

# DIGGING DEEPER

*Roaches, rodents, asbestos, oh my!*

**CallieShea & MackenzieYunker**

Our halls are filled with all sorts of historical memories and achievements. But what's buried deep beneath the surface within our hallway walls are a few things that may disturb you.

"I've seen nothing that surprises me for a building of this age," said principal Meghan Roenicke.

Tiger pride has always been a motto that Grand Junction High School carries close to heart since its doors first opened in 1956. However, 63 years later the classrooms are not fit to what a modern classroom should be. There are classrooms with no windows, sagging floors, paper thin walls, and the list carries on. GJHS has one main building with 6 additional buildings added to the campus over the years. One of the outbuildings, the 400 building, has a wall that is not seamlessly connected to the floor, allowing students to slide numerous objects under, ranging from a piece of paper to a meter stick.

"To hold classes in these buildings and to have it function as a school is not sustainable at this point. You've got sagging floors, walls that are not going all the way to the floor, [the 400] building is sinking, too, by the way. There is a gap where it has sunk about six inches," said Chelsea Miller, science teacher.

Petie Pope, the environmental health and safety manager for all of District 51, sees and deals with every issue and work order. He oversees every investigation of GJHS and its condition. What students

may not realize is that the biggest issue at GJHS is one every student and faculty member can help solve.

"The biggest concern and health risk that you have at Grand Junction is rodent infestation and control," Pope said. "Two reasons:

One, every time a mouse runs they leave urine, and they leave urine as a way to leave messages for other mice that there's food if you follow me. The other is mice feces. As it dries, it decomposes, [then] it can become airborne."

An Aug. 9, 2017 Baseline IPM Assessment Report obtained by the Orange and Black showed significant mice activity and recommended an "aggressive mice trapping campaign throughout the school."

"The Main Office had a relatively high concentration of mouse droppings as well as active cockroach populations," the report stated. "The Athletic Directors Office also had significant evidence of mice activity."

The report said the trapping campaign should focus on rooms 114, 115, 117, 118 and monitor rooms 102, 104-H, 107, 109, 205, 209, 210, 218, 221, 223, 224 and the main office.

According to the report, there were mouse droppings and Oriental cockroaches found underneath one of the ovens at GJHS. On the report, the exact location was redacted, meaning that the droppings and roaches could be in the lunchroom, food science classrooms, or special education classrooms. After filing an open records request and receiving the unredacted version, the report showed that the mouse droppings and cockroaches were found in the Food Science room at Station 4.

Food sciences teacher Jen Campbell-Wilson said mice tend to come

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**Petie Pope**

**1969:** The 300/400 buildings are added.

**1982:** The library and common area are added.

**1985:** The 400 building is added.

**2006:** The 700/art building and East gym are added.

**1955:** The original building, auditorium, upper and lower U, West gym, and 500 building are built.

**1972:** The 800 building is added.

**1983:** The weight room next to the West gym is added.

**1998:** The 600/math building is added.

in during the summer, despite proper food storage.

"Every quarter we do a deep clean," Campbell-Wilson said. "The students also clean every time they cook. I think we all know there is a mice problem in the building."

Oriental cockroach activity was also found in the school. According to the report, some were trapped through a sticky trap near drains, which can provide easy entry from outside. The mice can cause a bacterial disease called Leptospirosis that is brought on by touching or smelling the mice's urine trails, the report stated.

According to the report, "Leptospirosis can lead to kidney damage, meningitis (inflammation of the membrane around the brain and spinal cord), liver failure, respiratory distress, and even death."

The trails of urine are invisible to the naked eye and require a black light to see. The mice are attracted to food and water sources, which is why Pope said teachers and students need to close any of their food in airtight containers. Some classrooms listed in the report were said to have significant mice activity because there was incorrectly sealed food.

One of Pope's main concerns with the rodent infestation is that it is leading to other problems our school faces.

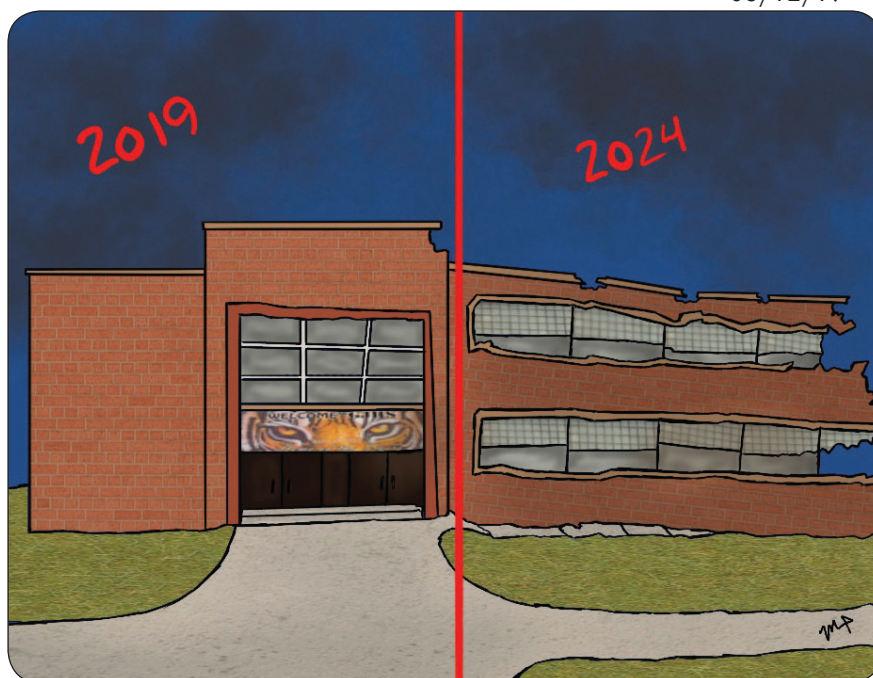
"It's frustrating because the problem is easy fixed, and it's been pretty directed. So when you say 'oh well there might be a dead mouse behind this wall' I'm like, 'well I hope not because if we have to crack that wall open there's asbestos that we now have to deal with'," Pope said.

There are many rumors circulating amongst teachers and students about the presence of asbestos in GJHS, but teachers and students do not know which are pure rumors and which are the truth. Pope confirmed there is asbestos on campus.

"Asbestos is only a problem when you disturb it and it becomes airborne. When the fibers are inhaled it then becomes an harmful health risk," Pope said.

There are two types of asbestos, friable and non-friable. Friable asbestos is something you can hold and crumble in your hand, but non-friable cannot be broken with pressure. Pope confirmed that all of the friable asbestos has been taken out and does not prove an immediate danger to any person. However, having this material in our school keeps the school from making any major renovations. The non friable asbestos that cannot be reached lies under floor tiles and within walls.

Director of maintenance, Eric Nilsen, said this year so far there have been 647 work orders for maintenance at GJHS. "In general, it would be more cost effective to replace the school than fix everything that is worn out or failing. Buildings and building systems have a 'life span', and many parts of GJHS are at or near the end of the systems life," Nilsen said.



Graphic illustration by Mason Toth

## FAST FACTS

*How much  
longer can  
GJHS  
survive?*

**"The structural systems of the existing GJHS facility are compromised."**

**"The GJHS exterior wall systems appear to be failing."**

**"GJHS has a projected remaining life expectancy of 0-5 years."**

**"GJHS has been operating for over 63 years"**

\*Information courtesy of BEST Grant Application obtained by the Orange and Black News Magazine