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## Fund set up to rebuild Garfield auditorium

*A \$25,000 donation kicks off the effort to repair fire damage at the historic high school.*

May 31, 2007 | Carla Rivera | Times Staff Writer

The Los Angeles Unified School District on Wednesday announced the creation of a special fund to rebuild the historic auditorium at Garfield High gutted recently in a suspicious fire that caused an estimated \$30 million in damage.

"We suffered a great tragedy when this magnificent and historical building was destroyed by fire," said Los Angeles Unified School District Supt. D Brewer, who was joined at a morning news conference in front of the East Los Angeles school by several lawmakers and business and community leaders. "We're looking forward to working with the community to rebuild this great auditorium. It's an opportunity in Los Angeles to do something good for schools."

Arturo Sneider, founding partner of Primestor, a real estate development firm with ties in the Latino community, inaugurated fundraising by presenting officials with a \$25,000 check. In addition, Brewer said the school would soon receive an initial \$2.5 million in insurance money for remediation, environmental testing and rebuilding.

Outgoing school board member David Tokofsky presented Brewer with a \$500,000 check from his district discretionary fund to pay the insurance. The building is fully insured for replacement, including code upgrades, said Steven La Shier, the district's deputy director of risk management. The policy includes an antique historical building restoration clause. It is uncertain, however, how high rebuilding costs will climb.

Officials hope not only to rebuild the 1925 auditorium but also to reconstruct original architectural details such as the ornate plaster molding, hand-carved wooden seating, murals and paneled ceiling. One source of encouragement is the existence of the building's original plans and blueprints from 1925, which are vital to accurately replicate the design.

Tokofsky also invited school graduates with pictures or memories of the auditorium's earliest years to help fill in anthropological puzzle pieces, which will be crucial for insurance claims.

"We're lucky enough to have the drawings, but that's not enough," Tokofsky said. "But in talking with historical architects, we need the texture of the walls and ceilings looked like."

Still, some distinctive features such as the Depression-era glass chandeliers may be difficult or impossible to replace.

Assemblyman Charles M. Calderon (D-Montebello), who grew up a block from Garfield High, has asked the Legislature's budget conference committee to provide an initial \$1 million in education facilities bond money for reconstruction and up to \$5 million total, depending on rebuilding costs.

"Garfield High School is not merely an educational landmark; it is a beacon in East Los Angeles" that has lighted "the way to economic, artistic and academic achievements for generations of students."

The May 20 blaze that gutted the auditorium is being investigated as an arson fire by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's and Fire departments and Los Angeles school police. No suspects have been identified, said school Police Chief Lawrence E. Manion, but he encouraged anyone with information to contact the sheriff's arson hotline at (323) 881-7530.

On Wednesday, as students were immersed in state tests on the campus, the school's main building, which is attached to the auditorium and contains offices and classrooms, was being heated to 140 degrees to inhibit the growth of mold. Air samples so far have tested below regulatory levels for asbestos, and school officials said they hoped to reopen the building by June 11.

Donations to the Fund to Rebuild Garfield Auditorium can be made at any Bank of America branch, officials said.

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