

Beulah Ralph Elementary prepares for inaugural school year

By Jacqueline LeBlanc

After years of construction and preparation, students finally will fill the halls of Beulah Ralph Elementary School, the district's newest and 21st elementary school. The 89,000-square-foot building is located on the corner of Scott Boulevard and Route KK.

Groundbreaking for the school began in November 2014 and construction was completed in June of this year. Dr. Tim Majerus, the former principal at Alpha Hart Lewis Elementary school, was named principal of Beulah Ralph Elementary School in October of 2015 and planning for the school year quickly followed.

Majerus immediately began looking for his assistant principal and hired Seth Woods. Several Columbia Public Schools teachers and staff showed interest in transferring, and Majerus had the majority of his staff hired last February. Since then, Majerus and his team have been involved in getting to know each other and envisioning the future at Beulah Ralph.

"We've had two opportunities where we had the entire staff together," Majerus said. "So we met offsite and spent the entire day together planning for the upcoming school year and talking about what our vision for the school is, and how to accomplish those goals. So it's been very fun."

Each teacher at Beulah Ralph is part of a committee, which revolves around discussing service learning, Positive Behavior Intervention Support, academics, and brainstorming school traditions. These committees have allowed teachers the opportunity in making Beulah Ralph a unique school. For example, the service learning component combines giving back to the community with learning in the classroom.

"I'm super impressed with our staff. They're collectively a very talented, very student-centered and very positive group of individuals," Majerus said. "The teachers will be tying their service learning project back into the curriculum, so I'm very excited about those ideas."

Self-Contained Special Education teacher Kara Kolostov spent the last four years at Rock Bridge Elementary School and was one of the few teachers CPS chose to transfer to Beulah Ralph Elementary School. The new school offers accommodations for special needs students, such as special classrooms and a rubber matted ground playground in the front of the school. Although Kolostov originally had mixed feelings about leaving Rock Bridge, she is excited to be part of the new community at Beulah Ralph.

"I'm so excited about making brand new decisions that are going to impact kids' lives for years and years to come," she said. "I'm looking forward to working with our incredibly positive staff and working with my students."

The school is named for Beulah Ralph, who was an educator with Columbia Public Schools for 58 years prior to retiring in 2005. She died in 2010. Born in Hardin, Missouri, and raised in Columbia, Ralph graduated from Douglass School in 1945, and worked as a secretary for 20 years. She later created and directed the Home School Communicator program in 1967, dedicated to ensuring a smooth transition for minority students at CPS after desegregation.

Monica Naylor, a former teacher and Ralph's only daughter, said that her mother would be incredibly proud to have the school named after her, but would have never expected it.

"There was such an outpouring of support in the naming of the school," Naylor said. "People will tell you that she made them feel like they were special because her support was unwavering. Having the school named after her would not be something she would ever expect because she always did what she did from the bottom of her heart."

The theme for the school's inaugural school year is "Building Beulah," and will incorporate Legos in a variety of ways during the year. The school has also discussed creating a time capsule, determining the school mascot and colors during election season, and celebrating Beulah Ralph's 90th birthday in January.

"There is still a little touch up work to be done here and there, but for the most part the building is ready to go," Majerus said. "I'm looking forward to seeing the students and witnessing all the hard work by our staff start to pay off."