

# **Legislature Approves \$34.8 million to Build Williston Middle High School**

By Terry Witt  
Senior Staff Writer

The Florida Legislature last week approved \$34,800,000 of funding for the future Williston Middle High School with support from Gov. Rick Scott, House Speaker Will Weatherford, State Sen. Charles Dean and Rep. Charles Stone.

Superintendent Bob Hastings said his staff will meet on May 19 with the prime contractor, Gilbain Construction, largest builder of schools in the nation, and its local partner, Oelrich Construction of Newberry to iron out the final details.

Mark Marino, a Williston High School graduate who lives in Williston will be the project site manager and the man who is tasked with bringing local subcontractors into the project.

Hastings said the presence of Marino and Oelrich Construction on the project will give it a “local flavor” and assure that much of the money will be pumped back into the local economy.

Groundbreaking and the start of construction will take place in January of 2015. Construction is expected to take 18 months. The anticipated school opening is 2016.

“I am tremendously happy. I think it will give our county economy a big boost and the kids in Williston deserve a new school,” Hastings said Monday.

The Levy County School Board’s portion of the \$34.8 million project is about \$6 million. The school board has committed three years of discretionary property tax funding to the project. The discretionary property tax is 1.5 mills.

Members of the State Senate and State House offered different funding options for school construction early in the legislative session, with senators pushing to partially fund all six projects on the list and the House backing the Florida Department of Education plan to fully fund the top three projects and partially fund the remainder. Lawmakers settled their differences and fully funded the Williston School and also provided \$31 million for a new Dixie County Middle High School.

Hastings said he never doubted the funding would be approved. He said Williston Middle High School was on the Florida Department of Education’s critical needs list and the project had support from the governor and House Speaker Will Weatherford.

Weatherford was guest speaker for the Levy County Schools Gala event earlier this year where he promised funding for the new Williston school. Hastings said he probably did the same for other school projects wherever he spoke, but he was confident Weatherford would back the project with full funding.

Hastings and Dean and Stone were also major players in finding funding for the new school.

“They were very major players. You’ve got to have their support to obtain state funding,” Hastings said.