Church raised $4.5M for school Cathedral-Carmel to expand campus

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LAFAYETTE - Cathedral-Carmel School's downtown campus will grow in the next year with the help of its supporters and neighbors — parishioners of the Cathedral of St. John the Evangelist.

The school and church parish partnered in a campaign more than a year ago to raise $4.5 million for construction of a fine arts building and a new Cathedral Hall, a multipurpose building that will be used by the school and church community.

"It's the first time that the church and school have joined for a project," said Sarah Hyde, the school's development director. "It's brought us together. We started with a $4.5 million goal. We're over $3.1 million right now."

The construction project also includes renovations to the school's administrative offices to enhance campus security.

On Friday, the church and school celebrated the groundbreaking of the first phase of the capital projects — a 7,000-square-foot fine arts building for the school campus.

The fine arts building project, in the planning phases for six years, is part of the vision for the school that's on its way to becoming reality with the help of the school's supporters and the cathedral's parishioners, Cathedral-Carmel Principal Kay Aillet said.

She credited the Rev. Chester Arceneaux, the Cathedral's pastor, for his collaboration on the fundraising campaign.

"We're thankful to the parishioners and our families for their support. We're blessed that we have a wonderful pastor who's rallied his parishioners," Aillet said.

Construction on the fine arts building is expected to take about seven months and the tentative schedule for the other two projects involves a summer 2015 start date and a completion of all the work in summer 2016.

The campus and church are landlocked downtown, limiting growth. The school has adequate playground space and wants to maintain it for student's play and for field practice areas.

The fine arts building is planned on a concrete-covered area formerly used as a tennis court. The building will cover the old court, as well as sections of an existing parking lot and a small area of greenspace on the school grounds.

"We still have adequate playground area and there's still room for a running track that we plan to add," Aillet said.

The Cathedral Hall fills a need for a large gathering space for the church and the community, Arceneaux said. In years past, the school's gym served as a venue for Lafayette community events even setting the stage for boxing matches and an Elvis appearance, he said.

The 9,000-square-foot hall will be constructed where an older, two-story building now stands facing St. John Street. It once served as a residence hall for the Christian Brothers. The school now uses the first floor of the former religious order's residence for its arts and music classes while the second floor provides a storage area.

"What we're trying to do is provide a formal space for the arts, for receptions and for family development," he said. "The community needs a hall for developing the family life and parish life."

Arceneaux said the goal is for the church to celebrate the centennial of the current cathedral building in the new Cathedral Hall on June 27, 2016.

"My prayers and my hopes are that we can start the new 100th year in the new center," he said.

The new space will serve as a multipurpose building used by the school and church community with a capacity for 400 people. The hall may be divided into five different spaces to accommodate different events or needs, Hyde said.

Next summer, the school also will renovate its administrative area and enhance security by funneling visitors directly to an office area to limit access to the campus, Hyde said. Currently, visitors are buzzed onto the campus at a security gate and then, they walk to the office building.

"Now, we'll have that added security and visitors won't be allowed onto the campus until they go through the office," Hyde said.