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'This is not just a gym'

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PUTNEY -- When Putney School officials presented their plans to build the most energy efficient gymnasium in the country, their dream extended a little bit beyond their budget. The school wanted to put up a facility that used as many recycled materials as possible. They also wanted the building to produce more energy than it used.

And they wanted to end up with a structure that had a gentle impact on the environment, all the way down to its composting toilets.

The architect said he could do it, but it would cost \$1 million more than the school had originally budgeted.

The board members talked about it and decided that if they were going to take on the project, then they wanted to do it right, and the decision was made to not cut any corners.

Walking around the gym Thursday, just a few weeks away from the official ribbon cutting ceremony, Putney School chief financial officer Randy Smith said everyone involved with the project is sure they made the right decision.

"This is not just a gym," Smith said as workers throughout the building put their finishing touches on the \$6.7 million athletic facility. "We want this to be a place where our students can learn about being environmentally responsible, so that later in life, when they are making choices, they can say, 'It's possible. Our gym at school it did this way.'"

The new Putney School Field House sits right in the center of the campus, just outside of the dining hall.

The 15,000-square-foot building sits no higher than the highest building, and with its rounded edges and traditional windows, it fits in with the other buildings at the private boarding school.

All of the systems in the building are powered by electricity which is produced by the 15 sun-tracking photovoltaic solar panels that are being installed in a field just outside the new building.

With super insulated walls, that have an R factor of 45, and a roof with an R factor of 60, the building is expected to generate more energy than it uses over the course of a year.

The building is wired directly into the power grid and the school will sell its excess energy to Green Mountain Power and then buy back energy when there is not enough sun to run the solar cells.

Smith said the school viewed the field house as long term investment, and while a little more money had to be raised now, over the long term the energy savings should more than cover the extra capital.

"It's an extraordinary building, and we hope that in 10 or 15 years it is a standard and all building will be built this way," said Smith. "We had to build something we could afford, but it was also a decision we made for the future. We wanted to set an example."

Down in the basement, a high-tech composting toilet system will break down all of the waste into a safe powder.

The floor in the weight room is made out of recycled tires and all of the windows and window shades are strategically placed to use all of the light and heat from the sun.

The school is saying it is the only **net zero** building in the country and they are hoping to be one of only a handful of platinum LEED certified buildings.

The school hopes to continue using the building as an educational resources for its students. An online monitor will track the energy use and a wall in the field house is devoted to telling the story of the

building and America's reliance on a diminishing world supply of oil.

Bill Maclay, the lead architect on the project, said the school has ended up with a building that should go well beyond just teaching its students about environmentally sustainable construction.

Maclay said there were challenges along the way, including making sure all of the subcontractors embraced the green technologies that sometimes made their jobs a little harder.

And early on in the project he had to convince the school that the extra investment made now would give them a world class facility that would be a model for green building.

"There is no other building I know of that is even comparable to this," he said this week with the field house just a few months away from its first basketball game. "What we mostly wanted to do was show that this is totally doable. You don't have to wait for the future. It's already here."

The school will officially dedicate the building at the annual Harvest Festival on Saturday, Oct. 10, with field house tours from 2 to 3:30 p.m. and a ribbon cutting at 4 p.m.

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[Photo:](#)

[Workers finish construction on The Putney School's new eco-friendly field house. \(Zachary P. Stephens/Reformer\)](#)

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