

Gill from page A1

mouth, according to principal Gayle Zimmerer.

It was the brainchild of Mike Duff, a Gill Elementary principal who preceded Zimmerer. Duff believed this program helped students better retain what they were learning.

"We've been on the agrarian school calendar for 200 years and kids aren't working in the fields in the summer anymore," Duff said in May, 1998 when he retired. "That's the reason we went on that calendar. It just doesn't make sense."

Students in Gill Year-Round attended the same 183 instructional days and received the

same curriculum as those in traditional elementary school. But, with two-week inter-session breaks in November, February and May, classes continued until late July.

For Alex Berger, a first grader, that meant being able to visit her father more often. He lives in Ohio.

Milexa Dillon, whose daughter, Emily, was a first-grader in the program, said the scheduling facilitated family vacations.

"My husband manages a golf course," Dillon said. "For him to take vacation with us in the summer time, that's a problem because that's when he has most

of his customers. When November came along, and we got the two weeks off, that was wonderful. We got to go to Florida. When February came along, we went to Florida again. In May, because it was off-season we were able to go to Venezuela because the tickets were very inexpensive. It's a great program."

The program created a family atmosphere at the school. "It's an opportunity for the families and parents in our children's classes because we've been together," said Pam Prezioso, whose son, Stefano, finished third grade. "The more you love

your school, the more you meet people and the closer you become."

Kyle Hirschenberger, whose daughter Rose, was a first-grader, organized the end-of-year event. "I'm disappointed," she said. "I'd like to see it continue."

Not all parents have been as enthused with the year-round idea.

"Some parents don't want kids with different calendars, or it isn't enticing any more," Zimmerer said.

Proponents maintained that families were still able to enjoy a six-week summer vacation and that when students return in

late August, they have better retention due to the shorter gap between school years.

This year, enrollment was down to 97 kids, from 143 when the program first started; Zimmerer said. Declining enrollment played a factor in the end.

Thanks for the memories

This was Jon Vondrasek's third year as both a Gill Year Round teacher and in the teaching profession.

"The kids call me 'Mr. V' for obvious reasons," he said. "It's been fantastic. The kids developed a family relationship with each other. They know each

other like the back of their hands."

They knew each other so well that during one activity, they were able to line up by their birthdays without saying a word.

Gill's teachers this year were: Linda Lipson, kindergarten; Cindy Schuster, first grade; Wendy Blachford, grades 2-3; Vicki Shaw, grades 3-4; and Vondrasek, fifth grade.

Next year, Blachford will move to half-time at Flanders Elementary; Schuster will teach Reading Recovery at Flanders.

The others will continue teaching at Gill. Lipson will teach kindergarten, Shaw, third grade and Vondrasek, fifth grade.

Most kids will stay at Gill, their home school.

Zimmerer said year-round programs are active in California. "The concept is popular in lots of places," she said. "It's unusual to have a traditional and a year-round at the same school. Sometimes one school is designated just for year-round. In California they do it to save space instead of building new buildings."

Evan Wojtkiewicz, a fifth-grader, shared sentiments that were also expressed by parents before the program debuted.

"It's quite tragic," he said. "They should have kept it. The board of directors, including Robert Maxfield, the superintendent, didn't exactly inform the parents that they were closing down Year-Round. They didn't have enough time to get more people to attend Gill Year Round."

In March, Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield delivered what one news report termed a "death sentence" for the program during a meeting with parents and staff. At that time, Maxfield said that the lack of upper elementary enrollment would lead to split classes in three grades which is not considered acceptable from a teaching standpoint.

Low enrollment meant continuing the program would not be cost effective, he said.

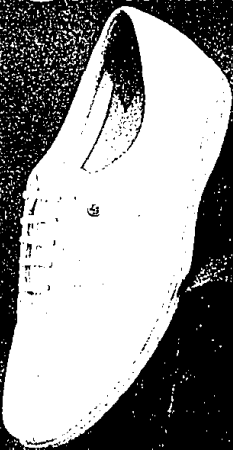
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Tootsie from page A2

Kirk said his favorite flavor is "red."

After growing bored on a recent drive home from Las Vegas with his parents, Kirk, being an avid Tootsie Pop eater, wondered what might happen if people knew the answer to the question the Tootsie Roll ads had posed years ago.

Twenty minutes later, the experiment was done. Kirk admits that he usually doesn't wait that long to get to the Tootsie Roll. "Sometimes I bite it to get to the center faster."

Kirk thanks the turtle and the boy in the Tootsie Roll ads for easing his summer boredom for 20 minutes.

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