__PUBLIC__

VAN WERT — With Vantage staff and students, dressed in red polo shirts, guiding visitors through the wide halls, the community took a good look at the results of a $35 million renovation and expansion on Monday. Vantage Career Center took time to celebrate the grand opening of the facility with an open house, showing off the new building and all its features.

The evening began with the ceremony in the Student Commons area, featuring key participants in the project as well as honored guests. Following the ceremony, guests were invited to walk the halls and discover what had been built over the past months. And many people did just that.

“It has been a fabulous turnout so far,” remarked Superintendent Staci Kaufman directly after the ceremony. “I really didn’t know that we’d have an audience for the ceremony. We wanted one, but this is better than I could have hoped. All told, we may have 1,500-2,000 people in the building tonight for open house, as well as to celebrate the end of our construction project,”

The cleanliness and organization marked a major distinction from the past 18 months or so. While the school seemed to run well despite ongoing construction work, there were inconveniences that most had to deal with at one time or another — like dust, noise, and moving classrooms. With that in the past, Kaufman said she is happy to have the work completed.

“It feels great. I think we’re going to miss it a little bit... but not for too long! It’s going to be nice to get back to teaching and learning and what we do best. It’s so exciting to have this night finally come,” she related.

At the ceremony, Kaufman, and Board President Lonnie Nedderman each had a chance to welcome the visitors and speak about their own experiences in the Vantage halls during the past year and a half. Plenty of thank yous were extended toward the general contractor Gilbane, the Ohio School Facilities Commission, Garmann/Miller, and the staff and students of Vantage. Another big thank you went to the voters who passed a 1.05 mill levy in November of 2009.

This project marked the first upgrade to the Vantage facility since it first opened to students in 1976. Over the past few months, the remaining parts of the old building were completely reworked while the new additions to the building were constructed. Labs were expanded, and traditional classrooms took on a new look with state-of-the-art technology.

Each of the six phases of the building project was completed on time, and the entire project was not only on time but was also slightly under budget. All parties involved admitted this was not always easy to accomplish. Architect Bruce Miller of Garmann/Miller Architects and Engineers was forthright in his assessment of the difficulty of this project.

“I told Staci [Kaufman] this was probably one of the most difficult designs we’ve ever had to complete. We put all new electrical in, all new HVAC, all new water lines, all new heating, and technology and fire alarms. And by doing that, as we went through the process of each phase, we had to keep the old building running while we were working on the new. So it was very complex, very complicated,” he said. “Gilbane did a wonderful job coordinating with us throughout the process. It was really a team effort.”

During his remarks, Chad Stevers of Gilbane introduced a group of high school students who had participated in the Jr. Builders program. These students sat in on planning meetings, did job shadowing, and eventually got a chance to do a job interview, giving them a chance to develop various skills they will need as they start to enter the work force.

The project itself was funded at 71 percent by the Ohio School Facilities Commission, with the other 29 percent coming in local funds from residents living within the boundaries of the

participating school districts. Kaufman noted that the project was only possible by the passage of the tax levy back in 2009. Once that passed, the plans could become more extensive.

With the additional square footage and up-to-date equipment, many Vantage programs will be able to handle up to three times more students. More opportunities also have been created in adult education as well. Since Vantage is considered a big asset for economic development, the win is not just for the school and the students, but also the community.