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Let Earth do it: New Williston dorm a first for Easthampton

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

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Thursday, August 28, 2008

EASTHAMPTON - The city's first building featuring geothermal heating and cooling opened its doors to the public Thursday.

The ecologically friendly building, at 194 Main St., is a new dormitory at the Williston Northampton School that will house 32 ninth-grade boys and three faculty families. The building uses energy-efficient lighting and insulation as well.

"This is our first dormitory in 45 years, so we're very excited about that," said Richard Teller, archivist and librarian at the school.

The \$7.2 million project broke ground in November of last year, and also included moving Dean of Students Glenn F. Swanson's nearly 220-year-old Park Street home 60 feet north on the property line to make way for a paved entrance to the new dormitory. A crosswalk will connect the residential quad to the school's main campus on Park Street - an ongoing project set for completion within the next few months, according to Andrew Shelffo, spokesman for the school.

Part of the 24,000-square-foot building is the renovation of an old Victorian home formerly owned by David J. and Natalie Strong, who founded Strong Bus Co. The boys' dormitory and two faculty apartments are additions to that Main Street home, which will house dorm head Allison Marsland, her partner, Maria Rello, and their three sons, Denison, Zachary and Matteo. Ben Demerath, a music teacher, and Sarah Klumpp, a history teacher, will live in the other two faculty apartments.

Marsland is moving in today, and students are scheduled to move in Wednesday, according to Shelffo.

"It's an immense privilege to be one of the first occupants after the renovation," said a smiling Marsland, who was wearing a name tag and greeting people during Wednesday's open house of the building.

Shelffo showed guests around the Victorian home, pointing to the dining room, parlor and dual fireplace. The wooden stair rail that connects the three flights of stairs is original to the house, built in 1882 by Eugene W. Wood, an Easthampton merchant.

"This is where you get the Victorian feel," Shelffo said as he approached the staircase.

Located between the Victorian home and the two other faculty apartments, the boys' dormitory has 14



KEVIN GUTTING

Michael and Michelle Nolen of Southamptton ascend the Victorian-era stairs in the former Strong House at the corner of Payson and Main streets in Easthampton. The house will be the residence of one of the Williston Northampton School faculty families that will be attached to the new 194 Main St. dorm.



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double rooms, four single rooms, a kitchenette, and laundry area. The main entrance leads to the common room, where sunlight streams through skylights and stacked windows that reach its approximate 18-foot ceiling.

Outside the building, behind the trees and about 6 feet beneath the dirt, are 15 350-foot wells that allow for the geothermal heating and cooling of the building. In other words, oil and natural gas are not needed to control the building's temperature, saving the school about \$10,000 a year (according to the current price of oil and gas) in energy costs, according to Shelffo. The geothermal portion of the construction of the building totaled about \$130,000, according to Jeffrey Tannatt, the school's director of physical plant.

"We expect to invest it back in about three or four years," Shelffo said. "You save energy and you save money. We hope to make that (geothermal heating and cooling) a feature of any building we build on campus."

The wells, spaced 20 feet apart, cover about 4,800 square feet of the property, Tannatt said. The biggest challenge of the project was creating a well field that's big enough to get the temperature exchange in the earth, which is about 57 degrees at 4 feet below the surface year-round, Tannatt said.

The wells were drilled by Connecticut Valley Well Drilling; the project's general contractor is Fontaine Bros., of Springfield. George Fontaine said this is the third geothermal heating and cooling building, but the first geothermal dormitory, that the company has constructed.

"In the long run it should be a definite win for the school," Fontaine said.

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