

## Murphey School breaks ground on geothermal system

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By Doug Denison

Gov. Jack Markell attended the Oct. 7 groundbreaking ceremony for a new geothermal ventilation system at the Elizabeth W. Murphey School in Dover. At the ceremony were, from left, Fred Sears, CEO of the Delaware Community Fund; Dover Mayor Carleton E. Carey Sr.; Collin O'Mara, secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control; Markell; Vivian Rapposelli, secretary of the Delaware Children's Department; Michael Kopp, executive director of the Murphey School; former state Rep. Nancy Wagner; Joseph McDaniel III, Murphey School chairman; Kay Sass, city of Dover public relations; Dave Jones, Atlantic Refrigeration and Air Conditioning; and James Hutchison, Murphey School board member.

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By Doug Denison, Staff Writer  
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Dover, Del. -

When Dover native Sanford Murphey founded the Elizabeth W. Murphey School for Orphan Children in 1922, many said he was ahead of his time.

His view of education and the public responsibility to provide opportunities for those less fortunate was not only seen as noble, but groundbreaking.

It was in this spirit that the school broke ground Oct. 7 on a \$100,000 geothermal climate control system, an environmentally friendly improvement that will save money and reduce the school's electricity usage.

School Chairman Joseph McDaniel III said Murphey would have approved of a state-of-the-art, socially conscious way to heat and cool the school, which provides residential care for neglected children.

"Mr. Murphey was very progressive in his thinking," McDaniel said. "We often say at meetings, 'What would Mr. Murphey do?' With this geothermal project, we know he would have been enthusiastic."

The system, funded by a collection of grants from public and private groups, will heat and cool the school's main administration building by circulating fluid through pipes drilled 300 feet into the earth. Since the soil below the surface remains at a constant temperature year round, the system can draw heat in the winter and dump heat in the summer.

Geothermal wells are 40% more efficient and cost only 10% more than ventilation systems powered by electricity, oil or natural gas, said Dave Jones, of Lewes-based Atlantic Refrigeration and Air Conditioning. His company is in charge of drilling the 17 wells that will power the system.

Jones said the additional costs are more than covered by government subsidies established to encourage the use of geothermal energy. The federal government gives homeowners and businesses a 30% tax credit for installing a system, and the state of Delaware rewards geothermal users with grants of \$600 per ton of air handling capacity.

The Murphey School received more than \$10,000 from the state to help pay for its system. "If you look at geothermal and at air-to-air systems, the geothermal is a better play," Jones said. "And, it can produce a warmer air temperature."

Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control Collin O'Mara said more than 350 geothermal wells are active across the state, and his agency is doing all it can to encourage more.

"There are other alternative technologies like wind and solar panels, and I support those technologies, but the quickest return on your investment is from geothermal," he said.

Michael Kopp, executive director at the school, said the administration building, which houses an auditorium used frequently by community groups, was long overdue for a heating and air upgrade. "Many people use the auditorium, it's just so uncomfortable in the summer. Something had to give," he said.

Kopp has used solar panels to help power his home for years, so when he started looking for a new ventilation system at the school, he knew he wanted to go with alternative energy. "I knew the potential of renewable energy, so I said, 'Why not?'"

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