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'The World's Most Beautiful School'

Historic Longview farm soon to be modern elementary school

By Kelly Evenson
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When Robert A. Long built Longview Farm in the early 1900s, he envisioned a self-sufficient, technologically-advanced farming operation.

Known as "The World's Most Beautiful Farm," it encompassed 1,700 acres and more than 40 buildings, all built between 1914 and 1916. Some of the farm's features at that time included a 20-acre lake and filtered water system, a greenhouse, a 1,500-seat grandstand, a chapel (currently the Longview Chapel Christian Church), a schoolhouse, a movie theater and a horse barn.

This horse barn would later be known as the Longview Horse Arena, which in addition to housing an indoor arena, horse stalls, living quarters and offices, it housed the first automated car wash of its kind. Many of the original structures, including the arena, have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Little has been done with the horse arena or farm in the last two decades. Gale Communities, a development firm, purchased the arena and what remains of Longview Farm a few years ago. Once the development is completed, New Longview will include more than 1,000 homes.

It was then that the Lee's Summit School District was approached about constructing an elementary school near the development. The Longview Horse Arena quickly became Longview Farm Elementary, the district's 16th elementary school.



"I think this was a tremendous opportunity for the district to be in partnership with the city and Gale Communities," said Mary Alice Neal, assistant superintendent for elementary education. "To use this historical structure for an elementary school is a way for us to prevent it from being lost. We are restoring it to its original grandeur."

Shannon Pollard, the project architect, said the city of Lee's Summit approved a historical easement last year for the north and west sides of the horse arena building. The original stucco facade remains in this area as well as the windows. The original red clay roof tile also remains on a majority of the horse arena building.

Julie Scheidegger/The Examiner
Construction is nearing completion at Longview Farms Elementary in Lee's Summit. The school was built from the Longview Farms Stable. The horse arena is now a gymnasium.

The school, which opens this fall, will serve 650 students at full capacity in kindergarten through sixth grades. With the exception of the historical aspect to the facility, it is identical to all other elementary schools in terms of programs and curriculum. Funds from an April 2004 bond issue were used to construct the \$11.9 million project.

"We have already started moving in furniture and supplies," Neal said. "This building has such a wonderful historical piece that it will be an unique opportunity for students."

The horse arena is now the school's gymnasium. Wooden beams and columns from the original structure have been left exposed. Art and music classes are in the former carriage room and the jockey living quarters have been turned into rooms for the gifted and special education programs. The rest of the arena is being used for administrative offices and the media center.



Neal said portions of the horse stalls are being used as a corridor along both sides of the gymnasium. She said students can then get to the cafeteria/commons area without disrupting class in the main arena. The original barn doors are also being used at the entrance of the school.

Two additions have been also been attached to the building. The first is the kitchen along the east side of the school. The largest is to the north and houses classrooms.

Julie Scheidegger/The Examiner
Built from the from the Longview Farms stable, Longview Farms Elementary has retained pieces from the original structure such as stable walls and a saddle that will make up a reading nook in the library.

"When we abated the lead paint from the ceiling, it exposed the beautiful natural wood grain of the beams," she said. "R.A. Long was a lumber baron, so obviously he chose good wood for the beams."

Like in the gymnasium, many of the original beams and columns have been left exposed in the media center. In addition, Neal said a horse stall has been left as a "reading nook" for students. An original saddle bracket was also found, which has been attached to one of the nook's posts and a saddle has been displayed.

"This remaining stall as some historical significance to the building," she said. "It is thought that the last heir to Revelation (Loula Long Combs' favorite horse) was born in this stall," she said.

Long Combs was the daughter of R.A. Long and Longview farm was the family's country estate. Revelation is also remembered in another area of what is now referred to as the Loula Long Combs campus. The marker for the gravesite of Revelation remains at the front entrance of the school. A flag pole will be put next to the marker.

"This building comes with a history none of other schools have," Neal said. "This will be our only elementary school where a portion of it is almost 100 years old."

The first day of school for the Lee's Summit School District is Aug. 22. The principal of Longview Farm Elementary is Ryan Rostine, who was formerly the principal at Hawthorn Hill Elementary. The stallion has been selected as the school's mascot and it's colors are purple and gold. "The Legacy Continues ..." has been adopted as the elementary school's motto.