

Out of rubble

Flora Macdonald Academy is rebuilding after the 88-year-old school was ripped by tornado winds that hit in March



Closest to the action

The dome of the school may be in need of repair but it is still there. "Nothing in this old building is standard," said Headmaster Eugene McKethan as he explained why it is going to cost an estimated \$19,000 to repair the dome. Glass for the odd sized windows will be a major portion of the costs.

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By Ed Miller

The saying, "life goes on," holds especially true for victims of the recent tornadoes that ripped through sections of North and South Carolina.

In Red Springs, residents are still picking up the pieces of what used to be homes, churches and schools.

One of the hardest hit schools was Flora Macdonald Academy, and efforts are underway to rebuild the school which is listed on the National Registry.

Though the damage to the 88-year-old school is extensive, the building, somehow, retains its stately looks.

About 85% of the roof of the school was torn off, the dome on the main building was badly damaged and there were 396 windows broken of the once-famous college.

Eugene McKethan, Headmaster of the school, and his administrative staff are the only people who now regularly visit the school.

The vault and the school records are still in the old building. Students only go there once a week to use the library. It has been repaired enough to allow minimum student use but still has plastic sheeting draping over the bookshelves.

The rest of the time, pupils attend classes at two local churches.

Kindergarden through sixth grade students go to the First Baptist Church of Red Springs and seventh through 12th graders attend Trinity Methodist Church.

Though the students run a short school day, 8:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., McKethan says that academics are of major consequence.

"All that has had to be cut are some of the activity periods," McKethan said.

"We were in the middle of the state testing (California Achievement Tests) program when the storm hit," said McKethan.

"We postponed its completion until this week," he added.

"Our approach is more traditional," said McKethan about the academy.

"We have kids memorize multiplication tables," he said.

"There are always all kinds of rumors that we are not going to reopen, but we always open in the fall, and we will open next fall," the Headmaster said.

"We have never compromised our standards," he said.

According to McKethan, it is going to cost about \$500,000 to repair the building housing the school so that it meets state occupancy codes.

The building is very old and nothing in it is standard size, McKethan says.

It is estimated that it will cost about \$19,000 just to repair the dome and that is hardly more than glass, he said.

About 10 engineers were in and out of the building just after the storm and they found that the tornado had not only done its

share of damage, but that it had uncovered previous deterioration in the structure of the building that also must be repaired before students can come back for classes.

Insurance will cover about half the cost of the repairs and the school is applying to the State General Assembly for a grant of another \$200,000.

"We will also be soliciting funds from alumni" to help with the repair efforts, said McKethan.

The headmaster has also planned to apply for \$45,000 in federal grant money to help clean up, repair and replant the lush gardens that surround the school.

There is also a plan to possibly get the national government to build a "multi-purpose building" for temporary classes until the main building is fixed.

The multi-purpose building will be made into a gym after its classroom use is finished, said McKethan.

The administration is hoping that, by early July, they will know the status of the money and can begin construction.

Even at this pace, the building most likely will not be ready for occupancy on August 27; therefore, the school has requested mobile unit funds from the government via the Federal Emergency Management Act.

Obviously, the staff at the school is working very hard to restore normalcy to the educational facility if not to improve it.

The fate of Flora Macdonald Academy is now in the hands of the insurance company, the state and federal governments.



Still standing

The building that houses Flora Macdonald Academy still proudly stands though her roof has been taken off and her gardens almost destroyed. Trees around the building that were there many years before the

88-year-old school were uprooted and carried away in the winds of March. The school is working on a rebuilding program and officials hope to have the facility useable during the next school year.