



## NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

### District Architect Mun Leu Designs Construction Efforts to Benefit Students of Today and Tomorrow

District Architect, Mun Leu, has worked in a wide variety of building projects for 25 years, so he has seen how community needs can shift and vast technological changes can accelerate over the course of only a few years. When it came to designing the master plans for every school in Alhambra Unified, one of his main challenges was also one of the most important criteria: to create buildings and modernize existing facilities that will serve multiple generations to come.

"When it comes to the master plan at each campus, we're not just planning for the next 2 or 3 years but for the next 15 to 20 years," Mr. Leu explained.

The Cal Poly San Luis Obispo graduate has been practicing architecture since 1985, and has worked on projects ranging from housing, to medical and office buildings, to entertainment centers. Ultimately, it is working in education that has offered him some of his most challenging and rewarding work. His experience runs from preschools to universities, giving him a versatility that can match the gambit of the district's needs for all of its schools.

"Working in education is rewarding because of what you provide for the community and ultimately the end users, which are the kids. It is also so fulfilling because there are far more than just 1 or 2 users [such as a single family in a house], and you are serving generations and generations of people."

Some of the work on the campuses is more complex and involved than others, depending on the needs of the particular school. Since Bond Measure C passed in 2004, which is when Mr. Leu began working with the district, Mark Keppel High School has started to undergo a significant transformation that includes new classrooms, science labs, music rooms, and a brand new gymnasium. The school will ultimately expand by 87,000 square feet.

"That campus will be brought into the 21st century," Mr. Leu said.

Another district high school will look more radically different yet in Century High School, which now claims only portable buildings as its classrooms. Beginning in March, a 14-month construction process will kick off Century's expanded size, altered orientation, and construction of all new buildings. The planned changes should be ready to give students a completely new and portable-free campus for the 2011-12 school year.

As is with each different construction project, Century's master plan takes not only the needs of the campus into account but also considers the physical aspects of the community in which it is located.

"The buildings have to fit into the fabric of each community and each school. Every building is a unique opportunity and calls for a unique design. When the buildings fit with the surrounding communities, [residents] feel ownership of the projects and feel proud of what they see."

To best determine what each campus needs, Mr. Leu and his team have worked directly with the people for whom construction will have the greatest impact.

"We have interviewed all of the stakeholders: the district, the school faculties, staff members, parents, and students. All stakeholders have had a say in [this construction], and we have worked to tie all of these into a singular vision for each individual campus."

When it comes to planning designs that will facilitate technological changes tomorrow that are still unknowable today, Mr. Leu said there are specific principles to take into account.

"It starts with planning the infrastructure, the backbone of the schools. We can create larger conduits between buildings, and allow for future expansion of various systems."

Planning for future growth is certainly not the only challenge facing Mr. Leu and the construction office. Working with budgetary issues and saving enough money initially so as to have enough left when the state is ready to match funds is crucial to maximizing potential for every project. Then there are also the challenges of passing designs through state approval.

So far, however, Mr. Leu says the progress is good.

"The speed and success of projects [two 2-story classroom buildings] at Northrup and Garfield were excellent. We got the plans through the Division State Architecture (DSA) in 3 months and built structures all with about 1 year. Usually the planning process alone takes that long. The efforts of the district, the schools sites, and state approval agencies all led to their success."

The buildings at Northrup and Garfield were made possible by Measure MM, passed in November 2008, which funds elementary school construction in the district. There are 4 more 2-story buildings planned for elementary campuses, including Brightwood which is next in line.

While the district watches its campuses continue to metamorphose to serve many years of students to come, Mr. Leu will doubtlessly be busy. And with so many diverse projects taking place, he will get to watch many times over the results his work and the part of his job he enjoys the most.

"The satisfaction of seeing the finished product and its users enjoy that product is my favorite part."

