza, Assemblyman Ted Lieu and Los Angeles County Supervisor Don Knabe.

Construction of the building was coupled with \$7.7 million in renovations to Valley School and Hermosa View School, which serves kindergarten through second-grade. Most of the funding came from a \$13.6 school bond approved by voters in 2002.

Before the ceremony Valley School Student Council members led tours of the two-story building, which contains a 2,000 square-foot library, 2,000 feet of classroom space (two regular classrooms and four specially equipped science classrooms), and the 7,500 square-foot gym.

The gym is large enough to hold one high school-sized regulation basketball court lengthwise. It is currently set up for three volleyball courts, or two shorter basketball courts that run width-wise. The building was originally envisioned to include more classrooms and a larger gym, and the gym does not yet include bleachers or a scoreboard, which officials hope to acquire later.

Long road

The lawsuit against the gym was laid to rest last year, when the critics, a group called Citizens for Responsible School Expansion, failed to convince an appeals court to reconsider a previous ruling in the matter. The citizens group had argued that the gym was omitted from a detailed list of construction projects to be funded by the 2002 bond measure, so none of the voter-approved money should have been spent on the gym.

School board members said the omission was caused by a mix-up between the school district and Los Angeles County. They said they intended to fax a list with the gym to county election officials, and later could not determine whether the list was misplaced by the county, or never faxed to the county after all. School board members also pointed out that the gym was listed in ballot arguments for and against the bond measure. Previously, a Superior Court rejected contentions by the citizens group that the school district failed to mitigate parking, traffic and noise from the gym project. ER