

The Oldham Era

St. Mary's unveils plan for Norton Commons school site

By John Foster

St. Mary's Academy recently unveiled plans for their new school in Norton Commons.

The 58,000-square foot school will feature enough room for 450 students – preschool through eighth grade – with high-school-caliber science laboratories and a state of the art media center.

Construction is expected to cost \$6 million and be complete in time for the 2009-10 school year.

The school site is at the intersection of Ky. 1694 and Schuler Lane.

Most of the site is in Jefferson County, with a portion of the athletic field in Oldham County.

St. Mary's formed last spring as a merger between Immaculate Conception in La Grange and Mother of Good Council on Westport Road.

The former Immaculate Conception and Mother of Good Council schools have been functioning this school year as St. Mary's Academy, but in their old locations as two separate campuses of the same school.

Principal Pam Hart has criss-crossed the county as she administrates the two campuses, 24 miles apart.

"It's been a challenge to say the least," she said.

Parents David Sauer and Scott Porter are enjoying the new friendships they have created with members of the other school.

Sauer, of La Grange, said his mind has been eased the merger has been exceptionally smooth.

"It's not been perfect, but it's been pretty darn close," he said.

Sauer and Porter serve as volunteer athletic directors for the school. They said when St. Mary's Academy formed, they became fast friends.

Football teams from each school gelled quickly as well, going to the Catholic school championship Toy Bowl in their first year.

Porter said at the Toy Bowl, fans from most regional schools socialized as groups based on their old school, but for them, the stands were a blend of St. Mary's green and gray.

Porter said of course they would like to move into the new school immediately, but "good things are worth waiting for," he said.

Hart said there is a need for a Catholic school in the Norton Commons area, an area the archdiocese sometimes refers to as “the donut hole” due to the absence of a parish or school in the region.

Regional schools are a focus of the archdiocese right now, Hart said.

St. Mary’s Academy is the fifth regional school, but the first to build a new facility.

Regional schools allow better programs, facilities and technology than smaller parish schools, she said. And although building a new school elevates tuition, maintaining a large school requires less tuition per family.

“You can offer so much more to the kids,” Hart said.

No teachers will be laid off in the move, she said.

The move will certainly increase drive-time for some parents, especially those who live in La Grange or as far as Trimble, Shelby or Henry counties, she said. They will provide bus service from the Immaculate Conception Campus to the new campus, she said.

Sauer said the drive will not bother his family too much.

“When you live in La Grange, you’re used to driving,” he said.

E-mail us about this story at: jfoster@oldhamera.com.