

MITCHELL

Massive cleanup at Mitchell

Hundreds work to get school ready to reopen



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RACINE — Mitchell Middle School staff members are set to return to their fire-damaged building today, with students to resume classes Tuesday, thanks to thousands of man-hours spent cleaning and repairing the site over the last two weeks.

The middle school, 2701 Drexel Ave., was damaged Feb. 27 when a fire broke out in Mitchell Elementary School, which is connected to the middle school and sits at 2713 Drexel Ave. Both schools were rendered unusable; the middle school in particular was left with soot on most surfaces, a smoky odor throughout the building and an inch of water standing in some first-floor offices and classrooms.

“It looked pretty bleak,” Racine Unified Buildings and Grounds Director Bryan Arnold said.

But the middle school is now largely back to looking like a functional school.

“The school is probably cleaner than it’s been since it was new” in the 1930s, said J. Murphy,

director of operations for Paul Davis National restoration company, which has been handling cleanup efforts at Mitchell.

Hundreds at work

Paul Davis workers arrived March 3, just four days after the fire, and they were on site “around the clock” every day since, including into Sunday evening. At times, as many as 440 people worked on the school in a given day, Murphy said.

Those people restored electricity, installed new ceiling tiles throughout the middle school, painted 20 percent of the school’s walls, gave the band room new carpeting and put new floor tiles in those water-damaged first-floor offices and classrooms. They also removed debris, wiped away soot, dusted, vacuumed and cleaned every item in every room, Murphy said.

Teachers were brought in, in groups of about 12, to label which items in their rooms had to be saved and which could be thrown away. Paul Davis workers then took pictures of the rooms, and removed everything from desks and computers to books and musical instruments. They cleaned those items and the rooms themselves, then brought everything back in, arranging it all according to the pictures, Murphy said.

“We try to put everything back,” he said.

Paul Davis workers also cleaned students’ lockers and their contents. They covered the lockers in plastic and pumped in a special chemical to eliminate smoke odor. The items inside were cleaned and even laundered, then put back so they’ll be there for students Tuesday, Murphy said.

“That whole process was very laborious with all the lockers there are,” he said.

A few middle school lockers, in the elementary portion of the building, have not yet been cleaned due to time constraints, Murphy said. Some middle school classrooms in the elementary part of the building also have not been cleaned, but the middle school principal has found space for those classes elsewhere in the middle school, Unified spokeswoman Stacy Tapp said.

Drywall has been put up in the two hallways that connect the middle and elementary schools, to block the still-damaged elementary school and “to keep smoke odor particles from coming” through, Murphy said.

Remaining repairs

Cleaning and repair work will begin at the elementary school very soon. A smaller crew, of about 40 or 50 people, will handle that job and should be done before summer, Murphy said.

The elementary school students, who are attending class at Wind Point Elementary School, 290 Jonsue Lane, for the remainder of this school year, should return to Mitchell for the 2014-15 school year, Arnold said.

When students return, they may or may not have a gym space. The fire broke out in the gym and caused its roof to collapse. Last week crews began demolishing the structure. Arnold has said the space will be reconstructed, but it’s too soon to say when or what the finished product will look like.

The cost of the gym demolition plus cleanup and repairs, all being handled by Paul Davis, is not yet known. Unified’s insurance will foot the bill, with the exception of a \$50,000 deductible the district must pay, Arnold said.

CLARIFICATION: Tradespeople employed by Racine Unified, such as electricians and plumbers, have worked to repair Mitchell Middle School, 2701 Drexel Ave., and to ready the building for students following a fire Feb. 27, according to Unified staff. Those tradespeople have been working on Mitchell along with Paul Davis National restoration company.

BUILDING PERMITS AND MITCHELL

- A state demolition permit allowed the demolition of Mitchell Elementary School's badly damaged gymnasium last week.
- A city building inspector approved newly installed lighting at Mitchell Middle School as repair work there progressed over the last two weeks.
- A city building inspector granted an occupancy permit for Mitchell Middle School Saturday.
- The city Health Department is to inspect the middle school's cafeteria for food vending today.

SOURCES: J. Murphy, director of operations for Paul Davis National restoration company; and Bryan Arnold, Racine Unified's director of buildings and grounds