

## Public gets surprise tour of Citizens Bank Stadium

July 13, 2015 by Kayla Carter (Elizabethton Star)

Guests at the groundbreaking for a new music room and classrooms at Elizabethton High School were treated to an impromptu tour of the Citizens Bank Stadium Friday.

The idea came to Elizabethton Schools Director Corey Gardenhour the day before. “We wanted to go ahead and give a public tour,” he said. “We thought it would be a good thing to give the public a little preview since they made time to come out anyway.”

Gardenhour was thrilled to see some band students already having fun on the field. “They are over here marching and getting a little practice in,” he said. “You can tell they are excited.”

One aspect that really sets the stadium off is the seating, he said. The bright orange seat backs really make the venue pop, he said. “That’s something we really wanted to do for the fans,” he said. “It’s just on the home side. We wanted to do something special for them.”

Gardenhour is also already dreaming of expanding the facility to accommodate more fans. “We hope in the future to put in an additional 600 seats,” he said. “We can expand as funds become available.” As of right now, all of the home side seats are sold out, he said. “We’re hoping that we will have some people interested in adding more seats,” he said.

While most of the stadium progress is already complete, the press box is one feature that still needs to be installed. It’s scheduled to go in on August 13, he said. “That’s one thing that is still yet to come,” he said.

Another aspect left to be completed is the bandstand, he said. “It’s going in behind the donor wall,” he said. “It’s going to give us a lot of flexibility for the band. They can march off the field and go right up there to sit.”

Concrete around the donor wall was in the process of drying. Gardenhour also referred to the donor wall as, “the wall of champions.”

“All the people in Elizabethton who have given money to the city school system in any capacity are going to be recognized on this donor wall,” he said. “On either side, there’s going to be signage for band and athletic state championships.”

Spaces were left in the concrete sidewalk for donor bricks, which can be purchased at \$100 each. Information for purchasing a brick is on the school system’s website — [ecschools.net](http://ecschools.net). “Someone could purchase a brick to put in here and it will be there for at least 70 years,” he said. “This is a 70-year facility so they can make a permanent statement by buying a donor brick.”

So far, the bricks have generated about \$35,000 in revenue, Gardenhour said. “The first batch will go in right in front of the donor wall,” he said. “It allows folks to be a part of history.”



Star Photo/Kayla Carter  
Elizabethton Schools Director Corey Gardenhour observes as city leaders and the public take a look around the nearly complete stadium at Elizabethton High School.

Turning his attention to the turf, Gardenhour explained its nuance. “The people who did our field’s turf are the same people who do fields for professional football teams all over the United States,” he said. “It’s as good as any professional field.”

Gardenhour commended the stadium project’s architect Tom Weems for designing such a gorgeous facility. “Obviously we could not have gotten to this point on our own,” Gardenhour said. “The stadium looks very professional. He put a lot of his signature touches on the design.”

Gardenhour expects Weems will come through with the same level of expertise on the music room and classrooms as well as for the T.A. Dugger project.

So, what’s Weems’ favorite part of being involved in the stadium project? “It’s days like today when you get to see the results of your work,” he said. “We’ve been on this job for six years. To get to this point is a big deal.” In Weems’ line of work, a project like this is called a generational job.

“We are really proud to be a part of this,” he said. “There are not many stadiums built in a town. You normally get one shot in a lifetime to do something like this.”

If he had to choose one part of the design he likes the most, it’s the statues of the Cyclones’ mascot named Tuffy. One brick statue of Tuffy will be placed on either side of the field. “As the team comes onto the field, they want to have a tradition of touching Tuffy for good luck,” he said. “Those will go into place in about 30 days.”

Even though the design of the stadium changed several times, Weems said everything came together in the end. “I think everybody who comes in here will be proud,” Weems said. “I hope they are all pleased with how the money was spent.”

GRC Construction Manager Pat Breeding has seen the entire project through to its current state and can’t wait to deliver the final product. “Everyone who came together on this project just clicked,” Breeding said. “It’s such a reward to be a part of bringing something positive to the community.”

Most of Breeding and Weems’ work will be complete by mid-August, he said. “All the final touches should be complete by late August,” he said.

That’s just in time for the school’s ‘Meet Your Seat’ event scheduled for Sept. 3. The Cyclones’ stadium will be able to blow fans away with their first games scheduled for Sept. 4 and 11.

“Everything is right on schedule,” Weems said.

## **EHS Band Students Look Forward to Added Space**

*July 13, 2015 by Kayla Carter (Elizabethton Star)*

It wasn’t just city leaders who joined the celebration of a new music room and classrooms at Elizabethton High School Friday. Former and current EHS students took time out from their summer break to be a part of the excitement.

Hannah Manuel, former EHS drum major, believes the addition is a really good thing for the students as well as the community. “We have always had a makeshift band room,” Manuel said. “The auditorium is not fit for what we need it for.”

Upcoming EHS junior Hayley Jarnagin, who plays clarinet, agreed with Manuel. “It’s really cluttered in there,” she said. “In the new band room, we’ll be able to spread out more instead of sitting on top of each other when we practice.”



*Star Photo/Kayla Carter*  
Special guests were invited by the Elizabethton School System to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for the addition of new classrooms and a music room at Elizabethton High School Friday.

Jarnagin pointed out a unique aspect of the design she looks forward to the most. There will be no excuse to miss practice because of weather, she said. "When it rains, we can still practice inside," she said. "They will mark the yard lines inside. It's really cool."

There's a lot of excitement stirring among Manuel's friends who are still in the program, she said. Some even like to rub it in a little. "My brother is in the band," she said. "The program has been such a huge part of my life. I'm continuing to study music. I plan to graduate with a music education degree."

Manuel doesn't perceive the situation as missing out. She's happy her fellow Cyclones will have a practice space they deserve. "They will have an actual band room," she said. "It's a place where they can practice. They will have a space to use in whatever way they need it for."

Upcoming EHS seniors Jacob Thomas, a french horn player, and Weston Taylor, a trombone player, are both hoping the project will be complete before they graduate. "We hope it will be done by about January or February," Taylor said. "That way we could use it to get ready for concert season in the spring."

Even though the band has already proven its success in years past without an actual band room, Taylor said there will be an even greater expectation for future generations that will get to use the space throughout their entire high school careers. "Bigger and better things will happen with a work space like this," he said.

Taylor wants to see the new band room spark even more participation in band. "I'm hoping this will change people's minds about band," he said. "I think more people will join band just to see if they like it. Hopefully they all will."

The projects going on at EHS, Taylor said, puts a spotlight on what makes his school stand out from all the others. "We've got a great athletics program and a great fine arts program," Taylor said. "I'm even more proud to be a part of it."

Elizabethton School System Director Corey Gardenhour was energized by the looks of excitement on guests' faces. "I think it's a day we are all going to remember," Gardenhour said. "We are all now a part of the school system's history and the history of Elizabethton."

Gardenhour summed up all the hard work it took to get to this point. He also named some of the individuals who helped make it happen. Many of them were guest speakers prior to the groundbreaking ceremony. "We also want to thank all of the citizens of Elizabethton," he said. "Ultimately the citizens and city council made a bold step to help us move forward. These children are our future."

EHS Band Director Perry Elliott and Choral Director Debbie Gouge both spoke on behalf of their programs. "We are very much aware of the tradition and importance of music to the city of Elizabethton," Elliott said. "We are very, very grateful to have a building that will be dedicated to just music."

Elliott did not want the excitement of the music room to overshadow the importance of the four new classrooms being built. "Those are desperately needed at Elizabethton High School," he said. "We have teachers who bounce around to different classrooms. This project will end up not only helping with music, but it will probably end up helping about 60 percent of students in this school."

Gouge, who has been involved in the city schools' music program for 29 years, provided some insight about the music program's history and impact on her own life. "My parents met in the high school band," she said.

Citizens Bank CEO and President Joe LaPorte started his speech off with a little celebration of his own. He asked Pat Breeding of GRC Construction if they have a signed and sealed contract for the project to begin. Breeding confirmed and LaPorte let out a burst of excitement. "Yes!" he yelled as the crowd erupted in applause. "I can't believe it."

LaPorte explained why he felt the need to support the program, which currently has 20 percent of the student body participating. "This program is rich in tradition and history," LaPorte said. "We are bringing the Betsy Band to another level. I've been following the band for the past several years and not only are these kids winners, but they are also outstanding ambassadors for this community."

Elizabethton School Board Chairman Rita Booher took a moment to explain the board's involvement. Even as the board members have changed, she said support has not waned. "Each one of them have stepped up, accepted the vision and worked hard to get us here today," she said. "We all realize that the three projects we started several years ago are very important. This is groundbreaking number two and we still look forward to groundbreaking number three."

Booher's speech addressed the same perception of EHS as Taylor expressed. "We want our children to experience quality academics, quality athletics and quality fine arts," she said. "Those are the things Elizabethton students excel in and we're excited to see them continue doing that."