

Two schools add trailers to reduce overcrowding

By Kevin Kelley

WESTLAKE

Students in math teacher Mike Bee's eighth-grade pre-algebra class are taking their instruction this year in a trailer.

The district purchased a two-classroom trailer for Lee Burneson Middle School this year to help with overcrowding in the building.

"A lot of parents during open house asked me 'How did you end up out here?'" Bee told West Life.

Bee insists he didn't lose a bet. Principal Dave Newman said the rationale was to put two male teachers in the trailers for security reasons. (Mike Wooley, another eighth-grade math teacher, uses the other trailer classroom.) Newman also wanted to put math classes in the trailers because they tend to have less of a need for bulletin boards.

"Obviously, I wasn't too happy," Bee said of the decision to move his classes into the trailer. It wasn't so much that he didn't want to be in the trailer, he said. He didn't want the headache of having to move out of his previous classroom. "I didn't really see the benefits of being out here," he said.

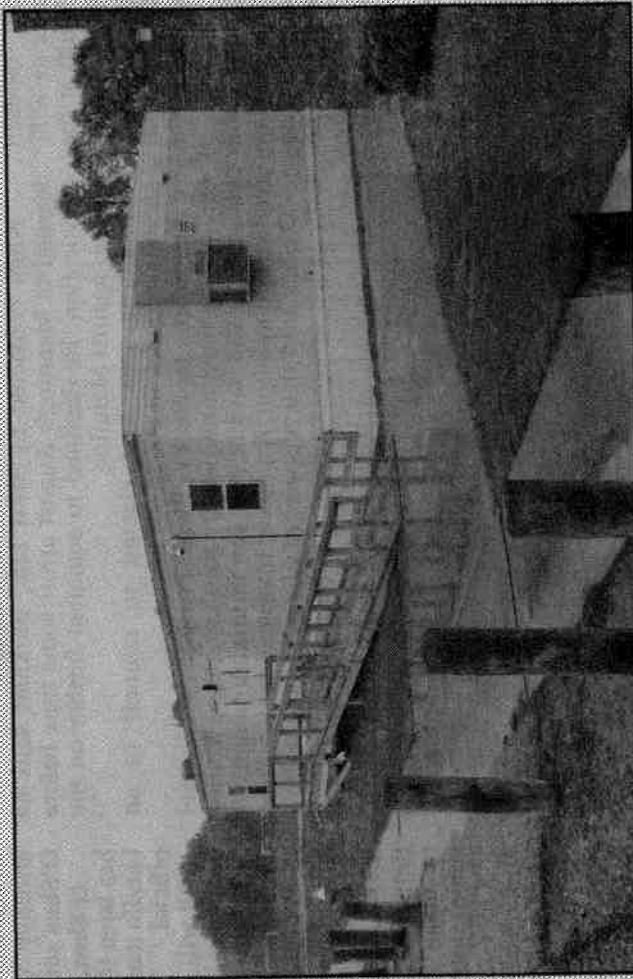
Bee said his students are quite frank about referring to the structure as a trailer, not a "mobile unit."

"No one's being that politically correct around here," Bee said. "They just accept things for the way it is."

Some things in the classroom, such as a ceiling-mounted projector, weren't ready the first day of school, Bee said.

But Bee said being in the trailer hasn't affected his overall teaching strategy.

During nice weather, it is nice to be able to step outside for a moment, Bee said. But problems can arise when the weather gets



This mobile unit, which holds two classrooms, was installed at Lee Burneson Middle School in August to help ease overcrowding at the Dover Center Road building.
(West Life photo by Kevin Kelley)

bad, Bee said, especially during rain and snow. The school plans to construct a canopy between the back door and the entrance to the trailer.

"The big problem is when kids have to go back inside for things," Bee said. "I have to give them a key....If kids forget something, or they have to use the restroom, I ask them to use their best judgment if it's something they really need or whether they can go without it until they go back into the school."

The school's police resource officer is stationed at the doorway adjacent to the trailer for security reasons, Newman said. When the officer is not located there, the door is locked and people must be buzzed in.

Newman, who has been Lee

The Dover Center Road school's enrollment of seventh and eighth-graders is nearly 700, Newman said. One-hundred and fifteen of those are special education students, he noted.

"Dedicated space must be provided for [special education] by federal law," Newman said.

Smaller classrooms such as those formerly used for home economics and sewing classes are now used exclusively as special education classrooms, Newman said.

Six classrooms are currently "jury-rigged" out of space originally intended for other uses, Newman said.

Media storage rooms are now used as classrooms. Another storage room was turned into an office for five teachers. The teacher center now doubles as the faculty lunchroom.

"One-hundred percent of our rooms are used 100 percent of the time, except for lunch," Newman said.

The school's foreign language teachers teach off of a cart that they push to different classrooms each period.

Lee Burneson was constructed in 1982 with an addition built on in 1998. Although the student population is now 680, it was designed to house only 646 students, Superintendent Dan Keenan said.

The district also purchased a trailer this year for Parkside Intermediate School. The total cost to purchase, install and prepare both units for educational use was \$161,758, according to Keenan.

Under proposals now being studied by the district's 20/20 Vision Committee, Lee Burneson would be renovated and added to. The committee, which is also reviewing plans to construct a new high school, new intermediate school and two or three new elementary schools, is expected to recommend a final facilities plan next month.