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Graduates marking milestone

BY ROY WILHELM

When members of the Ross High School Class of 2009 participate in graduation ceremonies June 7, they will be marking a milestone for a special group of somewhat older graduates.

Just over 50 years ago -- June 4, 1959 -- the very first class graduated from the new Ross High School building.

During those ceremonies, more than 2,200 reportedly gathered in the Ross auditorium to watch 219 seniors receive their diplomas.

The main speaker, Dr. Fred E. Luchs, pastor of the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor, Mich., urged the graduates, "Don't completely cut the apron strings."

And Principal C. R. Cooper echoed that sentiment: "Don't forget us, come back and see us."

Fortunately many in that class have not forgotten the school or community.

The list of graduates includes many who have contributed mightily to Ross, Fremont Schools and the Sandusky County community in the 50 years since that graduation day. Through involvement in businesses, government and civic organizations; through support of schools, churches and community causes; and through raising their families to continue those traditions, they have given back to the community that helped to raise them.

Members of the class of 1959 have served in public offices, been successful in local businesses, actively supported the schools and their programs and carried the load for many community events and programs.

Principal Cooper apparently saw it coming: "Never have I seen a class seek top honors as did this class," he said in praising the work ethic of those 1959 graduating seniors.

Clearly, they were a good class to pave the way as the first graduates of the new Ross High School.

The change was a memorable one for the students who moved from the Croghan Street building to the new Front Street school in the fall of 1958.

"It was exciting to know that we were going to be the first class to graduate from the school," Larry Overmyer recalls.

And many of his classmates, who are preparing for their 50th reunion Aug. 28-29, agree with his recollection.

"We had been crammed into that old building for so long," Marvin Hines recalls, "It was a good move."

His wife, the former Dolores Ellison, said, "It was really a change, we were all excited about it. The openness of the new school was really nice."

And John Roush, called the new facility "Incredibly cool, so nice and new compared to the old place." Roush, who drove from Lindsey each day, remembers that there was a big change in the parking situation. "It used to be a real trick to find a parking spot (in the downtown area)," he said.

Mike McCarthy, who recalled thinking the new school "was neat," laughingly reflected that "It seemed like there was a master plan to have classes as far apart as possible," in the spread out one-floor building, "after the downtown was so crowded."

Nancy Stoner, who also remembered being excited about the move and recalled seeing an electric typewriter for the first time in the new building, had a comment that reflected the feelings of all of her fellow graduates contacted. Being moved to Front Street, they missed "The magnificent downtown."

From snacks at the Posey Shop on Croghan Street, donuts at Hensch's Bakery on Arch Street and lunches in the restaurants that dotted the downtown, the students missed the opportunity to leave the building at break time.

"Going downtown was fun," Overmyer said, reminiscing about cold soft drinks, open-face beef sandwiches and cherry cream pie.

And, there was also fun to be had at the brief noontime dances in the old girls' gymnasium at the Croghan Street building. "They were wonderful," Stoner recalled.

While the walks downtown disappeared because of the distance, the dances also ended, apparently out of concern for the new gymnasium floor.

But while the move to North Street ended some traditions, there were tons of pluses from gleaming hallways, space to maneuver comfortably, the new gymnasium and wrestling facility, the Little Theatre, spacious parking lot and newness everywhere.

"We felt really good about it," Hines said of the move, "and we felt like we had to be standard bearers for the classes to follow."

They apparently played that part well, because during the graduation program, Superintendent of Schools A.E. Rupp praised the graduates for their "pride and care in the new building."

In the 50 years since, they have continued to set a high standard for community and school support.
