

Laurel Hill to reopen as 'integrative' school

By Christopher Blair
Emerald Contributor

Laurel Hill Elementary, a school nestled in a small, geographically isolated valley just to the east of Hendricks Park, experienced declining enrollment in the early 1980s, and at the end of the 1982 school year its doors were locked.

There were few options open for Laurel Hill students. The closest school, Condon Elementary, closed the same year. Edison Elementary, the next choice, was too crowded, leaving Laurel Hill children no choice but to attend distant Harris Elementary, which was already plagued by overcrowded conditions.

Opposition to the closure of the school in the Laurel Hill neighborhood was immediate, said Jan Wostmann, co-chair of the Laurel Hill Neighborhood Association.

"Not only was it too far away, but folks felt their children weren't getting an education," Wostmann said of the crowded, often portable classrooms. She added that participation in after-school activities for students who lived so far away was difficult, and that some children were spending upwards of one hour each day on the school bus.

A 1986 survey conducted by the neighborhood association revealed that there were in fact enough students in the Laurel Hill area to fill the school's classrooms. After lengthy debate between the neighbors and the Eugene School Board, which was against reopening Laurel Hill for financial reasons, proposals were accepted on how to reopen and operate the school.

There were four requirements that had to be met by those interested in reopening the school if the school board was to approve the reopening, Assistant Superintendent David Piercy said.

Adequate involvement and approval from parents in the area was required, Piercy said, adding that the school's operating costs must not be more than that of other elementary schools in the Eugene area.

Also, 150 students must register for school by December of this year.

The "new and improved" Laurel Hill Elementary will be based on a third proposal made by Edgewood-Evergreen Elementary School principal Kenar Charkoudian, Eugene-area teachers Betty Shoemaker, Barbara Shirk and Marilyn Lytle and parent Brooke Belcher.

This group has been working to detail their proposal since it was approved by Laurel Hill residents and the school board, and will present their ideas for the first time at a meeting of the neighbors association July 21.

The proposal by Charkoudian's group follows the educational theory and practice found in "Optimizing Education: The Integrative Education Model in the Classroom," a 1986 book by California State University education professor Barbara Clark.

The book's premise is based on, among other things, brain research performed in the 1970s and 80s, which classifies human thought, especially in children, under four areas of function: thinking, emotion, physical senses, and a so-called "intuitive sense."

"If we use all of these parts of the brain, we can optimize learning in students," Charkoudian said. "(Clark) has developed an integrative approach to education; in other words, using large themes so that you're not teaching social studies separately or math separately. We believe we can be more effective if we teach across subject-matter lines."

Charkoudian used a hypothetical lesson on early pioneers as an example of how students would learn and experience many different skills and ideas while studying one larger concept.

"You would not only be talking about history," Charkoudian said, "but also geography, the social problems the pioneers ran into on their travels and some of the health problems as well."

Basic classroom requirements set by the state will still be followed at Laurel Hill, Charkoudian said.

"This doesn't mean that we



Photo by James Marks

Laurel Hill School, which was closed by dwindling enrollment in 1982, will reopen its doors in the fall of 1989. The elementary school will adopt an "integrative" approach to teaching and extend its class day by one hour.

won't be teaching reading or math," she said. "But we plan to teach thinking skills and social skills and to release the intuitive sense within children."

One of the book's central ideas is that the intuitive sense is responsible for creativity, Charkoudian said. One of the goals of the school will be to attempt to "reduce tension in students so that their creativity will be released. There will be a relaxed atmosphere where there is mutual respect between children and adults," she said.

This approach to learning has been tried in a summer program at the New Age School in Los Angeles, but Charkoudian, who is expected to be named as principal of Laurel Hill when it opens in the fall of 1989, said this is the first time the ideas of integrative education will be applied to a year-long program.

Charkoudian said that she and the other members of her group are considering seeking funding for other programs for the new school, such as a before- and after-school day care program and a breakfast program.

The school day will also be lengthened from the five hours found in other Eugene-area elementary schools to six hours.

The response from Laurel Hill neighbors about the new school's opening has been generally favorable.

"A lot of the parents looked at the proposals quite thoroughly," Wostmann said. "But a lot of others just said 'Give us our school back.'"

lectures, closed circuit television, cassette tape recorders, a braille labeler and a talking calculator.

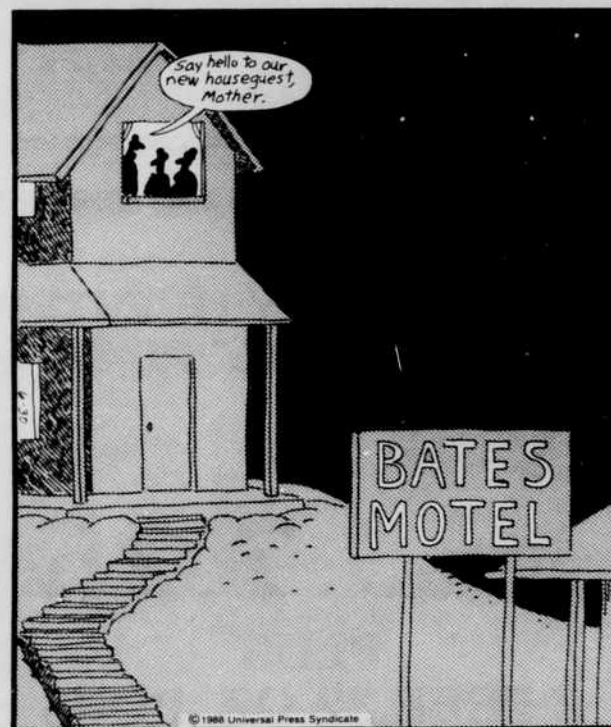
Money is also allocated for one or two differently abled students to attend a state conference for disabled student services. A miscellaneous resource fund will also be created.

The impetus for the project began two years ago when then-ASUO President Steve Nelson initiated a program to make the University Main Library and the EMU more accessible to handicapped students, Hoyt said. The Oregon Legislature allocated the money to the University at that time, he added.

"We hope that legislators in Salem will recognize the need (for this program)," Hoyt said in reference to the current contract.

THE FAR SIDE

By GARY LARSON



What really happened to Elvis

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contract.

The agreement will also provide a counselor for students with disabilities. According to Hoyt, Assistant to the Provost Hillary Gurtis has been selected as the counselor. Gurtis is presently on vacation and was unavailable for comment.

The contract also calls for a number of services and equipment to be provided for students with physical and learning disabilities. Gurtis was responsible for determining the services and equipment, Hoyt said.

The ASUO will allocate \$8,000 and the administration will match that amount. The account being used for this purpose is one of two surplus accounts currently in use by the ASUO, Hoyt said.

Of the money set aside by the ASUO, \$7,100 was left over Oregon Daily Emerald

from the ASUO administration two years ago, and the other \$900 will come out of the ASUO Executive account, Hoyt said. The funds will be administered by Academic Advising on a daily basis.

The program will begin next fall.

Services will include a sign language interpreter for the deaf, study assistance, financial assistance to cover diagnostic testing, tutorial assistance, mobility assistance around campus and assistance in enlarging relevant printed material in classes and textbooks.

The contract provides electronic equipment to be made available to disabled students: a telecommunication device and emergency evacuation warning lights for hearing impaired students, a sound amplifier for



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