



## **Community Partnership a Key Feature of New Public High School in Essa**

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**March 1, 2010**

Construction is scheduled to begin this spring on a new secondary school that will unite the Angus and Essa community in a very unique way. When the doors open at the yet-to-be-named Essa Township Secondary School in September, 2011, residents will be just as excited as students because this location is much more than the township's first high school.

Alongside the general and specialty classrooms, multi-purpose cafetorium, double gymnasium and three-storey atrium, the project will incorporate a new public library and community facility. Its location, adjacent to the municipal arena and community centre, will create a community atmosphere for the township.

The idea of combining community uses in the school became reality through a strong community partnership and co-operation between the municipality and the Simcoe County District School Board.

"We are committed to excellence in learning and believe that strong community partnerships are cost effective and will enhance our students' overall experience. The Board is proud to take this great step forward," said Kathi Wallace, Director of Education at the Simcoe County District School Board. "We were delighted with the exceptional community presence at our groundbreaking ceremony and open house event earlier this school year. There is high interest in the progress of this exciting learning facility," noted the Director.

"We are very pleased to have developed such a successful partnership with the Township of Essa," said Carol McAulay, Associate Director at the Simcoe County District School Board. "This new secondary school will not only provide a dynamic learning and teaching environment for Essa Township, it will also create unique opportunities for our students by integrating a comprehensive range of community programming."

Simcoe County District School Board trustee Robert North, who represents Adjala-Tosorontio and Essa townships, says that while the Essa school is a first for the SCDSB, the idea of integrating community services into schools is becoming increasingly popular across the province. Through the collaboration, the shared public use library will allow the township and the school board to supply improved resources for the community at a lower price, by eliminating duplication of resources and reducing overhead costs.

For students, the effect will be dramatic as teenagers are able to attend high school in their home community. The school will accommodate approximately 900 students, eliminating the need for hundreds of young people to be bussed from the Angus area to Barrie or Alliston.

"Now, these students will have far greater opportunity to become engaged with their school," North said, adding it should also improve overall credit accumulation. "It's very exciting for the Board. We have taken the money allotted to this project and by working together with the township and other community groups, we have ensured the biggest bang for taxpayers' dollars," North said.

Essa Township Mayor Dave Guergis believes the school will set the bar high for future development.

"All levels of government must always remember that there is only one taxpayer and we need to find ways like this to ensure tax dollars are being spent in the most cost effective way possible," Guergis said.

"Going through this process with the school board has been a phenomenal experience for me and my council. We are very excited and so is the community. This partnership has afforded us the ability to have a larger facility with additional services. Everyone, especially Essa residents and our future high school students, truly benefits."

The unique project marks the first time the Simcoe County District School and a municipality have partnered. The result of the partnership is a student-focused, joint-use facility spanning 134,000 square feet.

“Students will have far greater opportunity to become involved in activities after school without worrying about transportation,” said Trustee North. “For the first time, they will be participating on teams that represent Essa Township and Angus.”

Along with its strong contribution to the local community, the school has been designed to contribute in a very positive way to the environment. As the 14-acre site, located on County Road 10, will be developed in a way that preserves and complements the existing preservation areas at the back of the building and adjacent to the track and field area. Students will be given opportunities to learn about the environment with classes at the outdoor classroom area.

Because of the significant community use, the building will be used year-round and a geo-thermal ground source heating and cooling system is being installed to draw heat from the ground during the winter months and to cool the air during the summer.

“As with any new construction or redevelopment project, the environment is top of mind for the Board and staff as we design and build facilities,” explained Brad Parkes, assistant manager of design and construction at the Simcoe County District School Board. “We are responsible stewards of the environment and the Essa Township secondary school has been designed with sustainable and environmentally-friendly features from the types of materials used to the heating and cooling systems.”

Funding from the Provincial government was approved last year, recognizing the high growth levels in the area and the need for a secondary school. Final approval was received in February for an additional \$1.4 million to be used for a ground source heat pump system and a solar photo voltaic system that will generate a maximum of 50 kW of electricity. Plans are underway to include a solar domestic hot water system and to sell power to the provincial grid. The timing is right and the community has waited patiently for this facility.

“As the saying goes, ‘Build it and they will come’, concludes Trustee North. “We are building it now because they are already here.”

Chris Samis will be the new high school’s first Principal. He is currently Principal of Barrie North Collegiate.

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