

School construction grant funds available

Vote Yes for MVTHS Committee holds press conference

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MT. VERNON — The message from the Illinois Capital Development Board for school construction funds is, “the money is in the bank,” according to Nick Osborne.

“I spoke earlier this week to Marcy Joeger, who monitors the school construction awards and projects,” said Osborne, the former District 80 superintendent and associate professor of educational administration with

Eastern Illinois University. “... Since May 2010, there have been 42 grants totaling \$420 million awarded. ... Her closing statement to me was, “Nick, the money is in the bank.”

Osborne was one of several speakers during a press conference called by the Vote Yes for MVTHS Committee on Thursday evening. Osborne explained the high school is on the 2003 construction grant list, which is a state fund separate from the “fiscally challenged general fund.”

“They are separate accounts, with the school construction funding maintained by the Capital Development Board,” Osborne explained. “Yes, the general fund is fiscally challenged. ... Yes, the state is behind on paying its categorical funds and title funds to the

schools, you see that by looking at signs in front of many schools. The money is not from the same fund.”

Osborne reported \$1.5 billion was appropriated through bonds issued by the state in 2010 to support school construction, and that 2003 school construction grant funds are available.

“The 2003 school construction grants are available in an account for use by the districts which secure their local match,” Osborne said. “Bills submitted from districts currently engaged in projects are being paid in five to six weeks. ... Delays are not due to unavailable funds, but due to the state billing cycle.”

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Osborne, along with Vote Yes for MVTHS President Matt Flanigan, MVTHS Board President Karen Goodwine and former MVTHS teacher Dorothy Shifflet addressed the standing room only crowd at the Municipal Building West on Thursday. Goodwine addressed information being presented by a group opposed to the April 5 MVTHS referendum called Friends of Mt. Vernon High School, alleging the information the group is presenting is “false, misleading and outdated information.”

“This group is being led by a board member of MVTHS, Pat Garrett. Mr. Garrett’s motives are, unfor-

tunately, not focused on what is best for the students of our district,” Goodwine said. “He seems more interested in preserving the outdated buildings and leading a public crusade against the decision of the board of education to move forward with a public referendum that is in the best interest of the students of our district. The Code of Conduct for Members of School Boards states in part, ‘I will take no private action that might compromise the board or administration,’ and ‘I will abide by majority decisions of the board.’ His actions are detrimental to the very institution that he pledged to serve and support.”

Shifflet, spoke of the challenges and issues facing those students and staff at the current high school facility who are mobility chal-

lenged, citing a freight elevator used for access to A, B and C Buildings which doesn’t always work, inaccessibility to the band, computer and technical areas in F Building, among other problems encountered on the campus.

Flanigan also reported Vote Yes for MVTHS has filed its status as a political action committee with the Illinois State Board of Elections.

The press conference called by the committee came hours after the Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors officially announced its support of the MVTHS bond referendum.

“Our community should take advantage of new school construction grants made available by the State of Illinois,” information

from the Chamber states. “To position ourselves for the most economically effective solution to the campus of MVTHS, we encourage a yes vote on April 5. ... We believe MVTHS is the final puzzle piece to attract, retain and grow the business climate, professionals and individuals interested in moving to our area. This referendum simply puts us in line to receive funding once it is made available. Passing this referendum doesn’t mean property taxes will be raised immediately, it simply provides a local match which is required by the State of Illinois before the rest of the funding can be made available. ... The JC-CC believes it is in the district’s best interest, both educationally and economically, to build a new campus on a new site.”