



Photos by Logan Hall

From the air, the rebuilt Upper Campus of Ojai Valley School, during a dedication ceremony Aug. 21.

After Thomas Fire, stars align for OVS

Perry Van Houten
pvh@ojaivalleynews.com

Ahead of the opening of the 2021-22 school year, Ojai Valley School has completed the most ambitious construction project in school history.

On Aug. 21, the school dedicated three new building projects at the OVS Upper Campus, part of a \$16.5 million improvement plan to replace buildings lost in the Thomas Fire.

"It's been an incredible journey, when you consider that we, in less than four years, completely rebuilt the top of this campus, and did all of it for under \$20 million," said OVS Director of Advancement and Admissions Tracy Wilson, who led the Ojai Valley News

on a tour of the new fire-safe buildings Aug. 31. "It was Herculean, to say the least."

The new buildings are the state-of-the-art Aramont Science and Technology Center, the Grace Hobson Smith House dormitory, and the Littlefield Student Commons dining and library complex.

The two-story Commons — a structure envisioned before the fire — includes a kitchen and servery, indoor and outdoor dining areas and a mezzanine student lounge. "One of the things that was lacking in the campus before was a central gathering place where the whole community could come together," said Wilson. Upstairs, there's a library and outdoor reading porch.



At twilight, the new multipurpose room at Ojai Valley School's Upper Campus, with student and faculty performances during the dedication Aug. 21.

The new girls' dorm sits on the footprint of the former structure, but its architectural design is much more open than before, with a central, outdoor courtyard. The dorm rooms are spacious with big windows, and every room has a view. The girls' dorm lounge has some of the best views of

the Ojai Valley, Wilson said.

OVS has grown the academic program at the 195-acre Upper Campus to move into some of the new spaces, she said. In the science and technology building, the school has added a new physics lab

Ojai Valley School, Page B5

Ojai Valley School: Continued from Page A1

and a dedicated Makerspace for robotics.

The rebuild also features solar power and a lithium-battery energy storage system, reducing CO2 emissions and ensuring the campus can function during power outages.

"As I said at the dedication, Wally Burr and Ed Yeomans, the founders of our school, would be thrilled to see this sustainable campus; the whole integration of outdoor-indoor space, the integration of the new with the old," said Michael Hall-Mounsey, OVS president and CEO.

The new buildings were designed by Los Angeles architect Frederick Fisher and Partners. "We had engaged Fred in our master plan projection for the next 20 years at the school," Hall-Mounsey said. "The fire devastated us but it also gave us the opportunity to incorporate the master plan a lot sooner."

With the damaged buildings gone, said Wilson, "you had this blank canvas to work from in envisioning how to rebuild and how to do it a little bit bigger and a lot better than what we had before."

The rebuilt buildings — the science-tech center and the girls' dorm — were built about 10% bigger, "which is allowing the school to grow for the future. We actually have the highest day enrollment right now in the history of the



Photo by Logan Hall

The new Makerspace for robotics at Ojai Valley School's rebuilt Upper Campus.

school," Wilson said.

Only a month after the Thomas Fire, the campus reopened with temporary dorms and classrooms, and in fall 2019, McGillivray Construction of Ventura started work on the new buildings.

Craig Floyd, head of school at the Upper Campus, said he couldn't be happier with the results. "It has come to fruition, and it's a big sigh of relief to finally have this part of the campus whole again and to provide such a wonderful facility for the students," he said.

What was the reaction of students returning to the rebuilt campus after summer break? "Shock and awe," said Floyd. "To come back three months later and see it completed, they were just blown

away."

Calling the rebuild "our renewal," Wilson said the support from the community can't be overstated. "Our alumni, our parents, our trustees, our faculty have all worked so hard to make this happen. Lots of smiles right now because we're finally getting to live in it. It's going to make a huge difference in the education of so many kids," she said.

The dedication event Aug. 21 was held in another new building, a multipurpose room dedicated to the performing arts, and included performances by students and faculty. "The night of the dedication, the sun was setting as the moon was rising," Wilson said. "It was like the stars were aligned for us."