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'50s day sets stage for birthday event

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Eagle Elementary blew out the candles on 40 years, but no huff or puff could tumble the school spirit accrued during that time.

The elementary opened in the fall of 1955. Since then, four building additions and a large renovation has taken place.

Along with bricks and mortar, many pleasant memories are cemented in the minds of those who have worked or attended there.

"It's a school with a lot of heart," principal Sue Johnson said.

Johnson's predecessors joined her in celebrating the school's 40th birthday Dec. 15. Former building principals Dave Coffin and Don Cowan took their on-stroll down memory lane.

Children dressed in 1950s poodle skirts, saddle shoes and jeans and sang do-wop ditties. A new flag, which was designed by students, was raised.

Cowan started there as a physical education teacher in 1962. He returned in 1978 as principal.

He's one of only five to serve as principal in the school's 40-year existence.

Margaret Cottrell was the first head master and remained until 1969. Dave Coffin served from 1969 to 1978. Frank Kasun replaced Cowan in 1980 while Johnson has been principal since 1989.

Cowan's fondest recollection was working with students who were wheelchair bound or otherwise health impaired.

"I remember the looks on the faces of those kids when they came into the gym," said Cowan, who is the district's director of Kindergarten through Grade 12 instruction.

"We had one student with

Muscular Dystrophy . . . All he could do is swing his arms. He would toss a bean bag and he'd enjoy that as much as a kid running or jumping around."

Inclusion, or mainstreaming as it's become known, has been commonplace at Eagle. Children in the POHI program, which stands for physically or otherwise health impaired, interact with general education students.

The school has hosted "changing places" programs where general education kids go through exercises to emulate challenges people with disabilities face.

"The effect those kids had on the general ed kids . . . The warmth it generated, and just what it did for the student interaction with one another, was just wonderful," Cowan said.

Such school spirit was a needed commodity on birthday celebration day. An ice storm forced school to be cancelled the previous day, putting the kabash on a scheduled dress for the student performance of "The Past 40 Years in Song and Dance."

The kids pulled off the musical retrospective without a hitch, though.

"We hustled and had a quick dress rehearsal Friday morning," teacher Helene Blackman said. "The kids were real troopers."

While students addressed a problem on stage, staff were a bit lost to explain the school's peculiar address. Eagle Elementary, though a Farmington Public School, has a West Bloomfield mailing address.

Best guess is that Ward Eagle donated the land to the Farmington School District, which was incorporated into West Bloomfield.

"I'm not sure why we're in West Bloomfield," Johnson said. "That was our address when I came here."



Principal No. 5: Eagle School's Sue Johnson is the fifth principal to serve at the school since it opened 40 years ago.



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMMON

Way back when: Sari Adelson and Brian Rosenbaum dance to the music that was popular when the school opened in 1955.

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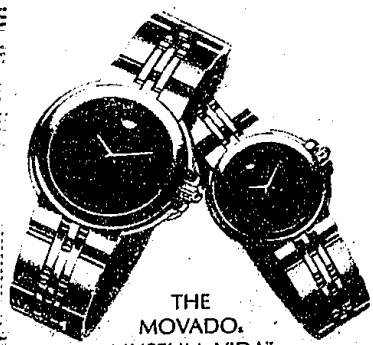
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