

Completion of Wadleigh brings tears of joy

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The eyes of many women among the Friends of Wadleigh filled with tears as they concluded arrangements for the modernization of Harlem's

86-year-old Wadleigh Junior High School Friday. Some came near to hugging retired General Charles E. Williams, president and chief executive officer of the N.Y.C. School Construction Authority, with whom they met

in the office of Congressman Charles Rangel.

But there were tears of joy marking the end of their eight-year struggle for the renovation of the delapidated, fire-gutted structure. It had cast a demoralizing influence on the school children because of "overt neglect" by the Board of Education and its old Building Maintenance Division.

Now, it won't get a simple renovation but such gut rehabilitation and modernization as would restore even the stained glass windows, Congressman Rangel said.

"It is a great day" for the children of Harlem now on the threshold of pursuing their learning in a wholesome and inspiring academic environment so too for the parents who have worked hard for the change and had been disappointed many times, the Congressman stated.

The new structure will cost

\$28 million and take part of three years to ribbon-cutting in Sept. 1991. However only in the last 18 months of the work would classes not be held there General Williams explained. His design experts were scheduled to be at the school, IS 88 at 215 W. 114th St., Monday, Oct. 2.

For eight years, said Wadleigh's Principal Shirley Mayo, they had been pleading with the central Board and pushing for the renovation. Even after there was a fire on the fifth floor, no priority was given to the clean-up and promises to budget the Wadleigh renovation were never kept.

The school, parents and local school board redoubled their efforts with the coming of the late Schools Chancellor Richard Green and the creation of the Authority in December 1988.

The General Williams took charge and despite the death of

Dr. Green PTA President Magdalene Phillips said, they found they had no cause to worry. "I am just overjoyed," said Veronica Perry, Community Board second vice chairman. "Wadleigh will be our Exeter Academy in Harlem."

Mayo, the principal, was unable to express adequately her "sincere and deep-felt gratitude" for the Authority's decision to move ahead on the modernization. Due to the years of fruitless struggle, "the children felt the city did not really give a damn and it was demoralizing to them," Mayo stated.

"But through the encouragement of parents and community we managed to overcome and became stronger," she added.

The Congressman hoped that the New York City Partnership which had been seeking a way to work with the Board of Education to foster classroom learning, would join with Wadleigh and that other institutions would do likewise.

"We all have our dreams of what Harlem should be," Rangel stated. As to Wadleigh, he added: "we want to make its restoration such that it would become the General's flagship."

And agreeing, General Williams described a flagship as something "new, excellent and symbolic. Among other things in the Harlem community, I want this to stand out as a symbol of the structures the Authority would build," he ended.