Renovated Mustang Hill building opens to students, community

With a snip, it was done.

On the afternoon of Sept. 7, as more than 100 students, staff and community members held their cell phones high, Marcellus High School Principal John Durkee and senior class officers Meghan Faulkner and Faith Norstad lowered a pair of red oversized scissors to a length of green ribbon stretched across the school entrance.

As the two halves of the bisected ribbon fluttered apart, a chapter that opened more than four years ago finally closed.

“This is truly an exciting day for the Marcellus Central School District and the Marcellus community, as we officially unveil our newly renovated high school,” Marcellus Board of Education President Michael McAuliff said during the grand opening ceremony.

Built in 1965, the high school had not undergone any major renovations in more than a half-century.

“For me, the realization that this project was necessary came when my wife and I attended our older son’s open house during his freshman year,” Mr. McAuliff said. “And as we followed his schedule and were sitting in his science classroom, other parents, who had graduated from Marcellus several years prior, some as early as the early 1980s, found their initials carved in the lab tables in the science room.”

The long and winding renovation

The school district proposed its original plan – to renovate all high school classroom spaces, corridors and locker rooms, replace part of the roof, relocate administrative offices and add a new choral room – in October 2014. After the community rejected that plan in a districtwide vote, school officials presented voters with a scaled-down version, which they approved in March 2015. But when construction bids came back 25% over budget, the school district had...
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to go to voters a third time, to approve an additional expenditure that was paid for with state building aid and money from the district’s reserves.

“There have been many ups and downs and changes over the past four years of planning and execution of this capital project,” Mr. Durkee said. “One thing, though, has never wavered: the commitment to ensuring that everything done here was done for our kids.”

Because the Mustang Hill building could not simultaneously accommodate construction crews and four grades of students at the same time, Marcellus had to undertake an elaborate game of musical desks. Students in grade 9-12 were relocated to Driver Middle School, grades 7-8 moved to the high school building, and grade 4 went to K.C. Heffernan Elementary for the 2017-18 and 2018-19 academic years. Of course, teachers and support staff also moved.

“We’re so very excited to have finally arrived at this celebration after years of planning and constructing and moving and moving and moving,” Superintendent of Schools Michelle Brantner said.

Construction began in June 2016 and ended just weeks ago.

While little square footage was added to the building, renovations required a near gutting of the high school interior, to accommodate:

- The creation of a new, secure entrance.
- The renovation, expansion and, in some cases, relocation of classrooms.
- The realignment of classrooms to group “like” classes together. For example, the new STEM wing places science and math classrooms in close proximity to one another.
- The installation of new hallway lockers.
- The addition of a vocal music room to the music and fine arts wing.
- The addition of a life skills classroom.
- The renovation of girls and boys locker rooms.
- Creation of an expanded large group instruction (LGI) room.
- Relocation and reconfiguration of the main office, guidance office and nurse’s office.
- The upgrading of heating/ventilation systems.
- The upgrading and addition of air-conditioning to some areas of the high school.
- Asbestos abatement.
- The renovation of the library, which now includes a coffee bar and adjacent classrooms.

“To those returning to see the changes, I say welcome back to the new and improved Marcellus Senior High School,” Mr. Durkee said during the Sept. 7 ceremony. “For those at the beginning or in the midst of your educational journey, I say welcome to the future.”