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# Still standing: Rudolph's Sarasota High building

By Harold Bubil , Herald-Tribune / Friday, February 13, 2015

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## PHOTO GALLERY: Sarasota High School Renovation

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### SARASOTA

The first phase of Sarasota High School's \$42 million campus redevelopment project has been completed, and students are once again taking classes in its iconic Building 4.

For \$8.5 million, the county School Board revamped the 1959 landmark by the late architect Paul Rudolph, creating a fresh image for the school and preserving a building that exemplifies the vaunted Sarasota School of Architecture.



Sarasota High School's Building 4, recently renovated by the Sarasota County School Board (Staff photo by Mike Lang)

The renovation also caps an often-contentious 15-year effort by the local architectural community to save the building.

Before demolishing another Rudolph-designed building, Riverview High, in 2009, the board promised to “appropriately rehabilitate” Rudolph’s work at Sarasota High. In 2012, plans coalesced to restore the building’s exterior — keeping celebrated breezeways open — while rehabilitating interiors for

“21st-century learning.”

Sarasota Architectural Foundation members generally praise the restoration work. “From a distance, the rehabilitation of the exterior looks fantastic,” said Janet Minker, the foundation’s board chairman, adding that she has not yet had a tour inside.

“Our community has saved one of the most important midcentury public buildings in America, and we should all

be proud.”

Building 4 will be featured later this year when the foundation hosts a symposium focusing on Rudolph’s Florida buildings.

The outcome could have been vastly different.

The school district could have torn down Building 4 and replaced it with a new 30,000-square-foot educational structure — shaving \$1 million off the renovation cost.

But Deputy Superintendent Scott Lempe says the rehabbed structure is a “win-win” for staff, students and the architecture community.

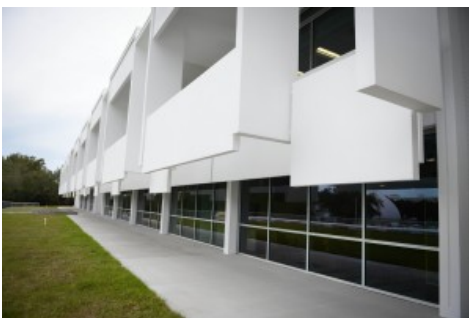
“As you walk up to the school today, your arrival experience is very much like it was in 1959,” Lempe said during a recent tour. “The students of SHS have the best science experience in the county today because of what was done on the inside of the building.”

Lempe noted, too, that new fencing will make the campus more secure.

Tandem Construction completed the work from Harvard Jolly Architects designs, with expertise on Rudolph provided by Sarasota architect Jonathan Parks.

“I would be surprised if everybody is not satisfied with the outcome,” said Jeff Cobble of Harvard Jolly, “even the hard-core Rudolph folks, because it looks stunning from the road.”

### **With some changes**



While the “hard-core Rudolph folks” may applaud the preservation, much around the building is different.

For decades, Building 4 was obscured by mangroves and other trees that straddled a Hudson Bayou tributary that cuts through the campus.

Asbestos-containing stucco had to be removed by hand from the iconic sun shades at Sarasota High School's building 4. (Staff photo by Rachel S. O'Hara)

Now the trees are gone, leaving an unobstructed view of the white building — as it was decades ago.

“It is like a new building,” Fort Myers architect Joyce Owens said.

Tandem Construction's Nathan Renner said the company received calls when the vegetation was removed asking what the new building was that had been built.

Sarasota High's principal, Jeff Hradek, said staffers, teachers and students have been given an emotional lift since moving back into the building after winter holidays.

“We have an eye-opener,” Hradek said. “You have outstanding teachers with the tools at their fingertips to make an engaging experience for the students.



Jo Durrance uses the new ActivePanel in her new classroom at Sarasota High School Tuesday, January 20. (Staff photo by Rachel S. O'Hara)

“The kids really appreciate having something nice and new, and it gives them some ownership over the campus,” Hradek said. “The mood on campus has been given a surge. Now, when you pull up here, it doesn't look like a refinished old building. It looks like an architectural, modern, creative design that was original, and I think that changes people's perspectives.”

The renovation was originally expected to cost \$7 million, but the discovery of asbestos in exterior stucco required a tedious and costly abatement.

All concrete surfaces had to be scraped and chiseled by hand, then repaired and recoated. Contractor BASF, which supplied the coatings, is nominating the project for the International Concrete Restoration Institute's “Project of the Year” competition.

Architect Steve Johnson of Harvard Jolly said the firm plans to enter Sarasota High in national competitions sponsored by the American Institute of Architects.

Parks, meanwhile, designed a barrier that enhances security on what Lempe describes as “the most open campus in the district.” The barrier resembles an array of black tablets, and was manufactured locally by Mullet's Aluminum. Parks said the building's signature cantilevered sunshades provided inspiration.

Other major parts of project included removing a parapet to restore the roofline as Rudolph designed it; shoring up the west end of the building, which had settled into the elevated ground about three inches; removing air-conditioning and electrical conduits from the exterior; installing code-compliant railings; and repairing several damaged support columns.

“The success of the project is to keep the breezeways open,” Parks said. “The bigger success was not having the building torn down.

“The original gestures of the exterior are now prominent,” he added. “The parapet had put a lid on the building. Now it is like a ballerina on her toes.”



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