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Lynchburg Business article: PME 50th Anniversary

In the early 1960’s a woman named Sarah Webster lived on a quiet, remote farm on Trents Ferry in Lynchburg. This land had been passed down to her from her grandfather and it was precious to her. Webster lived peacefully tending to her honey bees, cow and garden at her farm until there was a knock on the door.

The city had bigger plans—a new elementary school named after Lynchburg’s fourth superintendent, Paul Munro. Webster had no plans to sell. “She loved kids, but she did not want to live next to a school” Webster’s grandson, Bill Burruss recalls. Webster fought her case against the city up to the State Supreme Court and lost. “From what I understand it was a pretty tough fight.” Burruss said, who is now the school’s Chairman of Building and Grounds Committee.

From its opening in September 1962 to 2012, Paul Munro Elementary School has become accredited, awarded and respected over the past 50 years. Now, those who have been touched by the school want to pay homage by throwing a birthday party for the schools’ golden year.

Brainstorming and planning for the party began in the fall of 2011. “We came up with the idea of how we wanted to celebrate it and what the 50th anniversary would do” head of the 50th anniversary committee, Missy Perry said.

With last names and address changes, alumni can be hard to come by, but the committee found that “word of mouth” has proven to be the most reliable method. Perry said she wants everyone to know about the birthday party and hear old stories from past students. “It’s to celebrate 50 years of this school and bring back people and have a lot of photos and get people involved” Perry said.

The celebratory weekend kicks off on September 28th at Paul Munro with a party and open house from 2-4 p.m. and will offer a tour and history of the school. September 29th at Amazement Square from 7-10 p.m. will be a gala anniversary party for alumni to catch up with fellow students and browse through old photos and renderings of what the school might look like with new playground equipment and landscaping. “It’s a chance to celebrate the school and what it has done for the community” Perry said.

To raise money for new playground equipment and garden landscape, personalized bricks are being sold as a birthday gift to the school. The brick is meant to honor a teacher, student, family member or staff. In the spring, the current students of Paul Munro held their own fundraiser for their school’s birthday by participating in a Move-A-Thon.

For every minute that the kids moved, they raised money through “sponsors.” The students moved for 50 minutes to celebrate 50 years by moving to various stations. The kids played waffle ball, hula hooped, danced, etc. in hopes of raising money for a gift from the student body. Over 20 volunteers and teachers participated with the kids and helped raise over $2,200.

“It was a blast!” Organizer of the Move-A-Thon, Amy Koudelka said. “The kids really enjoyed the day and it got them moving for a full 50 minutes!”

In 2011, Paul Munro earned the Board of Education Excellence Award and has completed all state and federal achievements for two years running. Paul Munro works each year to improve creativity and offer educational opportunities to its students. Rachel Thomas, a 2012 graduate from Paul Munro says she was well prepared for higher education thanks to her school. “We reviewed a lot for SOLs and tests. I’m sad [to leave] but I’m ready to go to middle school” Thomas said.

Aside from homework and testing, the students’ learning go far beyond the classroom. Every year the school offers field trips and performances for parents that the kids practice for. “The fifth grade finale was my favorite” Thomas said. “I like the book fair, all of my friends and teachers are there” Rising second grader George White said. “I love that it’s all family, that’s what we say, “We Are Family.”

While current students grow in their education at Paul Munro, others who were there just as the school was in the works reflect on its history.

As architect Everette Fauber mastered his plans for Paul Munro in 1962, he was working with a mosaic company that was brainstorming small tile designs to be placed on the school. Everette’s 12 year old son at the time, Stuart became fascinated with the work and began playing with the tiles. “He [Everette] came home and had these designs. As a 12 year old, I thought some of the company’s representations could have been done a lot better” Stuart said. Embracing his son’s creative ideas, Fauber sent the designs off to the company who loved them. These whimsical tiles are now one of Paul Munro’s most recognized trademarks.

“It was very important to my father that every school be distinctively different from any school at that time” Stuart said. “He felt very strongly that nothing be cookie cutter and that it all be tied together.”

For a school that has truly stood the test of time and educated so many children along the way, here’s to Paul Munro Elementary School and to another 50 years.