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White Lake's new gym floor will be special

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White Lake is having the modern day equivalent of a barn-raising.

With the ground-breaking for its new \$3.5 million community recreation center 19 days away, community members have donated 90 cords of valuable, hard maple logs that will be used to create the gymnasium floor, a symbol of pride likely unmatched in any other public school project.



Volunteers pose in front of a pile of lumber, milled from donated wood, that will be used for the new gymnasium at the White Lake school.

"I don't know of another community willing to do this," engineer Doc Smith of EDS Builders, the project's general contractor, said. "It's going to be a beautiful floor and when people see it, they will say it's our own floor, it's from White Lake."

"It's not unusual for this area," Todd Lambert insisted. "It's like the old days of raising a barn. Cut some wood, throw some food together and make something to be proud of."

The idea dates to just days after the referendum, while Lambert was sitting in his stand the opening morning of deer hunting season.

The community had voted to proceed with the school project through a referendum election 11 days earlier, and Lambert was thinking about ways to get people involved, and perhaps shave a few dollars from the cost.

The community was built on forestry, nestled in woodlands, and home to Robbins Flooring, one of the premier flooring manufacturers in the nation. Getting some folks to part with a few logs, whether from their back forty or back yard, seemed a natural fit.

It was.

"We just started talking and it took off from there," Lambert said. "Everyone got involved. It's become a source of pride among community members."

Dan Wickersheim, who served on the district's building committee, coordinated the effort, getting permission from the school board, working with a very receptive staff from Robbins, soliciting donations and arranging for loggers and trucks.

"One simple little idea ended up being a pretty good project," Wickersheim said. At first, organizers hoped they would get a few dozen cords of wood, enough perhaps to allay some of the costs. But it quickly mushroomed.

"As the word got out, we had people giving everything from just a few trees to full truckloads," Wickersheim said. "That tells you the community is really behind it."

Donors even included some landowners who had voted against the plan, he said, telling him that "the referendum passed and I'm on board."

District Administrator Bill Fisher said that is inspiring.

"It's another example of community pride and spirit that makes White Lake such a special place," Fisher said. "I've never experienced anything like this."

By the time the last load was delivered to Robbins earlier this year, 30 to 40 landowners had contributed

a total of 90 cords of hard maple. Several dozen more volunteers donated their equipment, time and labor.

"It definitely was a community effort," Wickersheim said.

Robbins marked the wood as a donation and graded the timber as it moved through the milling process. Smith explained that the company cut the district a deal on that process and the school will also get a break on the subflooring—a key piece of the component system.

"We're getting a college floor for the cost of a high school floor," Smith said.

And more importantly, White Lake is getting its own floor.

"This is about putting our wood on our floor," Wickersheim said. "People will take their grandchildren into that gymnasium and say, 'that's our wood.' There will be some sentimental value there."

Fisher agreed.

"This is going to make that gym a special place," he said. "It won't just be a gym. It will be our gym."

Smith said the wood donors, volunteers, and all the other people and businesses who are involved in the White Lake project will be recognized on plaques placed in the new recreation center.

"This will tell them, 'this is your building. This is your house. I want you to treat it like that,'" Smith said. "It will announce that this is a community place."

And he added that White Lake may serve as an example of what a small town, with a love of a community and its children, can accomplish.

"It's something I hope gets contagious," he said. "Imagine if other schools and community do this, across Wisconsin or the country. Think what we could do."

For his part, Wickersheim is pleased, but not surprised by the outcome.

"The school is definitely the heart of the community," he said, reflecting on tough times in years past when it looked as though the facility could not survive. "As long as we have a school, the community is going to continue to have a heartbeat."