

Integrating Technology into the Classroom St. Augustine High School Expansion & Renovations

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Technology waits for no one. Perhaps St. Augustine High School in New Orleans had this new twist on an old adage in mind when it decided to upgrade its teaching facilities. After providing quality education for 53 years, St. Augustine wants to make sure it can keep students current with the rapidly evolving world of information technology.

“Our expansion allows us to offer more electives in business and technology than any other school in the city,” says St. Augustine President Reverend Joseph Doyle, S.S.J. “It gives us the classrooms and equipment we need for our programs with local universities, such as an infotechclass with the University of New Orleans, an entrepreneurship class with Louisiana State University, and science programs with Xavier University. Before, we didn’t have the room.”

Business and Technology Take Center Stage

St. Augustine chose The McDonnell Group to build its expansion, designed by Billes- Manning/Hewitt-Washington Architects. The \$6-million project called for constructing a business and technology center where the old faculty house once stood.

The center is known as the Warren and Hilda Donald Business and Technology Center. “Warren and Hilda Donald are the parents of Arnold Donald, President and CEO of the Merisant Corporation, which makes Equal[®] [the sugar substitute],” Reverend Doyle explains. “Arnold is one of our graduates and pledged \$1 million toward the new building.”

The 31,000-square-foot, three-story design encompasses a chapel, offices, a new library, a new cafeteria and kitchen, business and technology classrooms, and residences for the Josephite priests and brothers who teach at the school.

With cost savings in mind, McDonnell built the new center’s first two floors using structural steel and then framed the third floor with load-bearing metal studs.

“Since it’s the top floor and not a weightbearing floor, the metal-stud framing will save the school money,” says Gary McCann, McDonnell’s Project Superintendent.

The chapel, a 1,000-square-foot brick structure, seats approximately 40 people for mass. “This is the school’s focal point,” Zuckerman explains. “It has a courtyard and some beautiful finishing work, including pointed arch windows and precast-stone detailing on the outside and stained woodwork and millwork on the inside.”

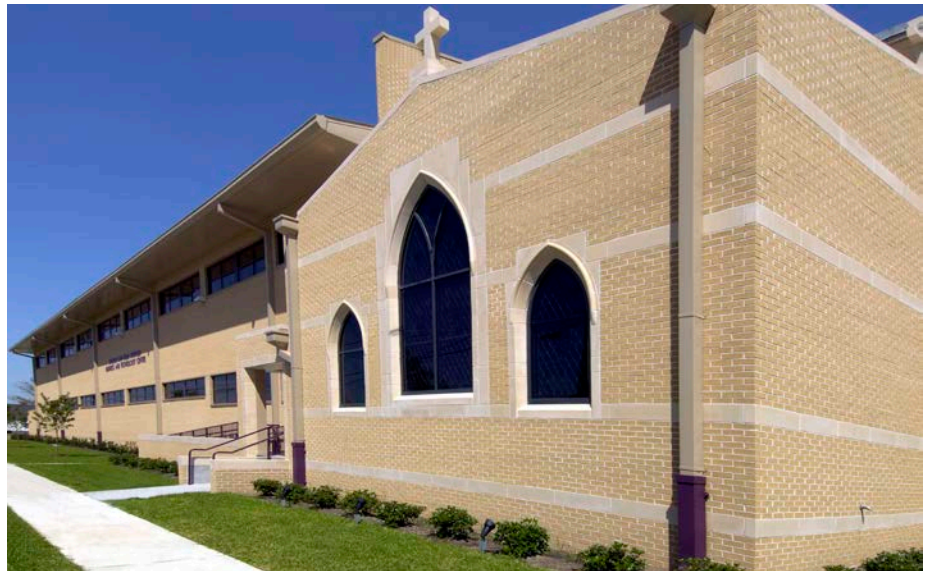
The library, twice the size of the old facility, is a two-story space with a vaulted ceiling and skylight. McDonnell also built the new cafeteria, outfitting the new kitchen with modern cooking equipment.

The heart of the new building, the business and technology area, features four large classrooms and labs, all equipped with the necessary electrical and Internet connections to support new computers.

Old School Also Expands

Besides building the new center, McDonnell renovated the existing high school. The changes there include larger administrative offices, a new faculty lounge, a small TV studio, a journalism classroom, and a new foreign language lab where the old library once stood. The old cafeteria became an expanded band room, and the old band room was converted into a larger weight room for the Purple Knights athletic teams. McDonnell also called in an outside contractor to remove asbestos flooring and pipe insulation from some of the work areas.

During this phase, The McDonnell Group is taking special care not to disrupt the electrical and mechanical systems serving the building’s ongoing activities. Part of that special care involved sending in a team early on to map out the location of those systems. “Over the last 50 years, many things were added into the building, and we had to know where they came from and where they were going before we started construction,” Zuckerman says.



Overcoming Difficult Challenges

John Manion, McDonnell’s Assistant Project Manager, coordinates material deliveries to the new building site and has dealt with a number of challenges as work progressed in the new business and technology center. “The site logistics are tough,” he says. “There are residences on two sides and the existing school and its parking lot on the other two sides. It made getting our steel and cranes in difficult.”

McCann also points out a major power line that feeds private homes bordering the school. The line traverses the construction site. “We had to strategically shut down the power, so as not to endanger crane workers during pile driving and steel framing,” he explains. “We had to carefully coordinate equipment access to the parking lot since the school is still in session.”

Because of the new center’s multi-use nature, McCann devoted considerable time to managing the numerous subcontractor crews working on different areas of the building, often at the same time. For example, as the subcontractor who framed the first two floors in structural steel worked on finishing the library’s roof, a second subcontractor began the metal stud framing for the third-floor living quarters. “They overlapped, and material ordering and delivery had to be correct,” McCann says.

Different crews installed the electrical and mechanical (AC, plumbing, and duct work) systems. They also did the various finishes, such as painted gypsum ceilings in the library versus acoustic tile ceilings in the classrooms and concrete-block masonry walls in the kitchen and cafeteria versus sheet rock walls for the library and living quarters.

The McDonnell Group has even coped with the global steel shortage that sent prices soaring. The problem came about due to high demand overseas, especially in China, and the continued consolidation of U.S. steel mills. “We procured material early for this project and stored it in a warehouse, bringing it to the site at the right time,” McCann says.

A Smooth Transition to the New Information Age

Despite the challenges, both phases of the St. Augustine expansion progressed smoothly. The project stayed on track, says Zuckerman, because McDonnell, the architect, and the subcontractors worked together closely, holding regular meetings to discuss scheduling and any conflicts. This sort of team approach is vital to keeping projects on course. “Everyone involved has cooperated,” McCann concurs, “the architect, the subcontractors, the school, everyone.”

When the new business and technology center opened in January, Reverend Doyle was eager for the positive impact. “We now have the classrooms and the computers to continue our pursuit of academic excellence,” he continues. “The new center brings our students into the 21st century by incorporating technology into every field of study they are taking. The new facilities will help us prepare them for the challenges in college and beyond.”



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3350 Ridgelake Drive Suite 170 | Metairie, LA 70002 | 504.219.0032 | www.mcdonnell.com