

40 years of raising the Dome School

Annette McGee Rasch
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In the early '70s, several families from the young and hopeful Takilma community home-schooled their children in the "Doo Dah Dome," a 40-foot diameter geodesic structure they built cooperatively on their land on Takilma Road.

"Neighbors started bringing their kids over and by fall of '75 it became clear that a real school was taking shape," said Doug Kendal, who still lives on that land with his wife Alyce. "By 1976 we had seven students and that's when the Doo Dah Dome was legally incorporated to become the Dome School, Inc."

Over the next several years the school's success meant a larger space was needed to

accommodate the growing student base, thus a shared vision gained momentum - for a community center in a more central location, where the school could keep growing and people could meet and hold events on a regular basis. "We had been using the dome for informal events because it was the biggest structure around," Kendal said.

So fundraising - and the search for the right piece of land - began in earnest. During this period, in addition to schooling, the Doo Dah Dome was utilized for film nights, casino nights, bake sales and other events to raise money. And, for a few years, some of the students were schooled in the "Log Cabin" located in downtown Takilma.

Finally, Takilma community members bartered with the Longview Fibre Company

for ownership of the 8 acres the current school occupies. Folks pitched in to accomplish forestry thinning work for the company on land nearby in exchange for the deed to the land they wanted.

The "monumental" construction project began in 1980. Land was cleared and the well dug, and that same winter the trees were milled that were used for the building. The foundation was laid in 1981.

By all accounts, it seemed "everyone had a hand in helping out," from framing and forming to electrical and roofing work. An enormous truss raising party was held and parts of old buildings were salvaged for fixtures, sinks, posts and beams. "The whole flooring system came from old houses in Medford, donated by a Methodist minister," Kendal said.

"Care was taken to recycle old materials where that was possible," said Jake McBride, one of the original teachers who also pitched in on the construction. "In that first phase, almost all the work was done by volunteers. We had such a wealth of skills and talent: from carpentry and engineering to electrical and plumbing. So many people donated supplies, time and energy, and just for the construction - but also the fundraising. Back then, if we raised \$1,000 at an event we were ecstatic!"

"I drew the plans," said Kendal, a building designer who's done designs for about 600 building or remodeling projects thought-out the Valley over the years. "And Robert Hirning did the plumbing, and Charlie Greenwood helped with engineering and the heating system."

SEE DOME on A-5

Dome School has evolved & stayed the same

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Looking back over 40 years, several teachers and administrators shared their reflections on the Dome

School's teaching philosophy.

"Going back to the beginning, with our new young families, we felt it was important to be part of our kids' education. So we laid that groundwork," said Alyce Kendal,

who taught at the original Dome School for five years before moving on to teach in the Three Rivers School District for 20 years. "Judith Ann McBride, Della Meengs and I were already certified teachers, which gave us professional insight and legitimacy and helped us make some really good decisions."

"One of our challenges was discerning what's really important for our children to learn in life. We really wrestled with that," Meengs said, who also taught at Dome School when her children were young before teaching at Lorna Byrne Middle School and then Evergreen Elementary for 18 years. "Of course reading and math are important, but we asked ourselves: 'What are the other really meaningful life skills?' One dominant theme was that we wanted our kids to be free thinkers. And we emphasized teaching kids the value of respecting themselves and each other, and to really hear others' points of view." She added with a chuckle, "We also wanted them to know that there was certainly more than one chance to get it right in life."

"Even with a turnover of teachers with their own styles, that original formula is still largely in place," said Susan Gustafson, the school's co-administrator for 30 years. "And, our low student-teacher ratio allows for lots of personalized

attention." The school currently has 56 students.

Jake McBride, who taught at the school for 12 years, added that the multi-aged setting has always been another key part of the Dome School's model. "Kids don't all learn at exactly the same pace, so if you have a range of ages, that helps with learning tolerance, sharing and other social skills."

"It's the very best way to educate - the big kids helping teach the younger ones," said Helen Kauffman, who taught pre-school and kindergarten at the school for 30 years. "We've gotten away from that a little, but there's elements still happening. And the Dome school staff functions as family. It's such a relaxed way to do schooling. Kids learn better in that relaxed atmosphere."

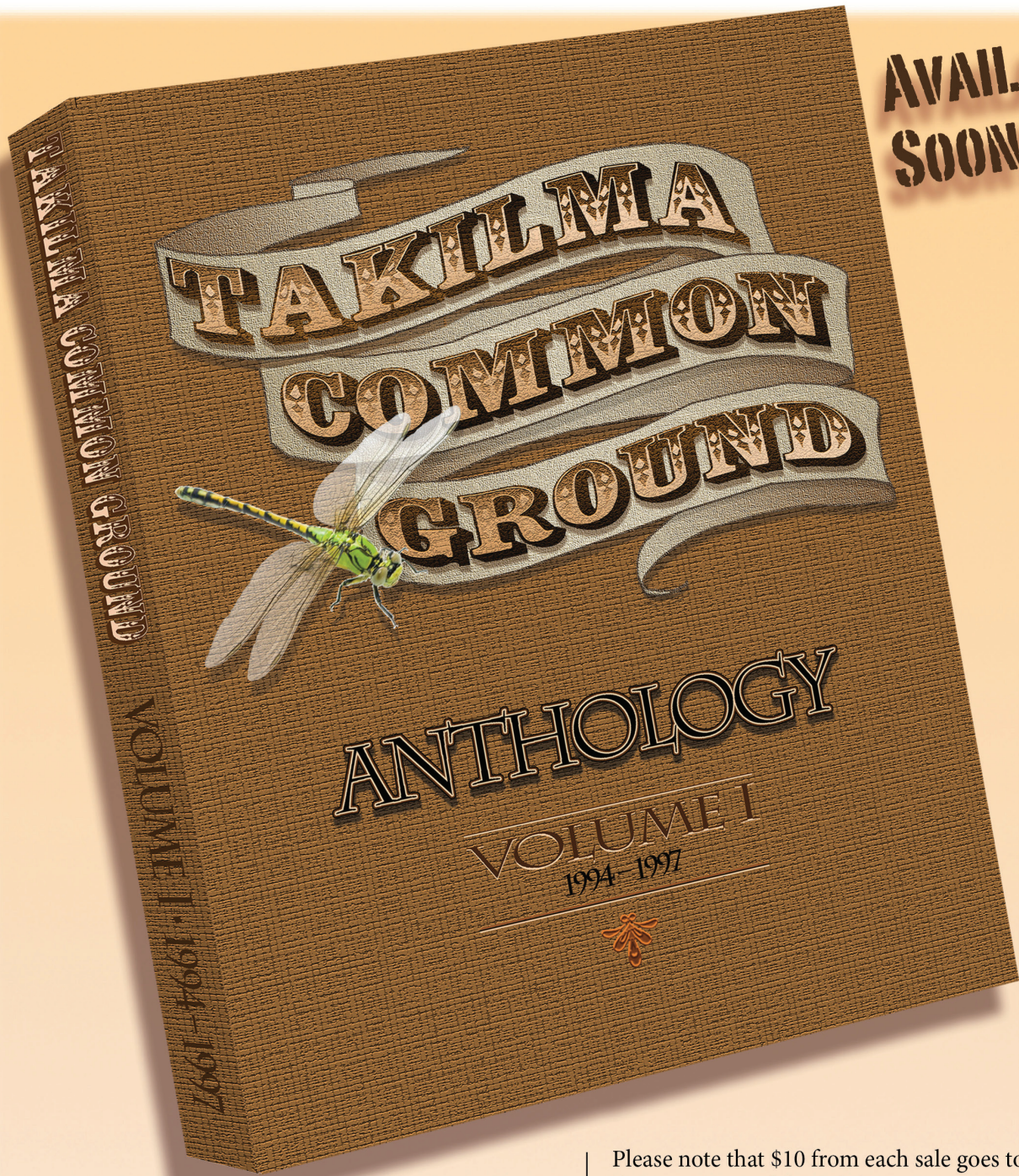
Kauffman also talked about volunteerism and how the school encourages community members to share their skills with the kids. "It's been that way since Day One. It's one of our strengths, you get that varied knowledge: from yoga, dance and art; to tree planting, gardening, bio-char and animal safety. You name it and we've done it."

Deb Murphy, who taught at the Dome School for 15 years and also served as co-administrator, said one major difference between "mainstream schools and our program is how we incorporate

environmental education. We get the kids outdoors a lot. The families all go camping together. We'd go to the beach, the caves and have lessons in these settings. Also, Ron Pio took the kids hiking every Friday for many years. Going beyond paper, pencil and work sheets helps kids become more well-rounded and getting outdoors brings forth the higher levels of thinking. Children always love the Dome School. We couldn't get them to leave at the end of the day. No one has ever hated school there."

Kimiko Maglio graduated from SOU with a double major in environmental science and early childhood education and worked at numerous other schools before teaching at the Dome School. "This school is so beautiful because it was built by the parents and community. All these people make the school what it is. And there's no principal. We work as a cooperative and make all the decisions together, about the school and how we want our kids to be raised. And I love sharing all my own personal passions with these kids. I feel so lucky to work in a school where I can do that." Maglio attended preschool at the Dome School and participated in the after-school Rangers Program through her elementary school years. She's come full circle.

SEE SCHOOL ON A-5



Takilma Common Ground was created in 1994 to increase communication and stimulate discussion. Volume 1 of the anthology collects the first 25 issues, from 1994-1997.

They often feature responses to themes, in the form of articles, essays, letters, poetry, and pictures. Issues also include birth announcements, memorials, recipes, a kids page, essays on the history of the area, and information on events. There is no finer chronicle of life in Takilma, past and present, than the *Takilma Common Ground*.

Please note that \$10 from each sale goes to support the expansion of the Takilma Community Building. Learn more about the need for the expansion at DomeSchool.org/help

Copies available from the Dome School/TCB office, 9367 Takilma Rd. or email Ryan at thedomeschool@gmail.com for more information.

The editors gratefully acknowledge the ongoing support of the Takilma community, all past and present volunteers and staff, and all writers, artists, and photographers who have contributed over the years.

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