

First day: Ss. Peter and Paul begins new year in old building

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - After spending half a year away, the students of **Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic School** are starting the 2016-17 school year at home.

Tuesday was the first day of school at the newly-renovated old building after the entire staff and student body were moved to the former **Mark Twain School** on Milton Road. Major floods at the end of Dec. 2015 caused the walls to crack, resulting in the need for extensive repairs on the entire building. Those repairs were completed earlier this

summer, allowing the students and staff to return "home," as **Principal Harry Cavanaugh** describes the more than 100-year-old building on State Street.

"Everything looks brand-spanking-new even though it's 108 years old," Cavanaugh said on Wednesday, the first full day of school this year. "The kids won't even know the difference. They wouldn't have seen the damaged conditions, unless they saw it on the news or read about it."

The damage was discovered by a teacher going into her classroom during Christmas break to feed the class pet. A large fissure was seen in the wall, and more damage was found through further inspection. Unprecedented winter rains contributed to that damage.

Observant students may notice the freshly-painted walls. Cavanaugh said the walls were repainted to replace decades-old peeling wallpaper. He also said the floors were buffed and polished for the first days of school.

As of day two, Cavanaugh said nothing major has caused any significant disruption. He said students have done common mistakes, such as forgetting lunches and belts, but those issues are "business as usual."

"No matter how hectic it seems or how upset you are about the building being ready, it always happens and it works," he said.

This year, Ss. Peter and Paul is also welcoming two new teachers focusing on early childhood. **Andrea Staub** has come to the district to teach pre-school. Cavanaugh said Staub has four years of experience in early childhood education from daycare to the Carrollton School District and St. Mary's Catholic School. **Beth Lehr**, who has six years of early childhood care experience, also starts this year, teaching first grade.

Like many Catholic schools, Cavanaugh said the enrollment at Ss. Peter and Paul has declined in the last five years. This year sees an enrollment of 75 students in the entire school, compared to the 110 students enrolled six years ago when Cavanaugh became principal.

