

EDUCATION

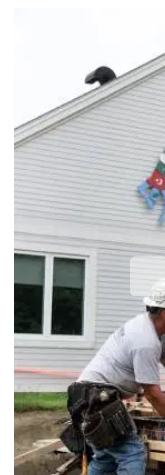
The Sharon Academy constructs new STEAM building



by Haley Clough Valley News Correspondent
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Paul Hurwitz, facilities director for Sharon Academy, picks an apple from a tree that will soon be cut down to make way for construction, as workers prepare concrete forms for the school's new STEAM building in Sharon, Vt., on Wednesday, July 24, 2024. Four yurts at the site that had been in use as classrooms for nearly 20 years, were moved to the other side of the school to make room for the project. There will be a "ground breaking" ceremony on August 29 to coincide with the school's annual potluck, said Hurwitz, at which time he expects the new building to be framed in. (Valley News – James M. Patterson) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online without permission. Send requests to permission@vnews.com.



Rich Lafoe, of R.G. Gosselin, checks the elevation for the top of the new STEAM building on the Sharon Academy campus in Sharon, Vt., on Wednesday, July 24, 2024. He expects the framing of the building with precast concrete to be complete at the end of December. (Valley News – James M. Patterson) Copyright Valley News. May not be reprinted or used online without permission. Send requests to permission@vnews.com.

SHARON — Four distinctive yurts used as classrooms at The Sharon Academy for nearly 20 years were relocated this summer to make way for a new 5,000-square-foot academic building, now under construction.

The shift from circular cloth yurts, akin to canvas tents, to one large building, is emblematic of the fundamental pillars of The Sharon Academy, said Tanya Swett, president of the TSA Board of Trustees.

“Strong relationships and a shared vision are the foundation of The Sharon Academy, and this project is a perfect illustration of that,” she said.

The building has been in the works since 2012 and will host STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) courses, offering new learning opportunities for students at the high school that sits off Route 14, down the road from TSA’s middle school, which is off Route 132, near Exit 2 on I-89.

The new building will include several different spaces to allow the school to better integrate STEAM topics into its curricula, said Swett.

The new spaces will include a large “clean” lab, intended for lectures and experiments in biology and chemistry, as well as a small “dirty” lab that will act as a “shop-type space for construction, painting, physics projects, robotics and set construction,” equipped with power tools, construction tools and an outdoor workspace, Swett said.

A darkroom will be available for photography projects or certain “physics optics classes,” and several multipurpose classrooms will be constructed, primarily for music and dance.

TSA is an independent day school, which came into being in the late 1990s, and has some 160 students in grades 7-12.

In June of 2020, Mary Newman took over as head of school, replacing former Head of School Michael Livingston, who worked at TSA for 20 years. In the decade prior to his leaving, Livingston had spearheaded the preparation for the STEAM project.

“The handoff of leadership from Michael Livingston to Mary Newman occurred with a shared vision of the school’s needs for additional space for innovative teaching and learning,” Swett said.

The new STEAM wing comes at an estimated cost of \$3.78 million, Swett told the Valley News. In addition to privately fundraising over \$1.37 million for the project, TSA received a \$500,000 grant from the Vermont Community Recovery and Revitalization Program in August of 2023, and a \$1.9 million loan from the USDA Rural Development agency.

Private fundraising also played a role in the project.

“Key to our early success was a generous \$300,000 gift from Byrne Foundation ... We feel enormous gratitude to the individuals and organizations that believed in this school and its vision for our students,” Swett said.

In a news release in June 2021 announcing the \$1.9 million loan, then-Acting State Director for the USDA, Cheryl Ducharme, said that TSA was an environment that combined a rigorous academic environment with a safe, communal dynamic that fostered positive learning.

“Since its inception, The Sharon Academy has cultivated young minds by implementing the highest academic standards within a safe, engaging and stimulating learning environment,” Ducharme said in the press release. “This funding will expand the space, equipment and resources available for students to learn about the arts and sciences, offering them more opportunities to advance their education and explore new interests.”

Construction of the project is being overseen by Connor Contracting, Inc., a family-owned company based in Berlin, Vt., and St. Albans, Vt.

The work should conclude soon enough for the building to be open for use by January, the start of the spring semester of classes at TSA, Newman said in an email.

For the fall semester, the school foresees minimal disruption to students and staff. Swett said the preparations for “utilities and the fire sprinkling system” will be completed before students return for the school year.

The only alteration to business as usual will be that “our traditional start-of-year community potluck (which will be held this year on Thursday, Aug. 29) will be relocated to the back of the main building and will also be a groundbreaking celebration for the project,” Swett said.

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