

THIS WAY FORWARD

THE BUILDING BLOCK



A Roof For Athletes

>>> *Union City High School is brand new, with a host of exciting features.*
By George N. Saliba, Managing Editor

Union City has a completely new high school which includes an athletic field on its roof. As far as architect John Capazzi knows, the latter is the first specific baseball/football field in the nation that's above a building. Capazzi is the principal of RSC Architects in Cliffside Park, the firm that designed the high school via a partnership with HOK New York.

The \$174-million project, which opened in September, unifies what used to be two old high schools on a new site. The 360,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art facility anchors the redevelopment of Kennedy Boulevard between 24th and 26th streets. RSC Architects says, "The educational spaces are housed in a four-story, L-shaped classroom wing with two stories of shared activity spaces located at the core of the school. Program features include 66 classrooms, home economics rooms, art and dance studios, photography and broadcast studios, technology labs, a media center,

a gymnasium with bleacher seating for 1,800 people, a full-service cafeteria, an outdoor courtyard and a 900-seat performing arts auditorium – a first for the district."

Meanwhile, the rooftop athletic field is comprised of more than three acres of artificial turf and has a grandstand which can accommodate up to 2,100 spectators. Capazzi says a challenge was ensuring that the athletic field's waterproofing and drainage was appropriately addressed. In fact, an electronic monitoring system detects any water leaks, so that repairs can be

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Union City High School has a stunning, three-acre athletic field on its roof that can accommodate up to 2,100 spectators.

made at an exact location, if needed. Additional costs included a roof vehicle access ramp and special accommodations for mechanical equipment (i.e., heating and cooling).

The field has 25-foot high netting to capture stray balls, and the design does not allow for direct access from the roof to the street, so there is no risk of someone falling off. "It's safe," explains Capazzi. "In fact, when you are up there, you don't feel like you are on a roof. You just feel like you are on a field."

Overall, RSC says that the high school was planned with the community in mind, with, for example, the North Hudson Community Action Corporation operating the school's health screening center and providing services to students as well as their families. Moreover, a parking garage not only serves the high school, but accommodates area residents and businesses. Finally, the rooftop fields are used by the city's recreational programs during non-school hours.

Capazzi says that if a school is located in the suburbs and property is readily available, going through the trouble of having an athletic field placed on a roof might not make sense. However, in urban areas, where land is scarce, the decision is valuable and can be energy efficient, as in the case with Union City High School.

Capazzi concludes, "I was at the opening [of the high school] and talked to the students, who are all very excited about the facility. They are looking to get as much out of it as they can educationally and to really utilize the facility to help them, which is what this is all about." **NJB**