

# IT'S ALL IN *The Details*



## ***The Kwakiutl Wagalus School in Port Hardy gets a total makeover***

By Shayna Wiwierski

**A** sense of community seems to be the underlying theme in one of Port Hardy's newest schools.

Currently under construction, the Kwakiutl Wagalus School is a kindergarten to Grade 7 school being built for the Kwakiutl First Nation. The school, which will be finished by the end of 2015, is a replacement school for the current one, which is housed in three different buildings.

"Two of these buildings are not suitable as they are very old and outdated," says Jordan Hunt, community project lead coordinator for the Kwakiutl First Nation. "They also do not have the capacity to take on all of the children of the community due to a lack of space."

The new facility is being built on a former forested land, which had to be

cleared in order to build the 12-acre 17,000-square-foot \$6 million-plus school. It will feature a large gym with a stage that will be used not just for gym activities, but cultural activities of the band. It also will have three classrooms, a kindergarten and a preschool classroom, as well as a multi-use classroom for school and out-of-school purposes, like community gatherings.

"It's a First Nations school, so they really want to make it their own," says Maaiké Pen, project manager/estimator for AFC Construction in Courtenay, B.C., the general contractors for the project.

The school features big timbers as a structure, with the entry canopy designed as a teaching tool representing the traditional framing and structure of their historical buildings. The heart of the school is a multi-purpose cultural room that is intended to be a modern interpretation



*The Kwakiutl Wagalus School hallway.*

of Kwakiutl's traditional Big House. The design for the school is by architects Lubor Trubka Associates Architects out of Vancouver, who specialize in First Nation community facilities.

Pen says that wood details were a big element that the band wanted in the building. "Their intent is to put down a building that is as much wood as possible. These days you see [the timber details] in a lot of West Coast designs," she says, adding

*Top photo: The Kwakiutl Wagalus School in Port Hardy is a kindergarten to Grade 7 school being built for the Kwakiutl First Nation. The \$6-million-plus school, which will be finished by the end of 2015, encompasses 12 acres and 17,000 square feet.*

*The school's gym features a 38-foot roof at its highest point.*



that it is however quite unique to see this extent of timber details in a school.

Although wood is used for most of the building, the gym, which has a 38-foot roof at its highest point, incorporates a steel frame. The gymnasium walls were designed to be pre-fabricated in eight-foot-wide panels. The original design had them completed with interior and exterior finishes prior to transportation to the site. This idea was abandoned as too much damage would incur to the finishes during transportation and erection.

“When the framing started, AFC first put up the timbers in the central multi-purpose room and then started framing the classroom areas. Imperial Welding then put up the steel structure in the gym, with MacDonald & Lawrence erecting the pre-fab gym walls,” says Pen, who adds that the wall panels were bolted together onsite.

Challenges the crew has seen so far include the fact that the power runs off a generator. Since the site was formerly a forested land, they knew that getting temporary power from BC Hydro would take too long. They opted for a temporary diesel generator. The civil contract has made the new road onto the site, leveled the site for the building and the sports field and is in charge of sedimentation control. Run-off from the site is an ongoing concern, as a large area was cleared of trees and landscaping won't be finished until the end of the summer.

“It's work to make sure that the muddy water settles in the sedimentation ponds and runs down clean,” says Pen, who adds that it's not a challenge as such, but few local companies are on the job so most



*Putting up glulams.*



*View of site, April 2015.*

View from the multi-purpose room.



trades travel from down island. However, band members have been hired by the different companies involved, adding to the sense of community that the school entails. "Working with the locals, there's a great sense of pride because it's their building."

In addition to AFC Construction, other VICA members currently working on the project include Island Architectural Millwork (millwork), Nelson Roofing & Sheet Metal Ltd. (roofing), Powerhouse Sheet Rock Ltd. (steel stud and drywall), and Den Mar Electric Ltd. (electrical).

Rob Curts, branch manager at Nelson Roofing and Sheet Metal in Cumberland, B.C., says that the roof is a two-ply SBS roof and standing-seam sheet metal roofing, which is something typical for schools. As for the roof insulation, they chose to go with Soprarock, which is a mineral wool fibre insulation. One of the main advantages is its stability in both movement and R-Value over time. This insulation is made from natural materials and is also recyclable and reusable. It also has a high resistance to fire and excellent acoustic properties.

Steve Crowhurst, estimator for Island Architectural Millwork Ltd. in Nanaimo, says that although the millwork for the project is quite standard (the cabinetry will have straight, clean lines, and the wood veneers give it a warmth you do not get with plastic laminate), the one thing that stands out the most is its structure.

"If I had to say what was unique about the project," says Crowhurst, "the heavy timber structure in front of the school is not something you would find at any school in B.C." ■



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