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Rob Gunderson is helping to rebuild his old high school, and his kids can watch him work

- *The \$45 million project is the biggest modernization of the school since its construction in 1961.*

By LIZ WASSON COLEMAN
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A construction manager's day usually begins long before dawn.

"I'm usually up by 4 o'clock and out of the house before they wake up," explains Rob Gunderson, referring to his kids.

An Enumclaw High School parent and lifelong resident, Gunderson has made a career for himself in the construction industry. Contractors drive to wherever the work is, sometimes commuting 90 minutes or more to reach jobsites around the region.

But for the first time in over 20 years, Gunderson, a project engineer for FORMA Construction, has managed to secure a 5-minute commute — for nearly four years.

"Now I get to see them before I leave most days, in the morning. It's easy to get to their sporting events. There's not a week that goes by that I don't bump into them on campus," he explains, referring to his twins — son and daughter, Fulton and Piper — who are preparing to enter EHS as juniors next week.

FORMA is the general contractor leading the expansion of Enumclaw High School. As an Enumclaw alum, working on this project holds a lot of significance for Gunderson, and his community seems to feel the same way.



[\[enlarge\]](#)

The first phase of improvements to Enumclaw High School include a classroom wing that should be finished in October.



Photos from FORMA Construction [\[enlarge\]](#)

Rob Gunderson tours the site with his twins Piper (left) and Fulton (right).

FORMA Construction's Liz Wasson Coleman wrote this story for the DJC about her fellow staffer Rob Gunderson, who is helping to rebuild his alma mater.



Wasson Coleman



[\[enlarge\]](#)

The new classroom wing has science labs.

"I get grilled when I come into town. People know me. Whenever I walk in somewhere, especially in this garb, I'll get questions," he says, gesturing to his FORMA-branded construction gear and hard hat. "It's nice to know that people care."

Gunderson is leading a tour through phase one of the construction site. Joining us in matching orange vests and safety glasses are Fulton and Piper.

Designed by NAC Architecture, the multi-phased, \$45 million project is the most thorough modernization of the school since its construction in 1961. Phase one has already included upgrades to both main and auxiliary gyms, boys and girls locker rooms and athletic storage; as well as a new 112,000-square-foot classroom wing.

"It's changed a lot since I was here," said Gunderson, who graduated from the school in 1985. "There's been three renovations that I know of, prior to FORMA coming on board here," he explains.

After phase one wraps up in October — more than two months ahead of schedule — NAC and FORMA will start phase two, including construction of new music and health classrooms, wrestling facilities and a remodel of the agriculture program building.

The entire project is slated to finish in April 2020 — just before Fulton and Piper are preparing to graduate.

We navigate around scaffolding and "wet paint" signs as he guides us through each floor of the new classroom wing, pausing to step into future science labs.

"It's going to be a huge technological upgrade. As a parent, that's a good thing. The new science classrooms will be ready for their junior year," Gunderson adds. "Anatomy, chemistry — they're going to get a lot of use out of that wing."

We wander through common areas lit with large skylights and eventually find ourselves in what will be the school's spacious new library.

"This is the part of the school that people are going to love the most," Gunderson predicts. "The open library, the natural lighting. When the courtyard is done outside you'll have your picnic tables and planters. A view of Mount Rainier. This is where everyone is going to want to be."

The school's current library is housed in a dark and outdated building, cut off from the main school campus. Walking past the new library every day once it's open, the Gunderson twins expect they will visit more often.

After they graduate Piper wants to study law enforcement and Fulton is considering engineering.

When asked if having his dad working around him for his entire high school career has directed his interests, Fulton admits, “I’m taking a class in what he does.”

“I’ve been dragging him to job sites his whole life. I was never purposely trying to drive him that direction, but it’s all around him,” his dad says.

Thinking ahead, Gunderson is excited for what a modern learning space will mean for his kids' school community.

“What will be really nice is that just like in college, you have common areas with couches and hang out spaces, which this campus has never had. The kids don't even realize it and I think they're going to love it,” says Gunderson.

As much as there is to look forward to in Enumclaw's completely renovated high school, tomorrow's students won't lose their attachment to yesterday. The importance of the school's history hit home for Gunderson early in phase one of the project.

“Going into something like this, you're thinking about what this school is going to be for the next generation and for your kids. You're not thinking about all the memories that are going to come flooding back,” he admits.

Commemorative plaques dedicated by past graduating classes dotted the existing EHS campus. They were carefully removed by FORMA and will be reinstalled once the new school is complete.

“The second dedication plaque that I helped remove was for my best friend in high school, who passed away the morning after our homecoming dance,” he says. “Now his plaque is back there, bubble wrapped and saved. Before I wrapped it up I took a picture of the plaque and put it up on Facebook and just got inundated with comments.”

Among the Facebook commenters were his classmate's parents. “His folks reached out when they saw it. They were happy and excited that someone who's connected to him was taking care of it. It's 30 years later, but it's still very real,” says Gunderson.

As phase one construction comes to a close, what is Piper most looking forward to? “Definitely not having to walk to the portables in the rain,” she says.

Fulton says his favorite part of the project has been seeing the construction process up close. But when asked if he is excited about the new spaces, he's cautious. “I won't know until I'm in there, and see the final product,” he replies.

For their dad, the emotional connection to this project had made all the difference.

“It's kind of cool to be an Enumclaw guy doing this. Living here all my life, going to school here, raising my kids here — being ingrained in this community — and being a part of this project. It surprised me how much I relish that feeling,” Gunderson admits. “I wasn't expecting that.”

Liz Wasson Coleman is Business Development Director at FORMA Construction.