

T · H · E FOCUS

Westlake Revamps And Revolutionizes Arts Center, Internet Technology

They stream video feeds from football games. They film high-definition video of plays and concerts. They have a state-of-the-art production studio.

No, we're not talking about the engineers and cameramen at local ABC affiliate in Austin, Texas, here. Instead, we're talking about students and teachers at the city's **Westlake High School**.

The school recently completed a multi-million dollar renovation that included a new fiber backbone and a refresh of its audio-video equipment. As part of the rigmarole, technologists received a state bond to transition the production studio from standard-definition to high-definition and revamp the equipment in the Westlake Community Performing Arts Center (PAC), an on-site theater.

Out went the DXC-50 cameras; in came four HDC-1400Rs and two PDW-700 XDCAMs. from Sony (www.sony.com/education).

"When you only have once every 25 years to renovate and change your infrastructure, you do it right," says David H. Poole, managing director of the arts center. "That was our goal going in, and

that's precisely what we did."

Today, under the new set-up, all of the school's sophisticated video work comes from a new control room at the arts center.

During home football games, students run cable from this control room out to the football field and take the cameras with them to televise the games. Poole says a team of 20 students fans out and broadcasts the game just as they would if they were working for ESPN. The students produce a live-to-tape broadcast that is replayed on local cable stations throughout the week.

During away football games, students travel to opponent stadiums and arrive 3.5 hours before kickoff to string about 5,000 feet of cable all over the stadium.

Back at Westlake, the students then splice and edit the footage they received.

At other times of year, particularly during choir, orchestra and band concerts at the 1,100-seat PAC, a different team of students is at it again, capturing live video content for the in-house image magnification screens (these are the Jumbotron-type screens) and producing DVDs with most of this content.

While most of these efforts are extra-curricular, Poole notes that students still have their hands working with cutting-edge technology—a skill that will familiarize them with the same tools they eventually will use in the real world.

"It's a pretty neat feeling for them to go into a news studio or the Dallas Cowboys football stadium and come back to school realizing that what they're doing is very similar to what's happening out there in the business world," he says. "A little, early dose of professionalism goes a long way." Still, the new setup

has not been without its challenges.

First, as with most new pieces of hardware, the Westlake gang needed a few good weeks to get the hang of the new equipment from Sony before students felt comfortable using it themselves.

Secondly, training other faculty members on the new equipment has been slow—because so many faculty members are used to doing things their way, neither Poole nor his any of his professional colleagues has wanted to force the issue with users until they're ready.

"By the time you buy a system this large, you can't just run into the classroom and start teaching," he says. "You have to get used to each piece of equipment, and train everyone anew. It takes time, but in the end, it's worth it."

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