

When the new performing arts opened recently to the soulful tunes of Mr. Ryan Stahle's Palace City Jazz Festival and the Ron and Sheilah Gates performance hall, within the larger structure, was graced with its first crowd, it was a day that provided many of those who had worked on the designing, planning, and building of that hall a sense of completion and of accomplishment.

Also a sense of 'whew.'

As in, 'whew, that was definitely a job worth doing but also a job it is nice to have done.' I can name a dozen people at least—and probably scores more if you count those who actually did the building—whose sense of happy fatigue at its completion is palpable.

Which is why I have found it a bit surprising over the last couple of weeks to have a half-dozen people approach me and ask when the rest of the new high school will get underway. In fact, we've set a very soft timeline of 2025 as the approximate year when we will get serious about the planning of the final stage (Phase 3?) of the building which will replace the current 1962 high school. For approximately the next decade, then, our high school will consist of two (OK, technically 3 if you count the former MTI north building) large structures, the Performing Arts Center/MCTEA building and the existing high school building.

That doesn't mean, however, that we won't on occasion or even periodically move some program or activity from east of Capital to west of Capital. Let me tell you about the one that will probably come next: the World War I memorial.

Beneath and a bit north of the high school flag pole can be found a free-standing masonry wall. On that wall is affixed a large metal plaque on which are forged the names of those Mitchell High School boys and those Mitchell High School teachers who stepped out of those hallowed halls and into the trenches of the western front of the Great War, what later came to be called World War I. There are a lot of doughboys named on this plaque, a lot of members of the American Expeditionary Forces. A relatively small subset of those names sport an asterisk, indicating those men who gave their last full measure of devotion to their country in that conflict.

The wall on which the plaque is mounted is structurally sound. The metal plaque is readable though some metal blemishes have appeared and the overall appearance has faded with time. South Dakota winters have that effect. Last week, the son, Dale Letcher, of one of those men serendipitously stopped me in a local restaurant and wondered aloud if it wouldn't be wise to move the whole plaque to the American Legion Hall. It's not a bad idea but it comes far too late for we have been planning for some time to move the plaque to an interior location of the building which will become part of the overall, future high school building.

Originally, we had considered doing so on April 6, 2017, the centennial of the day America officially entered the Great War on the side of the allies through a congressional declaration of war. But the much better idea is to do so on the centennial of the day the war ended with a truce, November 11, 2018.

Thus, in about 20 months, another fixture from the current high school will find its way across the street to the new building.

The plaque itself will be sent to a firm in the east which will resurface it, remove its blemishes, and leave it looking as shiny as the glint of the moonlight off a just-whetted bayonet. While we haven't planned the re-dedication of the plaque in its entirety just yet, I can imagine it will include invitations to the children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those alumni, those recognized on the plaque having long since left us. I imagine the American Legion and the VFW will be in attendance. No such ceremony would be complete without the national anthem, a speech or two from a local historian, perhaps a couple of songs from students in our vocal music department accompanied by students in our instrumental music department (George M. Cohan's *Over There!* springs instantly to mind but Irving Berlin's *Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning* never fails to bring a smile for a different reason), followed in the end perhaps with the carrying of the restored plaque to the hallway where it will stand as a reminder.

No, we won't be offering that plaque to the American Legion or the VFW or anyone else, though they would certainly be good custodians of such a legacy. We won't because that plaque, that reminder, needs to stay at Mitchell High School as a silent but imposing notice to students that when you leave this home of the Kernels, you don't just graduate and move on to the rest of your life. You also join a long line of MHS alumni and alumnae who have finished their high school work and went on to accomplish great things, to serve humanity, to protect freedom, to bring an end to conflicts and tragedies that so afflict our world.

The MHS men of 1917 carpe'd the diem of their time. The MHS class of 2017, and all the classes that will succeed it, can hopefully use their example to seize the day of their age as well.