

Ground broken for school

Berkeley builds to meet growth

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Author: JAMIE MCGEE

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CARNES CROSSROADS -- The line from the film says, "If you build it, they will come."

But according to the Berkeley County School District, the students have already arrived. They are spilling out of the overcrowded Stratford High School, where 48 trailers surround the main building.

"The voice my colleagues and I heard was 'They are here, they are coming, you had better build,' " said Kathleen Bounds, chairwoman of the Berkeley County School Board.

The district broke ground Wednesday for a high school that will hold 1,500 students from the south end of the county, temporarily alleviating crowding at Stratford, which holds 800 more students than it was designed for.

The school will be built on a 105-acre tract at U.S. Highway 176 and Marshall Acres Drive. It is a part of the 2,051-acre Cane Bay subdivision that will include about 5,000 homes and eventually will be the site of a middle and elementary school.

The groundbreaking was a welcome sight to Berkeley schools Superintendent Chester Floyd, who said overcrowding is one of the biggest challenges the district faces.

"Some days, when it's cold and rainy, students and teachers have to fight the elements to go to the library, the rest rooms, the cafeteria," he said of Stratford. "It's a long way to the cafeteria and the rest of the buildings."

With an estimated 30,000 to 50,000 homes projected to be built in the county, the district anticipates student population will double - - estimating 20,000 new students in the next 25 years.

Floyd said the district can't build fast enough. "We're playing catch-up," he said. "We'd like to think this school could handle growth for a short period, but that is not going to happen."

The district will have to find a way to build another high school in the Daniel Island and Cainhoy area, Floyd said. "Hanahan High won't be able to handle it all."

Charleston developer Ben Gramling of Gramling Brothers Real Estate and Development Co. donated 170 acres in Cane Bay to the school district and has planned the development around the schools.

"I've always dreamed of being a part of a community where people live, work, play and learn," Gramling said.

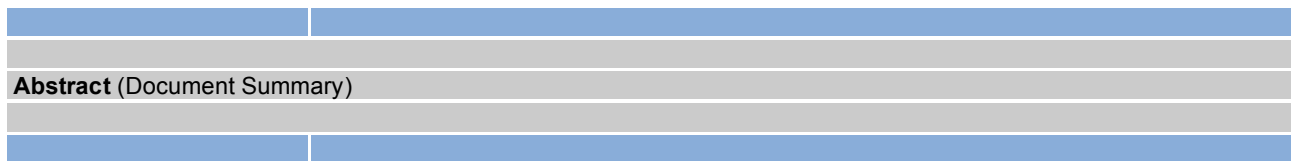
Students will be able to walk and bike to school on trails that will connect to each school. The land also includes two practice fields and separate fields for softball, baseball and football; the school will open with the fields ready for use. A two-lane highway with an underpass will provide access around the school.

The school will be about 368,000 square feet and will cost about \$72 million. It will be funded by a 2003 alternative financing plan that is also paying for the new Daniel Island School and renovations at Berkeley, College Park and Sedgefield Middle schools.

Contact Jamie McGee at 745-5856 or jmcgee@postandcourier.com.

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