

NEIGHBORS

VALLEY SNAPSHOT

Lewis Center breaks ground on long-awaited gym

CHERYL THOMPSON ~ SPECIAL TO THE DAILY PRESS



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HARD WORK PAYS OFF: From left: David Kenneally, IT director; Nick Monte, senior and associated body president; Rick Piercy, Lewis Center president and CEO; Scott Gormley, athletic director; Ashley Bergstrom, senior and AF JRTOC cadet commander; Gordon Soholt, AAE principal and chief academic officer; Bud Biggs, vice president of Mitsubishi Cement Corp.; and Darren Dowd, facilities manager proudly scoop out the first shovelful of dirt for the new gym coming in.

APPLE VALLEY • Students, staff and guests were bundled with coats and blankets against the fierce wind and cold, but the cold couldn't chill the hearts that were warm with the excitement of the event. The Lewis Center for Educational Research held its groundbreaking for the long awaited gymnasium for the Academy for Academic Excellence, a K-12 public charter school on Wednesday at noon. Principal Gordon Soholt also recounted how the school first moved onto the Mojave River campus 12 years ago.

Founder, President and CEO Rick Piercy commented that those in attendance at the groundbreaking are experiencing firsthand why for the past 15 years students have been wishing for a gym to exercise and play sports in. And meet out of inclement weather.

"Hearing all the rumors throughout the years of one day having a gym made today that much more meaningful. It was an honor to cheer on our newest accomplishment! We are so grateful," said Jordan Bean, eleventh-grade AAE student.

Just before noon, students streamed onto the basketball court and the surrounding area where the new gym will be built. The Air Force JROTC presented the colors and the national anthem was performed by the AAE band. The AAE Knights Varsity Cheer team was accompanied by AAE third- and fourth-grade cheer team.

The groundbreaking shovels were painted with school colors and letters spelling out the school mascot, KNIGHTS, and one displayed the school logo. Included with the staff and Foundation Board Chairman Bud Biggs, was the Associated Student Body President Nick Monte and Air Force JROTC Cadet Commander Ashley Bergstrom breaking ground with the colorful shovels.

The excitement built as Facilities Manager Darren Dowd stepped up to a big yellow backhoe with a jackhammer attached. As the crowd counted down, Dowd broke into the concrete slab that will be removed for the new gym causing a chorus of cheers.

"It is so exciting that we are finally getting a gym. It'll be a great opportunity for our athletic programs to expand and now we'll have our own facilities we can use," said Christine Khoury, a senior student.

"We're not only breaking ground on a building, but on a new era of sports, education and community," said Brandon Peterson, 11th-grade student.

All construction will be performed by companies and workers in the High Desert.

The school is offering various sizes of bricks to help finance the inside of the gym. If you are interested in purchasing one for you or your business, call (760) 946-5414, ext. 201 or visit **<https://lcer.engravedbricks.com>**. For more information about the Lewis Center and the AAE, visit www.lewiscenter.org.

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