Schools of Sacred Heart plan pair of new buildings

The Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau is planning a new high school for girls on its campus and a new school for boys across the road from its main campus.

Work to start on new boys school, girls high school

BY MARSHA SILLS
Acadiana bureau

By the end of next summer, more changes will be seen on the historic campus of the Schools of the Sacred Heart with the first major construction on the campus since 1970.

In 2006, a boys school — St. John Berchmans — was opened on the campus as an expansion of the single-gender education that had been offered at the Academy of the Sacred Heart for girls since 1821.

Now, the board of trustees has launched a massive fundraising campaign to build a permanent campus for the boys school and a new high school for the girls campus.

The first phase of the project is expected to cost $12 million to $15 million and includes high school facilities for the boys and girls campus that will include state-of-the-art technology and science laboratories.

The designs will also include mail spaces for outdoor learning and will continue the architectural tradition of the academy.

Architects Southwest has been hired for the project and construction is expected to begin in June 2010, said Sister Lynne Lieux, headmistress of the schools. Lieux is a member of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of the Society of the Sacred Heart.

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She added that square footage for both high-school buildings is still being worked out, but both will have capacity for 240 to 260 students. The Academy has a total of 418 students.

In 2006, Berchmans opened with 27 students in grades Pre-K through second and has added grades each year. Next year, enrollment is expected to be at 110 students through the seventh grade.

The boys school is in portable buildings behind the academy’s gym, but will move to its permanent location south of the academy campus and across from the schools’ administrative building. The modular classrooms will be moved to the site to create the campus until the construction of additional buildings is funded.

Plans call for a permanent facility for Berchmans’ lower grades, new athletic facilities for both schools, a fine arts facility and new residential housing for the academy’s boarding students. “We have 250 acres here,” Lieux said. “Most schools would die for that space.”

An expansion of its residential housing for girls would assist with recruiting, she added. The academy has 26 female boarders from the United States, Mexico and Korea. The students live on the second floor of the girls’ high school building in a dorm-style environment. Lieux envisions new housing that provides a more home-like atmosphere with “house parents” that could include faculty members.

Lieux said a decision hasn’t been made as to which projects will be next on the list after the high schools are complete.

“We’ll see where the demand takes us,” Lieux said. Outreach to alumni and other supporters has already begun, said Craig Dupliche, an academy parent who chairs the Schools of the Sacred Heart Board of Trustees. Dupliche added that early response has been favorable.

General chairs for the capital campaign include: Andrew and Rebecca Ahrens, Leon “Chip” and Lacey LaHaye; and Keith and Ginger Myers.

The schools are part of a network of 21 schools in the U.S. associated with the Society of the Sacred Heart, which also has institutions in 44 countries.

The schools have a niche in Acadiahs for its offering of single-gender education, Lieux said. The closest single gender education options for families in the area is in Baton Rouge.

“Single-gender education has a mission,” Lieux said. “Research shows boys and girls will learn better if in their own environment.”