

Cottage Grove

ST. PAUL PIONEER PRESS

New school a showcase

New \$72M Oltman opens on Tuesday

By Bob Shaw

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Joni Hagebock wasn't sure what the coolest part of the new school was.

Maybe it was the microphones that teachers wear in class. Or the lockers opened by swiping cards, rather than jiggling combination locks. Or the security doors that slam down throughout the building at the touch of a button.

But Hagebock, principal of the new Oltman Middle School in Cottage Grove, is sure the students will learn there. "I want to be a kid here," she said, as she gave a tour of the building Friday.

The \$72 million school will serve 920 students in grades 6 through 8 when it opens Tuesday. It has room to grow to 1,100 students, in a fast-growing neighborhood that includes parts of Woodbury, Cottage Grove and St. Paul Park.

And if the early reviews are any indication, the students will be dazzled.

"We had a parents' night here, and they were all going, 'Wow! Wow! Wow!'" said seventh-grade math teacher Willie Taylor. "We are meeting the needs of the 21st century kid."

The teachers working in the new school Friday were impressed — especially in comparison to the school they left behind.

The former Oltman school in St. Paul Park was built in 1951. It was first an elementary school and later evolved into a high school and a middle school.

Teachers laughed as they recalled its shortcomings.

"I was teaching kids in those old sled desks," said Ben Lower, sixth-grade science teacher.

"Not enough natural light," said math teacher Taylor.

"The cafeteria was this tall," said principal Hagebock, holding up her hand to indicate an 8-foot ceiling.

KEEPING IT SECURE

In contrast, the new school seems like a leap into a new age.

Architect Paul Youngquist, who also designed East Ridge High School in Woodbury, explained the security features necessary in a time when school shootings are in the news.

If someone with a gun entered the school, said Youngquist, a single switch in the principal's office would be pressed. Then six security doors, like overhead garage doors, would drop down to seal off sections of the school. In each section, students would be able to flee through exit doors to the outside.

Youngquist explained why he didn't put up any wall-mounted fire alarms. In the past, those have been used by attackers to create panic and get students to come out of classrooms. The sprinklers and ceiling-mounted alarms and cameras, he said, provide ample fire protection.

If the school ever wanted to change mascots, the most obvious choice would be ... a wheel.

Wheels are everywhere — under teachers' desks, cafeteria booths, classroom tables, library bookshelves.

The wheels are integral to the design of the school, which maximizes classroom flexibility.

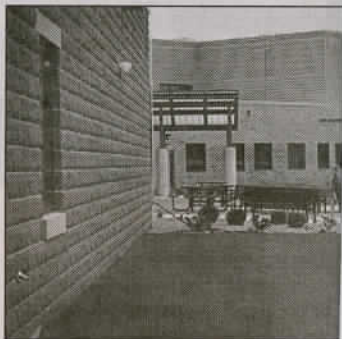
For example, science teacher Lower said he will be able to ask a class to arrange themselves in pairs, each pair around a sink. Then they might reconfigure themselves into clusters of three for studying, easily moving their desks. Later, every desk might be scooted to one side, for a demonstration.

Furniture in open-air study spaces can be rolled around to accommodate a swim team meeting, a large-scale lecture, or individual after-school studying.

"The building is flexible enough to allow each student to learn any way they want to



Sue Bentz, a special education teacher at Cottage Grove, while checking out sitting still.



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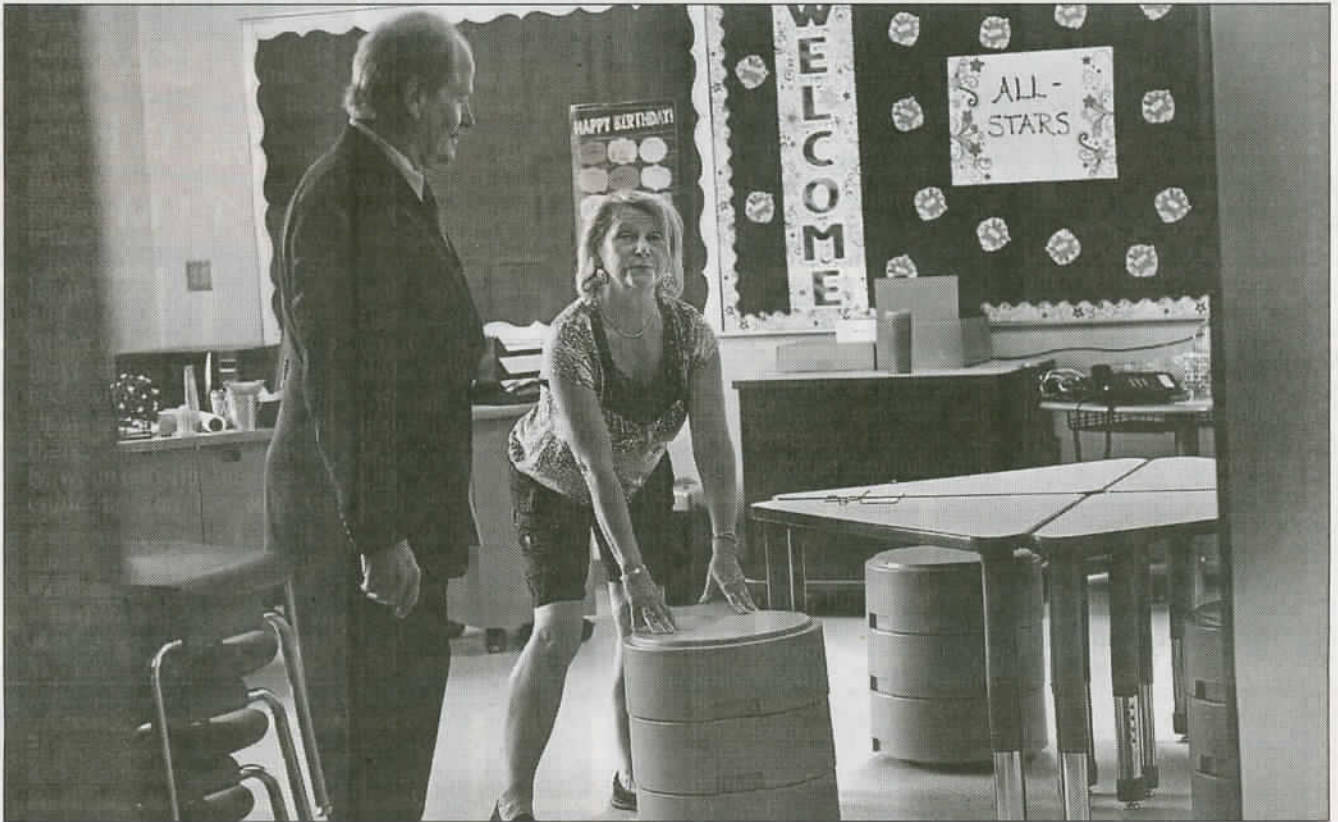
"Some learn by reading, some by coaching, and others by lectures. We provide all those learning spaces."

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The school is full of modern accommodations for special-

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showcase for modern teaching



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Sue Bentz, a special education teacher, talks to Paul Youngquist, the architect who designed the new Oltman Middle School in Cottage Grove, while checking out her classroom Friday. The classroom's seating is designed for students who have trouble sitting still.



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The school is full of modern accommodations for special-

ed students.

Some of the lockers will be opened when a student swipes a card. This is for anyone who has difficulty with combination locks, said Hagebock.

Three specialized classrooms are built for students who have autism, emotional disorders or developmental and cognitive delays.

They are complete with chairs that rock and stools

that wobble, for students who have difficulty sitting still. One classroom has a kitchen and laundry to teach life skills.

Students will watch and stage plays in the 412-seat theater. The gym includes three playing areas the size of a basketball court.

The pool has an access ramp running the length of it, and a separate diving well — where Jacobus and Hagebock couldn't resist bouncing playfully on the diving boards.

It will be the home pool of East Ridge High School, which has no pool of its own. A few of the swimmers have already come in to see it, said high school girls swim coach Kathy Madden.

"They are loving it!" she said.

HIGH TECH

Oltman won't be a technoslouch.

Students who don't want to take notes will be able to

download the lessons on what looks like a whiteboard — but is actually a Smart TV. Then, at home, they will be able to review the lessons on their iPads.

By the way, said Hagebock, did anyone mention that every student will be given an iPad?

Every teacher will wear a microphone during classes. Students will often have microphones passed to them to answer questions.

Hagebock explained that the need to talk loudly was tiring for teachers. "It used to be that we'd have to use our" — Hagebock started to shout — "teacher's voice!"

She can't wait to unveil the school for the students Tuesday.

"You put great teachers into great classrooms," said Hagebock, "and it is magical."

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