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Auction at school bittersweet

Remnants of closed MLK Montessori help other buildings

By Megan Hubartt - The Journal Gazette

The hallways and classrooms of Martin Luther King Montessori School were bustling with activity – probably for the last time.

Dozens of people packed the school at 333 W. Lewis St. on Saturday for a liquidation auction, bidding on everything from toys, mop buckets, playground equipment, refrigerators and a fish tank. Prices varied on the items being auctioned. Some people made off with bargains, paying \$25 to \$30 for wood shelves, cabinets and electronics.

Many of the toys brought in higher bids. A pink-and-white wooden dollhouse sold for more than \$100.

The items were auctioned so the building can be demolished to make room for the \$120 million Harrison Square project. A new downtown baseball stadium will eventually be built where the school stands.

Harrison Square also includes a \$35 million Courtyard by Marriott with a parking garage, condominiums and retail spaces.

Pam Samuels, Carrie McClure and Candace Smolinske, of Legacy Academy in Albion, came to get supplies for their school, about to begin its second year.

“We got risers because our children have choir performances.” Samuels said.

The school, which has kindergarten through fifth grade, emphasizes a fine-arts curriculum and has 14 students enrolled for the fall.

With enrollment up from four students last year, the women were in need of more equipment and were happy to take advantage of any deals they might get at the auction.

“We’re going to bid on more shelving, and we’re hoping to get some of the playground,” McClure said. “We really need playground equipment.”

Small coat racks, about 3 feet from the floor, that lined the walls of the school’s hallways still had nametags designating children’s hooks. Butterfly and flower art projects still hung from windows and bulletin boards in the classrooms, left behind after the school officially closed July 26.

People brought screwdrivers to remove shelving, bulletin boards and curtain rods fastened to the walls. Even the tiny toilets and sinks used by the little MLK Montessori School students would be bid on.

MLK Montessori School for ages 3 to 5 will reopen Aug. 20 for 100 students at Village Elementary School, 4625 Werling Drive, in the East Allen County Schools district. The kindergarten program will be eliminated because Village already has kindergarten students.

Sue Bernard, director of Matthew's House day care at St. Matthews Lutheran Church on Goshen Road, used to work in the building on Lewis Street when it was Great Beginnings, Lincoln National Corp.'s child-care center.

She got some good deals for Matthew's House, including more than enough dishes to serve meals to the 30 children in the program. But, it was a bittersweet day.

"I came out of curiosity more than anything," Bernard said. "It's sad, but they call it progress."

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