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Baca School design incorporates Navajo culture

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The BACA Dlo'ay Azhi Consolidated Replacement School, a design/build project being managed by the District's Western Resident Office for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is continuing at a rapid pace despite Mother Nature and its unique design characteristics. Never heard of this one? Probably because you do not get to Prewitt, New Mexico very often. The new school is an approximately 79,000 square foot single story replacement project for students who are currently being educated in the small hogan style school built in the 1940s just off of Interstate 40 in Prewitt, New Mexico and for the Thoreau School ten miles up the road in Thoreau, New Mexico. The new school will house approximately 390 students, and will incorporate a new gymnasium, kitchen facilities and dining room, library, Navajo cultural center, large classrooms for K through 6, and a new computer room with the latest technology and high speed data connections.

Construction started in a whirlwind in early August 2002 and has been moving at a fast pace ever since. The general contractor, Bradbury Stamm Construction out of Albuquerque, had to do some creative thinking to overcome some of the difficulties associated with the remote site and unique design. The first problem they had to address was where to obtain the more than 40,000 gallons of water needed daily for construction purposes. The contractor contacted the local power plant and arranged to "borrow" 40,000 gallons of water from them on a daily basis for a temporary duration. This permitted the majority of the site and building earthwork to be completed, but additional arrangements had to be made with the local gas plant in Thoreau for additional water needed for later construction.

The design is unique in that it is patterned from traditional Navajo cultural and religious themes with a



Photo by Robert Koteff

This round room will be the school's library and is located in the central core of the school.

circular center of life radiating out in four distinct directions pointing to the four sacred mountains.

"This unique design has resulted in some innovative construction methods because of the many curvilinear and non-traditional shaped rooms," according to Dave Burks, Project Superintendent for Bradbury Stamm.

The new school will also have a 60,000 gallon single pedestal water tower for fire suppression which the old school did not have. Classrooms will be more numerous and spacious with central heating and cooling. The BIA has been working closely with the Western Resident Office to ensure the project is completed to their requirements. The BIA is hopeful the project will be the first LEEDS certified facility in the state of New Mexico.

"The children are excited and we can hardly wait to
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move in,” says Jacque Mangham, Principal of the new school. “The increased space, new technologies, and cultural resource areas will greatly increase the learning environment for the Navajo students - a much needed improvement.”

If you are driving west on Interstate 40 near Prewitt, be sure to stop and see the new school. It has been confused as a new casino, but the only thing we are betting on here is a better and brighter future for the many students who will begin their educational journey here. □



Photo by Robert Koteff

The sprawling 79,000 square-foot single story school building will house nearly 400 students.