

Seven years after flood destruction, new Herbert Hoover facility shines for celebration

By [Brad McElhinny](#)

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Seven years after rampaging floodwaters devastated Herbert Hoover High School, the community celebrated a resurrection through a brand new facility.



Mike Kelley

"Stay strong, stand together, stand up for Hoover. We said those words over and over and over again seven years ago," said Mike Kelley, principal at Herbert Hoover.

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"A lot of places talk about being family, and some of them are, but we truly are up here. We were worried after the flood that students would leave, that teachers would leave, and you didn't. You stayed with us."

Saturday's ceremony included a performance by West Virginia music legend Brad Paisley, the admiration of political leaders and a football scrimmage just about as tough as the resilient community.

The gathering was "the one, the only, seven-year-in-the-making, the biggest celebration on the Elk River that we've ever had," said Clendenin Mayor Kay Summers, introducing high school classes from 1963 to 2023. "It's time to say 'Welcome home Huskies.'"

Paisley, a country star who visited the high school site one week after the 2016 flood, returned and described the honor of sharing a milestone for members of the community.

"I can't say enough about the facility you've built here," Paisley told the crowd. He remembered his visit right after the flood, saying "it was floating instruments in the band room. The basketball floor looked like waves of the ocean. It was one of the biggest disasters I've ever seen."

"Today, what you've done with it, this is the nicest high school I've seen in my entire life. I can't tell you how it feels to see something that terrible turned into something so inspiring."

After the [2016 flood](#), officials determined the school was so damaged that it would need to close. Original estimates suggested opening a new school might take only two or three years.

[To start the next year](#), students split half days with Elview Middle School students at the building until portable trailers could be put in place on the football field at Elview.

Students in the upper Kanawha Valley [gathered in portable classrooms](#) over seven years. A new 180,000 square foot, modern [state-of-the-art building opened](#) to students on Friday.

"We say there is greatness in traveling a hard path, and we have done it — and we have done it together," said Kelley, the principal.

Herbert Hoover seniors Chloe May and Alexah Terry had spent long years waiting for their new school, and they were cherishing the moment on Saturday evening.

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May said her first day in new classrooms “was amazing. I couldn’t believe my eyes. I walked in the school, and I expected it to be smaller than it actually was. It was huge on the inside. I’m happy for all the teachers, that they got their own classroom and they don’t have to share with anyone.”

Terry acknowledged sometimes wondering over the years if she and her classmates would get to experience the new school.

“It was definitely a conversation wondering if we were going to get to the new school or not,” she said. “It was just a long wait, and I wish the past graduating classes would have gotten the chance to experience this in all of its glory and greatness, but I’m glad we’re the first.

“It honestly made me a little bit emotional the first day. When I walked in and finally saw everything, it was a shock factor almost — seeing everybody walk in and the shock on their faces and the happy, big smiles. It really felt like home for a high school, and I’m glad that everybody gets to call this place home.

She said grit pulled people together.

“Elk River Strong means that our community can pull through absolutely everything and never lose their pride, never lose their connections with each other and become a team,” Terry said.

Senator Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., said on a WCHS Radio broadcast of the reopening ceremony that she choked up while approaching the school, contrasting the pristine new facility with memories of the flood damage.

“What a gorgeous day, what a gorgeous facility and what a beautiful field,” Capito said. “It’s an emotional day, but it’s a great day. I had no idea it would take seven years. It’s here. It’s now.”

Now, said Senator Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., “you won’t find a facility that gives this many opportunities.” He said on radio coverage of the event, “I’ve never seen anything like it in my life.”

Supreme Court Justice Tim Armstead, who lives in the Elkview community that serves and is served by Herbert Hoover, said residents pulled together.

"It's the nature of people here. When they see people who have a need, they step up," Armstead said. "It was unbelievable how this community came together because they care for each other. I know everybody feels that way, but there is really something special about the Elk River community."