

Alhambra's Century High opens with new campus, principal

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Duane Russell is the new principal at Century High School, a continuation school in the Alhambra Unified School District. The campus is set to open August 30 after a \$2.8 million renovation. (Walt Mancini Staff Photographer)

ALHAMBRA - Every time Duane Russell takes a look at his new campus, he gets excited about the new school year.

"It's aesthetically very pleasing," the new Century High School principal said Monday afternoon, just eight days away from the first day of school.

The continuation school just completed a \$2.8 million renovation on its campus at 20 S. Marengo Ave. After 14 months of construction, the campus will officially open its doors to about 310 students on Aug. 30.

Thanks to the 2004 General Obligation Bond Measure C, Century went from a few bungalows to a two-story campus that includes nine classrooms, a new science lab, an expanded art room and campuswide wireless Internet.

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"We have a brand new, state-of-the-art learning facility, thanks largely to the community," Russell said. "The school district really wants to thank the community for passing the bond."

After 23 years in the Alhambra Unified School District, Russell spent the past two years as principal of Mountain View High School in El Monte. He returned to Alhambra to replace former Century Principal Gail Rose, who retired at the end of the last school year.

Russell said it feels "great to be back home." It's especially gratifying with a brand new campus that he said shows the "tremendous" effort by the district's residents to invest in their children's future.

The new campus features the latest software and telephone systems, a new public address system, and a large courtyard with outdoor teaching spaces. It also is equipped with new computers, a new administration building and a new entry and drop-off point.

"It's great for the students to see that the community is so willing to commit to them," he said.

The school is no stranger to accolades. Last year, Century earned its third straight distinction as a Model School by the California Continuation Education Association. The distinction is given to schools that

exhibit "exemplary practices."

According to Russell, Century approaches students in a unique fashion.

As part of the alternative learning program, students regularly attend plays or opera performances at prominent Los Angeles area theaters. These experiences are woven into lesson plans through their English classes.

"Students usually come to us if they are credit deficient, have behavioral issues or are not getting what they need from a (traditional) high school," Russell said. "The teaching is still the same, but we provide more additional individual attention ... and focus on getting them prepared for the UC/Cal State system."

The school also emphasizes the rewards of lots of hard work, Russell noted.

Most of its students who achieve enough credits to graduate do so at a traditional high school but every student receives his or her own individual ceremony.

Every Century graduate is walked around the campus by the principal to every classroom. The cap- and gown-clad student is then sprinkled with confetti while the traditional graduation music is played from speakers located around the school.

"It's a great way to show them what they have accomplished," Russell said. "They see it as a testament to what they can accomplish."

erick.galindo@sgvn.com 626-962-8811, ext. 2720

