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Madison Heights alumni memorialize beloved school

Former students, teachers remember high school with monument

By Christina M. Wright
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ANDERSON, Ind. — Ignoring a sprinkling sky, hundreds of Madison Heights graduates, local law enforcement officers and firefighters gathered Saturday to unveil a memorial monument for the school that closed 13 years ago — without recognition, some alumni say.

“When they took the building over and renamed it Anderson High School, I thought it was poorly executed to not recognize Madison Heights and the people who went here,” 1963 graduate Lew Steiner said. “We grew up here.”

The ceremony took place on the grounds of the former Madison Heights High School. The facility is now known as Anderson High.

Confetti fell, a cannon was fired and some called for Anderson High — which will be the city’s only public high school beginning next academic year — to combine its traditions with those of Madison Heights and Highland. The latter will be transformed into a middle school for 2010-11.

“The new Anderson High School should be comprised of all the traditions from all three Anderson high schools,” said 1973 Madison Heights graduate Lisa Hathcoat, a teacher and yearbook adviser at Anderson High.

Hathcoat was suspended from Anderson High last week for allegedly leaving a classroom unattended. She was initially banned from the monument dedication, but Anderson schools Superintendent Felix Chow decided to allow her to attend.

Hathcoat led a Facebook committee of about 600 people in raising over \$38,000 through donations and memorial brick sales to build a monument to their beloved, defunct school.

Martha Baker Green, the event’s emcee and a 1973 graduate, said money left over from the monument fund would start the Pirate Legacy Fund.

“Let’s see how much money we can raise to keep this thing going,” Green said.

The nearly two-hour event on the lawn of the Anderson High building, which once housed Madison Heights, featured three men who were instrumental in the Madison Heights legacy.

Paul Bradford, former athletic director of 34 years, scattered funny stories into a brief history of Madison Heights. He said two Madison County townships were forced to build Madison Heights High School when the old Anderson High School building became overwhelmed with students.

A year later, he said, they were “invited” into the Anderson Community Schools Corporation, and after a seven-year battle with the courts, Madison Heights joined ACS.

Bradford noted a 1972 trip when Madison Heights students traveled out of town to testify about a brawl at the state finals. He said they stopped at a White Castle restaurant on the way back to Anderson, and he was tasked with informing a displeased cashier that he needed 135 burgers.

“True story, I’m telling you,” he said to the crowd’s laughter.

Bradford also recognized 1977 Mr. Basketball Ray Tolbert.

Tolbert, who now teaches and coaches in Indianapolis, said during his speech, “In my heart, it’s still Madison Heights.”

But he implored the group to embrace ACS’s one remaining high school.

“Now that Anderson, Madison Heights and Highland are all one, let us remember the good times and move on to the greater times,” Tolbert said.

Former Principal Maurice Wann, known to the students as “Maurice the Magnificent Wann,” congratulated his former students on making a difference in their various professions.

Anderson Mayor Kris Ockomon, who graduated from Madison Heights in 1978, declared May 15, 2010, “Madison Heights Pirate Day.” Every person on the podium ended their speeches with the school’s motto, coined by the school’s first principal, Robert Collier.

“Walk tall, be proud,” they recited. “You are a Pirate!”

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