

High school weathers test of time

CHERYL CORNACCHIA

The Gazette

Thursday, April 12, 2007

Micheline MacDonald graduated from Macdonald High School in 1946, returned to celebrate the school's 75th anniversary in 1982 and came back again in 2000 for a high school reunion.

Now, the 79-year-old retiree, who went by the name Micheline Gadbois in high school, is looking forward to one more visit.

Next month, the Ste. Anne de Bellevue high school celebrates its centennial and MacDonald plans to be among the hundreds of graduates who will gather during the long weekend in May to mark the milestone.

"They were happy years," MacDonald said this week from her home in St. John, N.B.

Reliving them, she said, will be fun for her and her younger sister, Denise, who will make the trip to the West Island from her winter home in Baltimore, Md.

In 2000, 1,700 alumni from as far away as Japan, Australia, Africa and South America travelled to Ste. Anne de Bellevue for a high school reunion.

The hope is that this year's historic event will be even bigger, said Pieter Leenhouts, an Ottawa engineer and the 1971 Macdonald graduate in charge of organizing the centennial.

So far, Leenhouts said, 1,400 graduates have been contacted by email and interest in the event has been building.

Thanks to an alumni-run website, www.machigh.org, graduates are connecting with one another, Leenhouts said. Online discussions, many of them starting with "do you remember," are creating the kind of buzz that should make the event a success, he said.

"I get excited just thinking about it," said Vivian Bruce (nee Chandler) who helped organize the centennial celebration.

A 1965 Macdonald graduate, Bruce said, she loved her time at the school - 11 years in all since she attended both elementary and secondary at Macdonald - and is looking forward to reminiscing with other grads.

She was editor of the school's yearbook, the Beacon, and kept tabs on school activities like sports teams, school clubs and the Reach for the Top team.

She remembers all the words to one of the songs she and her classmates sang on the school bus to and from football games.

"Give a yell. Give a cheer. For the girls that drink the beer. In the cellars of old Mac high,"



CREDIT: JOHN MAHONEY, THE GAZETTE

Students walk past Macdonald High School's former vice-principal Don Barnes (right) and alumni Vivian Bruce and Pieter Leenhouts.

she belted out to prove the point.

But she said she recognizes not everyone remembers their high school years quite so fondly.

Neither Canadian figure skater Toller Cranston nor retired CFCF news anchor Bill Haugland, who are among the school's more famous graduates, attended the reunion in 2000, Bruce said.

"I don't think Toller thought the school was supportive enough of his figure skating career," she observed.

However, Bruce said, many alumni are looking forward to the three-day event that will usher in the school's second century.

Bruce said the event is being held during the school year so that current students, as well as teachers and administrators, can participate.

The Grade 7 class, she said, is putting together a time capsule that will be mounted on the wall of the school's attic during the centennial celebrations.

There have been many changes since the school, built by tobacco tycoon William Christopher Macdonald as a training school for teachers studying at the college next door, first opened in 1907.

As for MacDonald, she said she can't wait to see the red brick school that she and her sister travelled to by train.

Growing up in Dorion, she first attended the French Catholic girls school then run by the Congregation Notre Dame in Ste. Anne de Bellevue.

But her mother worried that her daughters wouldn't speak enough English to land jobs.

Her mother paid a visit to the Catholic Bishop in Valleyfield to ask for special dispensation for her children to attend the then-Protestant McDonald High School.

"Times have changed," MacDonald said.

For more information about the Macdonald High School centennial event, scheduled for the May 18 to 20 weekend, please visit www.machigh.org

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