



Conference room gets upgrade

By Keri Lynn McHale

Each month, in a conference room in the District Services Office in Inverness, Citrus County School Board members meet to make decisions that impact approximately 18,000 students and employees.

While board members have voted throughout the years to build new schools, renovate old buildings and upgrade districtwide technology, not much progress has been made in the room where they listen to presentations, voice their opinions, debate issues and come to conclusions.

However, in December, it was out with the conference room's original, 1990s technology — such as an analog cassette tape recording system used for nearly two decades — and in with modern-day technology.

"We're moving to the 21st century," board member Bill Murray said.

According to Mike Geddes, school district director of technology and information services, the biggest overhaul in the room was the audio-visual system, which was upgraded to digital. "This really changes the whole way we share information with the public, It's very exciting and the technology is really cutting edge."

There are two new mounted video projectors and screens in the room; both screens face the audience so those in attendance at school board meetings can effortlessly see presentations. The old projector was outdated and displayed an image on a curved wall, Geddes said.

Beyond better clarity for audience members, the overall upgrade — with its user-friendly technology — made the room more of a professional place, Geddes said. When it came to technology, the room was decades behind other county government conference rooms, Deutschman said.

In the board's conference room, presenters can now easily display their presentations by bringing a DVD or USB flash drive instead of having to bring different devices and hook-up wires to show their materials, Geddes said.

As for the board members, each has an LCD (liquid crystal display) monitor at his or her desk to personally view anything being shown on the big screens, such as slideshows and documents. Outside of being able to better view presentations, the monitors reduce the need for board members to print Power Point slides in order to follow along with the presentations.

Also on their monitors, board members can watch the meeting from the audience's perspective, as it is digitally recorded.

Moreover, the digital recording eliminates the need for a cameraperson to film the meetings. Instead, the recording is saved to a hard drive and then a copy is taken to WYKE to run on television, Geddes said.

The room's previous sound system was so old Geddes had trouble finding parts to keep it working, he said.

Now there are new microphones and an amplifier — which have special features. For example, the chairperson's microphone overrides the other microphones. Therefore, when Bryant speaks, her voice overpowers the other board members' voices.

"It's just easier for people to understand what is being said," Geddes said.

Another feature of the room is its custom-designed podium, which doubles as storage space for equipment. Also, there's a plasma flat screen television mounted outside the conference room, which permits people to sit in the lobby of the District Services Center and watch the meeting.

The conference room upgrade cost approximately \$51,000, according to Kenny Blocker, school district finance director.

"The money came from the district's capital budget, which is used to pay for new schools, buses, other construction and renovation projects and maintenance and repair expenses.

"We think the board room is important as a community connection," Geddes said.

Geddes said the next step is to stream the audio and video over the Internet. Their goal is to reach to more people — especially employees, parents and students — who are unable to be present for the meetings.