

Amphitheater/outdoor classroom dedicated at EOCHS

By BRIAN HAWKINS
Starkville Daily News

Friday was a big day for students, faculty, staff, alumni and supporters of East Oktibbeha County High School as a major phase of a six-year project culminated with the dedication of the school's new amphitheater/outdoor classroom.

The amphitheater/outdoor classroom — situated on what was once a sloping wooded area just to the east of the main school building — was developed through partnership of a group of school alumni, various community partners and the Carl Small Town Center in Mississippi State University's College of Architecture, Art and Design.

The project was spearheaded by the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools — an alumni group of the school, which was formerly known as B.L. Moor High School — after a 2002 arson fire severely damaged the school facility, which was then in the midst of a major renovation project.

EAEOCS President Jackie Ellis said the school's alumni wanted to do something to help their alma mater recover from the fire.

"This was designed to be a community project to help with



Brian Hawkins/SDN

Above, East Oktibbeha County High School students, teachers, alumni, county school officials and community supporters listen as Jackie Ellis, president of the Educational Association of the East Oktibbeha County Schools — an alumni group for the school — and Chris Cosper, a faculty member in the Mississippi State University College of Architecture, Art and Design — discuss the project that led to the dedication of an outdoor classroom and amphitheater at the school.

bringing back our school from the damage that was done after the fire," said Ellis. "We wanted

to do something positive after that tragic event."

Working with the Carl Small

Town Center and MSU architecture students, EAEOCS members developed a courtyard out-

side the school cafeteria and

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began work to develop the amphitheater/outdoor classroom.

A more than \$30,000 dona-

tion by school alumnus and famed NFL star Jerry Rice helped get the project under way.

Various staffers at the Carl Small Town Center — including former staffers Kimberly Brown and Leah Faulk and current staff member Chris Cospers — worked with the EAEPCS to

design the facility using input from students at the school. County crews helped in clearing the trees and in preparing the land, which helped keep costs down tremendously, Ellis said.

"What you see here is what the students wanted," Ellis said.

Cospers said the school alumni — particularly Ellis — exhibit-

ed a great deal of patience over the six years it took to design and build the amphitheater.

"Jackie is the most patient client we've ever had. At times, the process seemed to be a little long, but we all persevered and

now it's finished," Cospers said.

EOCHS Principal Andrea Paschal-Temple said the amphitheater/outdoor classroom will provide unique learning opportunities for students, particularly in the sciences.

"We want to blend the curriculum — what we're doing indoors, we want to bring outdoors and help the students use their creativity," she said. "The students will enjoy using this facility."

