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CASE STUDY

Roberto Clemente Academy | Chicago, Illinois

Chicago School Opens the Roof To Deliver New Air Conditioning Units

In late August of 2023, Chicago saw its first 100-degree day since 2012. There is no good time for an air conditioning system to falter, but especially during a record-breaking heat wave.

That issue faced Roberto Clemente Community Academy, a four-year public high school that enrolls about 700 students. Chicago Public Schools moved swiftly to install new portable cooling units.

In April, the district took a large step to ensure the system won't falter again. Workers from a Chicago mechanical team removed and installed two 750-ton air conditioning chillers. A 550-ton crane handled each of the chillers, which weigh about 12 tons apiece.

Blackhawk HVAC completed the complex project by creating space in the roof for a Type D roof hatch from BILCO. The hatches are frequently used to install and remove heavy mechanical equipment through a roof opening.

The double-leaf hatch measured 9-feet, 8-inches x 18-feet, 3 inches. Rich LaCien of Blackhawk, the mechanical general contractor for the project, procured the hatch from Architectural Building Solutions, BILCO's manufacturer's representative in the region.

LaCien said Chicago Public Schools, engineers and structure team members discussed various plans to deliver the equipment for the school, which was built in 1974 and is named after Clemente, a Hall of Fame baseball player who starred for the Pittsburgh Pirates. The school is home to a large percentage of Hispanic students.

Blackhawk's team cut through the roof and removed concrete to establish room for the BILCO roof hatch. "We built a 2-foot curb and installed a temporary cap after we removed all the concrete," LaCien said. "We also put a pitch on the cap. The hatch will only be used for mechanical upgrades."

BILCO's D roof hatches are engineered with compression spring operators to provide smooth, easy one-hand operation regardless of size. The doors include automatic hold-open arms that lock covers in the open position to ensure safe egress. They include an overlapping cover design, full-welded corners on covers and curb, EPDM rubber gasket and fully insulated cover and curb that ensure weather tight efficiency.



The doors included a positive latching mechanism to maintain building security and are constructed with corrosion resistant materials to provide years of trouble-free, dependable service.

"BILCO met and exceeded my expectation with the roof hatch," LaCien said. "I was impressed with the quality of the door. I can be very critical of products, but we set it, squared it, set the bolts and it was done. There was no messing around with the latch or any other part of the hatch."

LaCien has vast experience in the industry, but this was his first time using a BILCO hatch for installation of heavy mechanical equipment. It won't be the last.

"If I come across another project like this, we're going through the roof with the opening and the roof hatch," he said. "We're not putting brick and louvers back in. It's spending so much money every time you do that. It will pay for itself just the second time that it's used. It's a worthwhile investment for the district."



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