

Requests for disability-related modification or accommodation, including auxiliary aids or services, may be made by a person wi

Cajon middle school becomes a jewel

Four construction stages reinvigorate campus



At Cajon Valley Middle School, students and staff are celebrating the completion of an eight-year face-lift. — Peggy Peattie

EL CAJON — Seventh grader Keeley McDermott loves everything about the rebuilt Cajon Valley Middle School that she and her classmates moved into at the beginning of the school year. She loves the iPad 2 tablet computers in the classrooms, the spanking new library, and “Fun Fridays” on the new quad where she and the other students sometimes get to throw water balloons at the principal.

“It’s so clean and there is so much space,” Keeley said during a recent open house and ceremony to dedicate the El Cajon school’s transformation from inner city eyesore to urban gem. Pride mixed with enthusiasm rang in her voice as she led invited guests on tours of the campus.

The celebration, which was attended by school district officials, local law enforcement, community members and students, was eight long years in the making. Yet, the \$15 million project, by being done in four well choreographed phases, still enabled school staff to conduct business as usual during construction.

Built in 1953, Cajon Valley Middle School was in sorry shape in 2000 when local voters approved Proposition X to fund the first three phases of construction. City of El Cajon redevelopment money and matching dollars from the state also helped defray the cost of the initial stages. (In 2008, Proposition D was passed, providing funding for the fourth and final building, a two-story classroom/multipurpose structure.)

Construction began in 2003 with the blueprint designed by Vista-based Sprotte+Watson Architecture & Planning.

The single-story campus was a crazy quilt of disjointed wings of classrooms, free-standing boys and girls locker rooms, antiquated plumbing and electrical systems, exposed rooftop HVAC equipment and acres of rusted chain link. There was no library, just a drab room with some books.

Worst of all, much of the student body and teachers had to be housed in 30 cramped, relocatable buildings.

“As time passed, the portable classrooms were overcrowded, and buildings were becoming more and more difficult and costly to maintain,” said Sharon Dobbins, director of long-range planning for the Cajon Valley Union