

Returning home: Ribbon cutting reopens local school

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ALTON - After shutting down for half a year, the historic **Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic School** building reopened Friday afternoon.

The event was marked by a ceremonial ribbon cutting sponsored by the **Riverbend Growth Association**. **Principal Harry Cavanaugh** cut the ribbon surrounded by staff and students. He said the return was like "coming home."

Friday was the first time many of the students could return to their old classrooms after the building was closed on December 2015 following damage caused by unprecedented winter rains. The rains caused cracks, holes and slippage of the entire building, making it unsafe for occupancy. During the conclusion of the 2015-16 school year, students attended class at the former Mark Twain School.

"It was nice at Mark Twain," Cavanaugh said. "It was something new for the students. There were things there we didn't have here."

One thing the Mark Twain School was missing, however, was a church. Cavanaugh said students made due with a makeshift altar in the gym. Returning to their original location on State Street will give students access to mass in a proper church.

Returning home also helped with the school's budget. Ss. Peter and Paul were paying the Alton School District rent for using the Mark Twain School while also paying for repairs. The the entire building had to be lifted and 19 pillars were added to ensure flooding would not be such a huge risk in the future. Cavanaugh said they also replaced decades old wallpaper and freshened the overall look of the schools interior.

School Parochial Administrator Fr. Albert Allen said the ability to repair the school and resume classes by the 2016-17 school year was a "gift from God."

It's a beautiful thing today," Allen said. "We're going to rededicate the school."

Allen took part in a blessing for the school, which asked divine forces to protect the school building as well as everyone inside of it. He also asked for the assistance of God to provide the kids with knowledgeable instruction.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker attended the ribbon cutting, calling it a "tremendous thing."

"The kids get to return home for the 2016-17 school year," he said. "Due to the extent of the damage, it's almost a miracle they were able to return so soon."

Cavanaugh said he was happy to be able to resume classes in the old building. He said two new teachers would be joining the staff as well.

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