

West Jeff Middle School parents working to beautify school's exterior

By Corinne Westeman
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A group of West Jefferson Middle School parents is collaborating with local businesses and community members to give the school's entryway a face-lift.

The "Change the Face of West Jeff" campaign has raised more than \$10,000, and almost \$30,000 in supplies and services has been donated to the effort.

Parents Kelly Morris and Laurie Osborn are spearheading the project along with fellow parent Lisa Webb of C&H Irrigation and Landscaping. The two said West Jeff's exterior does not reflect the quality of the school, and they want it to be more inviting and keeping with the mountain atmosphere.

The group's plans including adding trees and plants, picnic tables that could be used for an outdoor classroom, sitting areas around the light poles, and square stone pavers that would have names of families or messages inscribed on them.

Webb said the group intends to begin hardscaping this November and planting in the spring. She said supplying water and irrigating the area was the most problematic part of the design, however, Shirley Septic Pumping had offered to irrigate the beautified area for the first year.

Morris first started the effort, using small events to raise funds. She said she was shocked when she first visited the middle school at how "industrial and institutional" the entryway seemed.

"The first time I saw it, I thought, 'Did they forget to finish it?'" she said. "Just like any business or home, the feeling of what's going on inside should be reflected in the exterior. But every time I walked into that school, it felt very cold with the dead trees and the concrete. (The exterior) should reflect the quality of the school."

Osborn said she had a similar experience when her family moved to the area a few years ago. She said their Realtor had taken them by the other schools, but not West Jeff Middle School. After seeing it, she said she understood why.

Eventually the effort snowballed into restaurant nights at local eateries, fund-raising by selling pavers, and getting donations from Denver and mountain area businesses.

Morris said the Jeffco School District has been supportive of the group's efforts, and the group hopes to continue "opening their eyes and elevating their awareness of need in other areas of the school."

Band/orchestra teacher Laura Garrison-Benning said she appreciated the community's efforts "to take care of (the beautification) while we take care of the teaching."

Garrison-Benning, who has been at West Jeff for 17 years, noted the school already has a beautiful setting amid the mountain area, and that she wants the students to have a sense of pride and community.

"The community is very vested in the school and the students," she said. "It's nice that the effort is being made."

Morris affirmed, "The staff and students for years to come deserve to have a beautiful school."

For additional information, visit the school website's PTA page; or e-mail Morris at morris.kellya@gmail.com or Osborn at laurie.osborn@me.com.



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From left, West Jeff Middle School students A.J. Morris, Sage Swegle, Nick Osborn, Cooper Webb, Hannah Webb and Andy Bunchman display paver stones to be used in a beautification project.