

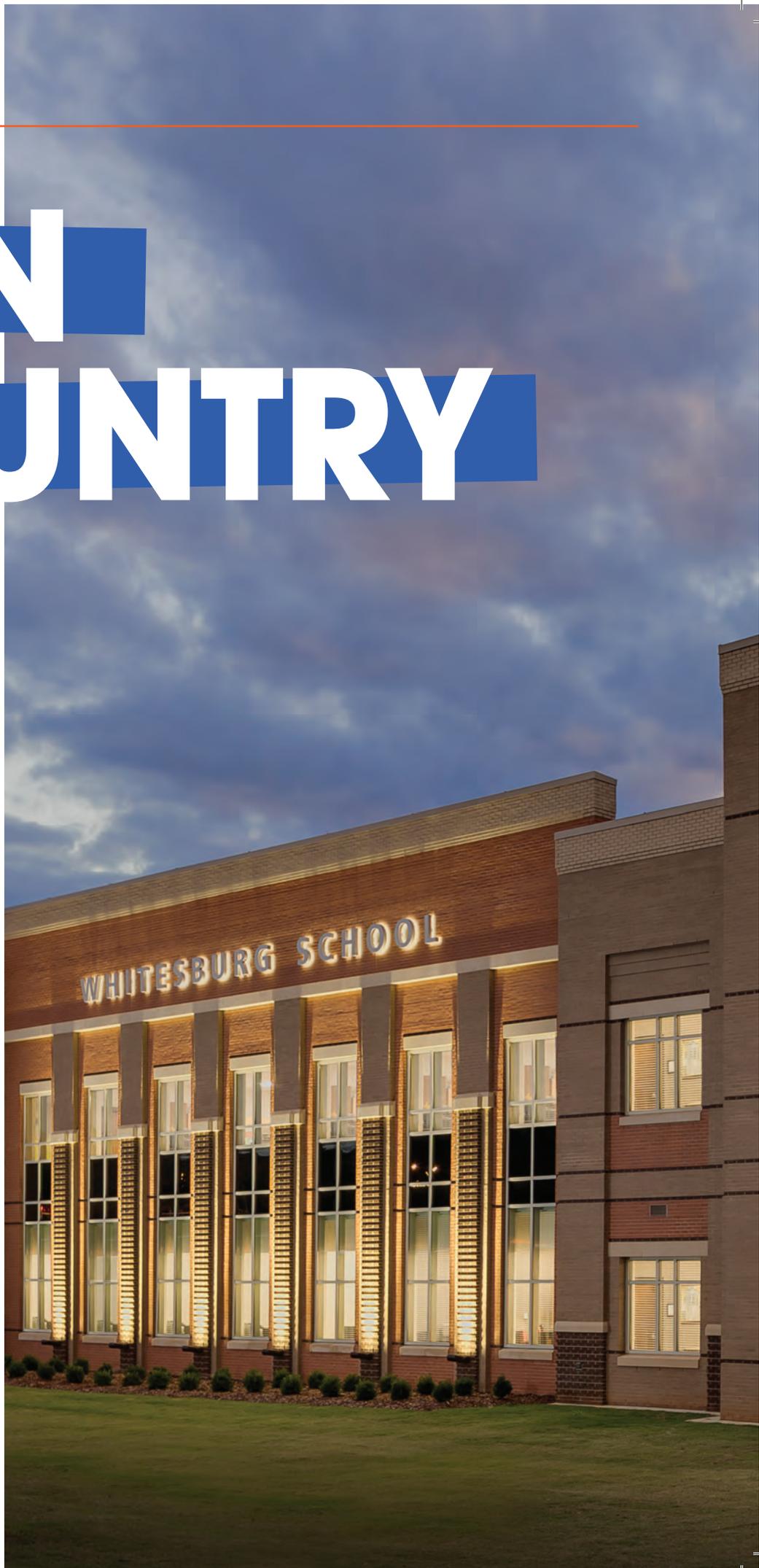
Madison COUNTY

Photography by Seth Parker, Parker Studios

As the 2015-2016 school year began, students in Huntsville were thrilled to walk the halls of the new \$26million Whitesburg P 8 School. The new school, which grew by 300 students (from 700 to 1000), houses pre-kindergarten through 8th grade and is the latest addition to a growing school district in Madison County.

The new design was a collaborative effort between the community, school administrators and teachers, and Chapman Sisson Architects. Design for the new school began in early 2013 and Construction was completed for the 2015-2016 school year.

“Because this is a P-8 school, the challenge was to create learning areas which adequately separated the younger and older students,” says Rob Mercer, AIA, design director with Chapman Sisson. “The form of the school was generated by this goal, with elementary and middle school wings stretching out on opposite sides of the administrative core of the building. In addition, common use areas of the school such as cafeteria, media center and multi-purpose room were also located between these two areas.”



The school gymnasium is a designated storm shelter that meets the current State requirement for all new schools, and can accommodate the entire school population.

The new Whitesburg P8 also includes the latest in school security. Utilizing a series of secure lobby spaces and cumulating in a bullet resistant administrative desk, visitors are checked for before they are allowed into the student occupied areas of the school. Though secure, large expanses of glass at

the entry maintain the schools welcoming feel to the community. In addition, all classrooms are accessed with card readers so that the security of all rooms can be monitored at any time.

Since both wings of the school are directly accessed through a common secure area, this type of layout helped with security. Automobile queuing is also separated on the site, with designated entry and exit routes for elementary parents, middle parents and

busses. In addition, the queuing drives form a major part of the first Green Car race track in the District where teams throughout the world can compete each year.

Whitesburg P 8 is constructed mainly of concrete masonry unit (CMU) walls, with several areas incorporating stained concrete floors for both appearance and ease of cleaning. The floor structure is made up of precast concrete hollow core planks, which are extremely economical and allow



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the building to be constructed more quickly than if steel joists and decking were used. The hollow core concrete planks, due to their shallow depth, allow for more above ceiling space, which is vitally important when running utilities and communications cabling in a new school.

“Concrete and concrete masonry units have always been the best materials for use in schools in terms of durability and low maintenance,” says Mercer. “Of course, concrete is very friendly from a design standpoint because it can be formed into whatever shape and application that one chooses. Being a natural material, its appearance contrasts well with other natural materials such as masonry and wood and metal.”

HISTORY OF WHITESBURG

The original Whitesburg Elementary school opened in December 1958 with just eight classrooms. By January 1959, 350 students had moved in, and by 1961 Whitesburg expanded by ten new classrooms. There were 753 students enrolled including a newly added 7th grade class. By 1964 enrollment peaked at 1425, which later declined as more schools were built.

In 1961 the Junior High addition was constructed. The lunchroom connected both buildings and served both facilities. In the fall of 1962 7th-9th graders were housed at Whitesburg Junior High, with an enrollment of 505 students and a faculty of 20 teachers. In 1975 Whitesburg Junior High consisted of grades 7th and 8th and later adding 6th grade and changing names to Whitesburg Middle School.

In 1965 the tunnel, which is still used today, was built to safely allow students a way to cross Whitesburg Drive to and from school.

In order to raise funds and purchase new equipment for the growing school in 1959 the PTA was formed. Today, the PTA continues to be a vital part of the school and is a critical part of its success.

In 2011, Whitesburg again become one school under the leadership of Mr. Greg Hicks. The new WP8 School opened with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Monday, Aug 3, 2015. Whitesburg P8 has a current enrollment of over 1,000 students grades Pre-K through 8th grade, and continues to strive to become the premiere P-8 school in the nation. **CW**

