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Sound of music gets boost at high school

Windham: Donation of acoustic panels will enhance the experience for musicians and audiences, officials say.

By Derrick Perkins
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Windham – A donation of eight acoustic panels for the new high school is music to the ears of education officials.

Windham Endowment for Community Advancement made the gift official at last week's School Board Meeting. Past president Diane Carpenter said the donation has been in the works for some time.

It's part of a capital improvement campaign created to ensure Windham High School becomes a community center as well as a place of learning, she said.

"It just expands dramatically what we can do as far as sound and the quality of sound that the performers will be able to enjoy," Carpenter said. "The shell was clearly high on everyone's list from the start and expensive. But the shell impacted so many groups – choral groups, small chamber music and flute ensembles – and many different types of groups would benefit from it."

The eight panels, which form a "shell" when fitted together, funnel sound toward the audience, she said. It will improve the performance for smaller groups and because the panels are portable, they can be moved to other areas of the school, like the gymnasium or cafeteria, to serve larger audiences, Carpenter said.

With the board's approval, the endowment bought the 12-foot-high panels on Dec. 23 at a cost of \$17,531. They're currently en route from Minnesota, Carpenter said, and expected to arrive at the school next week.

Board member Jeff Bostic said the panels will open up different options for using the school as a local arts and entertainment venue, something officials have been working toward since the high school's inception.

"All of us are very supportive and enthusiastic where the community is partnering with the school to enhance the experience of the arts that both the students and the community will be able to enjoy," he said. "We very much want the school to be a place where senior citizens as well as young people can feel as it's their school, whether it's to use the library or to see a performance."

The donation comes as officials learned the high school has been selected to host the 2011 New Hampshire Jazz All-State Festival, according to Superintendent Frank Bass. The acoustic shell will make the four days of performances all the better, he said.

"It ensures the highest quality of sound," Bass said. "The very best musicians from around the state will be coming for four days and you want the best sound available."

Carpenter said the endowment's efforts to improve the high school won't stop with the sound panels. They want to help fund a project undertaken by the Windham Initiative for Renewable Energy to install alternative energy sources at the school, including a solar panel system and a wind turbine, as well as potentially build a greenhouse.

"Basically, we live in a community where all good things are raised up by the many, and we think we can do more," Carpenter said. "It helps us bring money into the community from sources other than taxation. We're in the process of writing grants and we get corporate matches, and it expands the way money comes into our community."