

Ground is broken for Woodson addition

Heather Rule
hrule@postbulletin.com

Falling snow didn't seem to dampen the spirits of the Woodson Kindergarten Center Critters and other representatives from Austin Public Schools on Monday as they broke ground on the six-classroom addition.

"What better thing to happen in February but a snowstorm?" said Superintendent David Krenz to the roughly 400 kindergartners seated in the school parking lot.

The classrooms on the southeast side of the building, plus modifications to offices areas in the building, should be ready for the start of next school year.

Construction is set to begin today. Mark Stotts, finance and operations director, is "looking forward to getting going," he said. A webcam is planned for the site.

Along with winter weather, the morning ceremony also came with an element of fun with what you might call the number of the day: 100. Monday marked the 100th day of school for kindergartners, so they sat in the formation of a large "100" in the parking lot. They also wore "100" paper glasses.

Even Krenz sported a pair as he addressed everyone.

The other reason 100 was a trend was because this is also 100th year of business for Wagner Construction, the company that will build the addition.

"It's a really special day at Woodson," said Jean McDermott, Woodson principal. "They've been building things for 100 years."

After a few of the kids had a chance to wear the hardhats and lift the big shovels, it was time for the adults to get a chance to make the occasion as well.

School board members Angie Goetz, Kathy Green, Jeff Kritzer and Dick Lees each grabbed a shovel and threw some snow to kick off the project. They were joined by Krenz, Stotts, Educational Services Director John Alberts, Special Services Director Sheri Willrodt, Mark Hayes of ATS&R Planners/Architects/Engineers in Minneapolis and Matt Wagner of Wagner Construction.

"To finally be able to start putting all that planning and hard work into action really is a good feeling," Krenz said.

Wagner was the lowest of seven bidders for the project and will complete the addition and modifications, which are part of a \$28.9 million bond issue voters approved in November.

The addition, along with the planned new school for fifth- and sixth-graders, is needed because of growing enrollment in the district.

"The biggest thing is the space to make sure that we have adequate rooms to meet the growing enrollments that we're seeing," Krenz said.

It will help free up space in classrooms and allow for more small-group instruction, Krenz said. Another key

component will be technology. The building will be wireless and many tools, like iPads, will be brought in to help students with reading and math skills.