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North Baghdad community opens new girls' school

By Norris Jones
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Ali Bunni, Qada Council's Deputy Chairman in north Baghdad, officially opens a new girls' high school earlier this week with a ribbon cutting. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

BAGHDAD, Iraq— Residents in north Baghdad hosted the official opening of a new \$470,000 16-classroom girls' high school Feb. 5.

Ali Bunni, deputy chairman of the Qada Council there, officiated at the ribbon cutting along with local three tribal sheiks.

His community had been trying to get a new school built for years long before Coalition forces arrived, Bunni said, but it was the Coalition forces' generosity that made it happen. "We cannot adequately express our happiness on this special occasion," he continued. "This is great news



Students applaud during the opening ceremony earlier this week of a new girls' high school in north Baghdad. The \$470,000 project includes 16 classrooms that handle an enrollment of up to 450 students. Ali Bunni, the Qada Council's deputy chairman, said during the ceremony that he could not adequately express in words his community's happiness about the new facility. (USACE photo by Norris Jones)

for the 40,000 residents in this area."

The school's headmistress pointed out that girls in that area had to travel long distances to go to high school and most stopped attending once they completed primary school. "The construction of this building offers these girls an opportunity to complete their secondary education at which point they can qualify for better job opportunities or college," she noted.

Several students stepped up during the formal program and read poems about the importance of education. All the students joined in a chant saying, "By working hard and education, we'll build this country."

Col. Debra M. Lewis, commander of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Gulf Region Division's Central District, was asked to speak and told the audience, "Today is a very special day. Our future lies in education. You wanted this to happen and it has taken

many days and many sacrifices. Edward Lewis once said, 'We define ourselves by the best that is in us, not the worst that has been done to us.' She then led a round of applause for all who worked so hard to make the Grand Opening such a special occasion.

414th Civil Affairs Battalion enhanced the project through the Commander's Emergency Response Fund, purchasing 225 two-person desks, blackboards, chalk, computers, file cabinets, installation of a new concrete basketball court, and school supplies for all students.

"Local residents told me how important this school was to their community and I got numerous calls wanting to know when it would be finished," said Capt. Holly Hanson, a 414th team leader. "The local council got involved and provided us a list of what the teachers needed and we were happy to help."

Construction on the 1,500 square-meter two-story structure started a year ago for an enrollment of up to 450 students. Apart from the classrooms, the facility includes five faculty rooms, restrooms, generator, and a 130 square-meter guard house.

At the end of Calendar Year 2006, GRD has constructed or renovated 962 schools – providing quality learning environments for more than 500,000 students.

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