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MATTHEW SHINKLE/The Sun
Deptford Township School District board members and officials, as well as county representatives, take part in a groundbreaking ceremony at Deptford Middle School on Wednesday, March 24 to expand the building.

Breaking ground

Deptford Middle School expansion begins

By MATTHEW SHINKLE
The Sun

Deptford Township School District celebrated the official groundbreaking of the expansion of Deptford Middle School, formerly known as Monongahela Middle School, on Wednesday, March 24, paving the way for the school to move forward with the implementation of long discussed upgrades.

Voters within the township had previously approved proposals early last year by a narrow margin — with 53.7 percent in favor of the proposal and 46.3 percent opposed — to move forward with various upgrades and renovations within the school district.

The approved proposal aimed at addressing overcrowding at the Good Intent, Lake Tract, Oak Valley and Shady Lane elementary schools, which the dis-

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trict says have been over capacity for the last decade.

With the new wing added on to the existing Deptford Middle School building, school officials say the building would then add sixth grade students to its populous, originally only holding the seventh and eighth grades.

During the ceremony, superintendent Arthur Dietz thanked Lou Randazzo for his efforts in making the project possible. Randazzo, whom graduated from the district and previously served as Coordinator of Communications for Deptford Public Schools while also serving as president of the Deptford Education Association for five years, organized a door-knocking campaign leading up the vote on the proposal in an effort to gain support for the district wide upgrades.

“His leadership and guidance to see the Spartan Improvement Plan become a reality were un-

matched,” said Dietz. “He organized a door-knocking campaign in the pouring rain to help get potential voters involved to help and to vote ... he has made this middle school a reality.”

Randazzo said the much needed upgrades will allow for an even higher ceiling for Deptford Public Schools students than already provided, while also giving students access to a wide range of activities and resources a year earlier in their educational career than previously provided within the district.

“This project is huge in scope and size but the biggest impact it’s going to have is right here on our students,” said Randazzo. “This is the highest performing middle school in Gloucester County ... going from two grades to three within this building is a 50 percent increase; that means, for our students, a 50 percent increase in their access to social and emotional learning services; that means a 50 percent increase

in student access to interscholastic sports that they don’t have right now in their elementary schools; and it also means a 50 percent increase for our students in their access to educational and other extracurricular programs of study.”

The extension includes the construction of 16 classrooms, two science labs, a music room and a central district office space. The wing is the centerpiece of the Spartan Improvement Plan, which carries a price tag of \$37.6 million dollars, and also included the replacement of existing Multi-Purpose Room floors in three district schools and improvements to Deptford High School.

According to district officials, construction of the new wing to Deptford Middle School is anticipated to be complete before the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year, allowing for the district to implement its new middle school model that year.

Garrison Architects of Bellmawr, NJ is Architect for the \$37.6 million bond referendum that would move 6th Grade to the District's Middle School.