

Published 8/13

Parents are asked to raise \$300,000 for O'Fallon stadium upgrade

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News-Democrat

O'FALLON --As work to renovate the O'Fallon Township High School stadium comes into the home stretch, school leaders are asking parents to dig deep and raise \$300,000 to finish the job.

Superintendent Darcy Benway said a total of about \$2 million left over from other construction projects was used to pay for the bulk of the stadium project, which includes new synthetic turf and a new running track. But parents are being asked to help raise the remainder of the cost.

"Work will be completed while the money is being raised," Benway said. "We have every reason to believe the project will be completed on time."

Benway said the school's athletic department will hold fundraisers to raise the cash to pay off the project.

While school opens today in O'Fallon, the home opening football game is scheduled to be played Aug. 29 against Cahokia. Don Bolinger, vice president of construction services for contractor ATG Sports, said the project is on time.

"Everything is going pretty well," Bolinger said Tuesday. "We're getting the bleachers put in and turf in this afternoon. The lights are up, we're finishing up concrete work. The fence guy starts in Monday."

High School Principal Steve Dirnbeck said massive renovations were needed at the stadium because the stands were too small and rickety to accommodate large crowds, and the natural grass field was hard to maintain. The fragile surface limited the number of events that could be held on the field, Dirnbeck said.

Benway said the work will benefit more than just the school's football team. The more durable surface will allow soccer games and marching band events to be held on the field. It could also accommodate gym classes and practices for other sports without fear that it will be damaged.

Artificial turf was considered to be too hard and abrasive to play on in recent years and was scarce on the local high school scene. But Bolinger said advances in turf technology have made it softer and even more forgiving than natural grass. Other schools in the area, including East St. Louis and Edwardsville, have already made the move to ATG's synthetic fields.

If problems arise and O'Fallon's field is for some reason not ready in time, O'Fallon has contingency plans in place to that would allow its football team to play at McKendree University in Lebanon.

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