

Owego School Reopens Five Years After Storm Devastation



Photo courtesy of MultiVista

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After Tropical Storm Lee swept through the city of Owego in 2011, the Owego Apalachin Elementary School was left destroyed. Looking to rebuild, the district took measures to ensure the new buildings would be able to withstand future storms.

In 2013, construction began with the raising of the site's ground level by about five feet, allowing for the new school to be situated above the floodplain. "(We) utilized special site materials in order to raise the ground," explains David Degnon, senior associate at project architect Highland Associates, "but also had to take into consideration floodwater mitigation on the site as displaced water cannot be discharged downstream negatively impacting other properties. It was very important to the team to accomplish this in a way that seemed natural and seamless." In addition to the new elementary school, a new maintenance/storage building and district administration office were built on campus.

The construction team, which also included construction manager Lendlease and civil engineer, Griffiths Engineering, worked closely with FEMA, the school district and the New York State Education department to make sure the building met all the FEMA requirements. In addition to raising the ground level, a number of sustainable and energy-efficient materials were used for the project.

"The new school is heated and cooled with an energy-efficient geothermal system comprised of 287 wells which feed six water-to-water heat pumps, as well as 13 water-to-air rooftop air-handling units," A.J. Lello, associate principal and director of mechanical engineering at Highland says of the 164,000-sq-ft project.

The school district partnered with the nearby Union-Endicott School district to ensure that the students did not miss class time. In May of this year, a ceremony was held to celebrate completion of construction, at which time the displaced students moved into their new building.

"Thankfully, it is not often that we witness such devastation," says Degnon. "Being part of the process in designing and building the new elementary school was most gratifying for our entire team, but the most rewarding aspect overall was to witness the excitement on the faces of the students as they entered their brand new school and embraced all the new spaces designed to enrich and heighten their learning experiences."

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