



## NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Mark Keppel unveils renovated auditorium

It may have been a long time coming, but Mark Keppel's renovated auditorium has rewarded those who waited earnestly for its arrival.

"What a pleasure it is to be here tonight. I can remember being here when the auditorium was first razed, and it's wonderful to see it open again after all the work that's been done," said Superintendent Donna Perez on Friday, November 20, as the school celebrated the reopening of the building with a ceremonial ribbon cutting.

Members from the school board, officials from state and city government, District officers, and the building's architect were all a part of the ribbon cutting. Boy scouts from troops 329 and 379 formed the color guard and members of the marching band formed the backdrop for the Aztec Choir to sing the National Anthem.

The refurbishment of the auditorium was made possible by Bond Measure C, passed by voters in 2004. The renovation also marks the first of the major construction efforts at the school, signaling the emergence of a new face for Mark Keppel. This spring, new science labs, music rooms, and classrooms will be ready, and in the summer the new gym will be completed. Next school year, the campus will have 24 remodeled classrooms to replace all the portable structures currently being used.

Before the ribbon cutting, architect Mun Leu described the many improvements to the auditorium. Among them are 400 cold cathode light bulbs, which last 10 times longer than the old bulbs used for lighting and also use 60% less efficiency. A common theme in building today is sustainability and designing "green" spaces, and Mark Keppel's remodeled auditorium is in no exception. There is a new rigging system with curtains, a new stage floor, and new seats.

When Leu handed over the plans to Principal Grace Love, a chorus of applause sounded and it was official: Mark Keppel had its auditorium back, now fit for a new era.

Others who made presentations included Assemblyman Mike Eng, Senator Gloria Romero's Field Representative Henry Lo, the Board of Education, Monterey Park Mayor Mitchell Ing, Superintendent Perez, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Gary Gonzales, Matthew Low, who is a current Mark Keppel student and son of Rosemead Council Member Polly Low, and Alhambra Mayor Steve Placido. Principal Love also thanked McCarthy Building Company, BRJ Associates, and District Chief Operations Officer Cynthia Martin for all their support in making "the journey of construction possible."

After Board of Education members Adele Andrade-Stadler, Robert Gin, and Assemblyman Eng cut the ribbon, all those in attendance walked along a red carpet to enter the auditorium for the first time in 18 months. The inaugural Play performed by the Mark Keppel Drama Department was *The Importance of Being Earnest*, by Oscar Wilde.

The play was an appropriate choice for the drama students and staff. As Theatre Director Page Phillips said, "I think this process has taught all of us 'the vital importance of being earnest.'"

Assistant Principal Michael Donnelly is hopeful that the renovated auditorium will bring greater student involvement in the theatre program.

"We get a big part of our school back," he said. "The students do great work, and this gives them a new stage to continue to do so. Hopefully, it will help the program grow and get more kids involved."

Last year, students had to perform plays at other schools or in parks, and so being able to use the auditorium again is a truly welcome addition to their education in the performing arts.

Board of Education Vice President Gin shared his thoughts for the students and the new opportunities they will have going forward with theatre.

"Our kids have state-of-the-art theatrical equipment now and an auditorium the school can be proud of. We're thrilled to be here for them all."

Director Phillips shared her appreciation for what she will be able to do for her students and the "real-world theater" experience they will now have.

"We have just begun to scratch to the surface of the difference these renovations will make in our teaching capabilities. We have trained many of the tech theatre students on these new systems already, systems that rival college and professional level theaters. This kind of mastery and understanding could lead to future educational goals, skill goals, and lucrative employment. I'm so pleased we can finally offer these opportunities to our students."

As Mark Keppel continues to grow, and students watch their campus bridge the gap from its beginning days to a modernized environment, it is fitting that the auditorium's renovation was the first major addition. The curtain has lifted.

