

Answer sought for overcrowding at Beechview

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

School officials and parents alike are looking for a long-term solution to overcrowding at Beechview Elementary.

Part of the district's immediate plan has been to bus kindergartners to Alameda Early Childhood Center.

Residents, especially those in the Kimberley subdivision, contend it's a Band-Aid approach. They believe a long-term solution is needed.

Four members of the newly formed group Beechview Community Homeowners Against Overcrowded Schools met with members of the Farmington Board of Education Building & Site Committee and building and student services director Don Cowan.

"In general, it was a pretty good meeting," said Nick Waldecker, chairman of the group. "I think a lot of work needs to be done on the board's end."

Waldecker presented a detailed survey, which indicated 75 percent of the residents questioned said they chose that area because of its proximity to Beechview school.

Both sides considered a variety of ideas.

One is adding a section of kindergartners next year. There are two portable classrooms on site, which the group said are not being fully used.

School officials are noncommittal. The survey indicates there are 18 incoming kindergartners who could walk to school next year. A section holds 20-24 pupils.

Also being considered is asking parents with kindergarten students in 1994-95 to register earlier. That would give the school district a better idea if a kindergarten section could be added next year.

"There's so many variables," said Cowan. "I can't guarantee you there will be a section of kindergartners next year, especially with what the state has done (cut school funding)."

"On the other hand..."

Other ideas discussed included turning Alameda back into an elementary school. At the present, Alameda is an early childhood center.

However, Cowan said that preschool, kindergartners and first graders would have to be moved to other elementary schools, causing overcrowding at those sites.

Waldecker said the purpose of the group is to find a low-cost, long-term solution to overcrowding at Beechview.

Waldecker has one child in kindergarten being bused to Alameda. He's spoken out on the issue at board meetings, as have other residents.

Some 260 residents of the subdivision's 330 residences were questioned in the survey conducted during the July 4 weekend.

"I think it (the meeting) was worthwhile," Cowan said. "It (the survey) didn't give us anything earth-shattering, anything we didn't already know. Except, in three years, there's a beep where there's an increase in enrollment we didn't expect."

The survey found there were 31 children who are age 1 in the subdivision. Other than that, Cowan thinks the long-range solution may be time. The highest concentration of Beechview students is in the upper grades.

"I think the long-term solution depends on how many people use Alameda," Cowan said. "The long-term term solution will level itself out."

Not all parents in the community group have children in kindergarten.

Mary and Denise Nicole, for instance, are upset the option of walking to school has been taken away from some residents. Mary Nicole is president of the Kimberley Association and thinks it will have an adverse affect on property values.

They want to work out a solution.

Citizen from page 1A

"I handed her the phone. She probably talked to him (Lynch) more than I did."

Christensen considers it a shared honor with his wife of 37 years. The two can be seen selling poppies on the corner of Nine Mile and Grand River during the fund drives.

Lorraine travels to ball games and helps plant flowers in front of the veterans monument. The Christensens have six grown children.

She's also there helping out on the Memorial Day parade, a task Christensen has had a hand in for 32 years.

Red, white and blue guy

The industrial supervisor at the Ford Motor Co. Wixom plant has been in and out as a member of the parade committee, but has always marched in the event. He served as chairman for several years, including in 1976 for the Bicentennial celebration.

"I really loved that year," said Christensen, who served in Korea and Japan with the 187th Regimental Combat Team. "That really got me going because there was a lot of red, white and blue and Uncle Sam. ... I've been hooked ever since."

The parade has gone through some lean years afterward. Christensen managed to put some thump back into the parade, getting other veteran groups involved.

Today, it's considered one of the top Memorial Day events in the state.

"It's a community thing," he said. "I don't think a communi-

ty has an identity unless it associates itself with patriotism."

Wally Christensen

Involved in baseball

If there is America and apple pie, baseball can't be far behind. Christensen was instrumental in establishing the Legion baseball program in Farmington. He's managed the Post 346 team for 32 years.

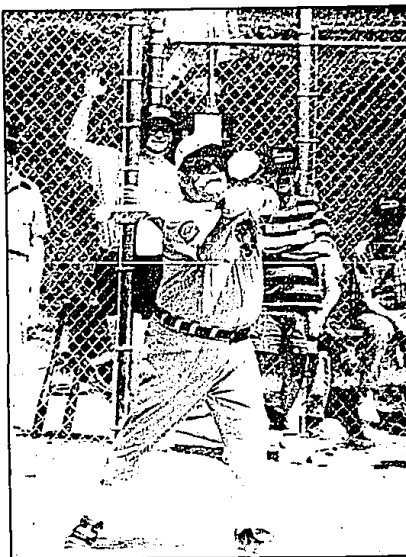
He also coached Little League baseball and football and was involved in the grid programs at Our Lady of Sorrows Church and Oakland Community College. Youngsters he's tutored in sportsmanship have gone on to become lawyers, police officers and political officials. He's gone on to coach their kids.

He had a young end on his Our Lady of Sorrows CYO football team in the late 1950s. Today, that young man is passing ordinances as Farmington Mayor or William Hartsock, rather than receiving footballs.

Some of his Legion baseball players have gone onto college, which Christensen is most proud of.

"I had people come out and play for me who did not have a college to go to after high school season," he said. "Then when the Legion season was over, they had a place to go. That's what it's all about."

His involvement in Legion



He's a hit: Wally Christensen, Citizen of the Year for 1993, takes a whack at a softball during the 125th Anniversary town picnic in 1992.

doesn't end at first base. Christensen has been elected Commander of Groves-Walker Post 346 and is an active member.

As a chaplain, Christensen has vowed, "no veteran in Farmington will go to the grave without someone there as long as I know about it." As a result,

many former servicemen have received a proper burial.

He's a former member of the Jaycees and was an investigational volunteer for the Goodfellows. Time isn't always on his side, though.

"You can't spread yourself too thin," he said.

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