Workers Find Creative Outlet in Masonry

By Beth Klima

A new wall is springing up at EMU.

Construction of a limestone facade on the new addition to the exterior of Northlawn began last week.

“The decision to build the wall was related to the need to provide a location for the new kitchen exhaust hood system. The work was part of a major renovation of the Northlawn kitchen that was completed during the months of May and June this past summer,” said Eldon Kurtz, director of Physical Plant.

Three former EMU and EMC students—stonemasons—are constructing the wall. “The masons were chosen primarily because they are just about the only such craftsmen in the valley…who are skilled at the style of stonework that matches the existing,” said Kurtz. He estimated that the limestone veneer would add $10,000-15,000 to the entire project.

The stone for the cafeteria wall was cut from a local quarry near Harrisonburg last year. Each stone has been hand cut. “Stone was used for a variety of reasons,” said Kurtz. “Aesthetically, it matches the adjoining wall and maintains the architectural integrity of the building.”

The additional work is an added expense to the wall project. “I feel that the use of natural stone rather than fake, which would have been less costly, was a quality choice based on long-term maintenance, architectural integrity… and the potentially prominent location in proximity to the plaza,” said Kurtz. He stated that the limestone veneer would add $10,000-15,000 to the entire project.

Kanagy feels a little less reminiscent. “I live right down the road, so it’s not too nostalgic for me,” he said.

Masonry is an occupation that is either self-taught or learned from apprenticeship. There are no vocational schools that offer training. Masonry also draws people with an already ingrained artistic flair. Hochstedler, who graduated in 2001, is a local potter and also works with ceramic firings. Flory also sees masonry as an opportunity to explore one’s artistic side. “I like the creativity of it,” said Flory.

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Kanagy is one of three working on the wall, which will be completed in a few weeks.

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Kanagy works with Handrich on the Campus Center construction.

The new limestone does not currently match the coloring of the limestone already present. “It will weather and match completely in about five or six years,” said Flory.

Many students admit that they haven't really noticed the work on the wall, while others have enjoyed watching the progress the masons are making. Their work is directly visible to those sitting in the Snack Shoppe.

The students who live in Northlawn have mixed feelings when it comes to what is being constructed behind their building. Those in dorms further away from the construction, find the noise to be minimal and of little distraction. “I don’t really pay attention to it,” said Leslie Grant, a first-year and Northlawn resident. "During the day when I’m trying to take a nap, it’s distracting to have the men working out there all the time,” said Rohrer.

The stonemasons say that noise has really been the only complaint of which they are aware.

The wall is expected to be completed in about three weeks, “but not before Homecoming,” joked Flory.