

Latham from A1

of Cottage Grove itself, which became incorporated in 1887.

Established by Henry Small, Latham first opened its doors in 1853, though it was then called Small School and located just east of what is now Sweet Lane and Highway 99.

As the decades ticked by, changes came to the school as it adopted the Latham name and, at one point, had relocated to land now inhabited by Weyerhaeuser. In 1941, the school made its final move to its current location and, the next year, four smaller districts were consolidated into Latham.

For the hour-long open house, the halls and rooms of the school were filled with people running their fingers along childhood memories, flipping through class pictures and greeting old friends.

Brothers Dennis and Leslie Chapman, former Latham students, returned to the school for the event.

"When I started here there were just four classrooms," said Dennis, who attended Latham from 1944 to 1952. "You went two years in the same room with the same teacher — No kindergarten, no Head Start, just boom, straight in."

Leslie went to Latham from 1955 to 1963.

"Mostly what I remember about the cafeteria was loving the food," he said.

Another former Latham student, Nancy Russell, said "I remember those cooks because they made

these really beautiful dinner rolls and cinnamon rolls and maple bars to die for."

Leslie agreed. "The cinnamon rolls were the best," he said. "Made from scratch in that basement."

Russell lost herself in the memory for a moment. "You could smell it when you walked in," she said. "It was just ... We knew. You hit that front door, open them up and it was like, you knew you were having cinnamon rolls or maple bars that day."

For many, part of Latham's appeal has always been the intimate atmosphere made possible by small class sizes — something which can be lost in schools with unbalanced teacher-to-student ratios.

"It's a dying culture, the whole culture of community," said Leslie. "We're such a mobile society and everybody's focusing on their [phones]."

Dennis remembered growing up with a core group of children.

"There were six of us that went through first grade all the way through high school," he said. "Our families all knew each other."

The Chapmans' father even taught at Latham briefly, though they admit he didn't last long due to the changing environment of education.

"When we 'Spock' kids came along, he had a little trouble dealing with it," Leslie said, referring to the famed pediatrician Benjamin Spock. "Teaching and education changed. The school hasn't changed that much."

Dennis backed up the

point. "Mrs. Saunders — my first- and second-grade teacher — went to school with our dad," he recalled.

"She said, 'Dennis, you know I have your parents' permission to spank you, and I knew they did. So, I was a pretty good student for the next eight years.'"

While memories of bygone eras abounded, it was often the unchanging charm of the school that struck many attendees Friday night.

"I hate to see it go," Dennis said.

Though many there that night reiterated Dennis' sentiment, the possibility of the school's closure has been present on the minds of school staff and board members for some time as budget cuts have gradually chopped away at resources over the decades. Enrollment has also taken a drastic downward turn.

"Three or four or five years ago it was up in the 130s," said Garrett Bridgens, communications coordinator with the school district. "Now it's in the 80s. So, it's been declining."

In addition, an estimated \$775,000 would have had to come out of the deferred maintenance budget to keep the school afloat and cover everything from windows to a new boiler to electrical upgrades.

In giving the school a proper farewell, Bridgens and the event's planning committee made up 350 stampable passports for everyone who entered the school Friday night. On each page of the passport, attendees were invited to visit various parts of the school where one could

engage the school one last time by flipping through old pictures, getting a photo taken, signing one's name on the main hallway wall or adding favorite memories to an online collection.

"We wanted this night to be a night where people could come and reflect and have an opportunity to walk through the building one more time," Bridgens said. "It's bitter-sweet, so we tried to strike the right balance of this being a celebration ... it's a celebration of all the amazing people who made up this school over the years."

Following the open house, the gymnasium filled with attendees to listen to reflections and celebrations of the legacy of a school with a century and a half of influence on the lives of families in the area.

Anne Fisk, principal at Latham School, hosted the ceremonies.

"Over the past five years, I've had the opportunity to meet many of you, meet many of your children, your grandchildren and it's just been an awesome opportunity that I've been very blessed to have," she said.

Current students of the school took the stage to sing songs written by Latham students in the 1990s and a slideshow of the school's history was presented by Bridgens.

Mayor Jeff Gowing, a student at Latham from 1968 to 1974, spoke to the crowd.

"Forty-five years ago, when I left here, I didn't think I would be coming back and talking as the mayor, but here I am," he said. "This is one of the first stages I think I ever stood on."

Gowing recalled fond memories of basketball games in the gym and bicycle races on the last day

of school.

"There's so many memories of this school. I really hate to see it go away," he said. "It's going to be such a sad thing to see this place go, but I know it's inevitable and we'll move on."

Next, Tom Davis, son of influential past Latham principal Cal Davis, reflected on the deep connection his family had with the school.

"Thank you very much for gathering today to reminisce about our community and say goodbye to a little piece of us," Davis said. "My parents, Cal and Doris Davis, loved the Latham and London communities. They treasured the people and treasured the schools."

Davis spoke of his father beginning his 33-year career at Latham in 1952 teaching eighth grade, driving the school bus and helping the janitor while his mother substitute-taught there.

Later, his sister would teach first grade at Latham, where her daughters also went, and his brother would hold his wedding reception in that very gymnasium.

Davis walked to the back of the stage to point at a basketball jersey hanging on the wall. "This No. 1, I wore in 1960," he said. "Our family has many, many fond memories."

Davis listed efforts by his father to make children's enrollment at Latham worth remembering.

"He built a glass birdhouse outside his office window so all the kids could come in and watch the birds nest. ... He wired a sound system in this gym so that the kids could square dance for P.E. class. He built an electric scoreboard that included an eagle that he had hand-carved," he said.

"This school was a deep effort of many teachers and

parents working together to provide a safe, wholesome setting for multi-generations of students," Davis said. "My parents took great joy in working with children of parents who had attended here."

His parents saw the school as a center for not just education, but building community, he said.

"It was the meeting site that helped provide identity to the area," explained Davis. "Mom and Dad would agree when I say that Latham community was a beloved extension of our family. We are grateful to be part of Latham's enduring legacy."

After students sang a final song, Davis rang the iconic Latham school bell one last time.

Throughout the event, questions about the eventual fate of Latham School proliferated the halls, though board members and school staff had no definitive answers.

"That's a great question. We've been getting that a lot tonight," Bridgens said. "That's obviously going to be a school board decision. ... The board will go through a process to figure out what they want to do with this building."

Though no timeline on that process could be given, plans have been made to move Latham educators currently employed at the school to other schools in the district next fall.

It was also acknowledged that any decisions on what will be done with Latham will carry the weight of the school's legacy with it.

"There's definitely a rich history. You can see that from the turnout tonight and seeing everyone here," said Bridgens.

(More photos are available on the Cottage Grove Sentinel Facebook page and will appear in next week's print edition.)

Worship Directory

COTTAGE GROVE:
6th & Gibbs Church of Christ
 195 N. 6th St. • 541-942-3822
 10:00am
 Christian Education:
 Pre-K through 5th
 www.6thandgibbs.com

Calvary Baptist Church
 77873 S 6th St • 541-942-4290
 Pastor: Riley Hendricks
 Sunday School: 9:45am
 Worship: 11:00am
 The Journey: Sunday 5:00pm
 Praying Thru Life: Wednesday 6:00pm

Church of Christ
 420 Monroe St • 541-942-8565
 Sunday Service: 10:30am

Cottage Grove Bible Church
 1200 East Quincy Avenue
 541-942-4771
 Pastor: Bob Singer
 Worship 11am
 Sunday School: 9:45am
 AWANA age 3-8th Grade,
 Wednesdays Sept-May, 6:30pm
 www.cgbible.org

Cottage Grove Faith Center
 33761 Row River Rd.
 541-942-4851
 Lead Pastor: Kevin Pruett
 www.cg4.tv
 Full Children's Ministry available
 Services: 9:00am & 10:45am

Delight Valley
 Church of Christ
 33087 Saginaw Rd. East
 541-942-7711 • Pastor: Bob Friend
 Two Services:
 9am - Classic in the Chapel
 10:30am - Contemporary in the Auditorium

First Baptist Church
 301 S. 6th st • 541-942-8242
 Pastor: David Chhangte
 Sunday School 9:30am
 Worship Service 11:00am
 Youth Wednesday 6:30pm
 cgfirstbaptist.com

First Presbyterian Church
 3rd and Adams St
 541-942-4479
 Rev.: Karen Hill
 Worship: 10:00am
 Sunday School: 10:00am
 fpcgrove.com

Hope Fellowship
 United Pentecostal Church
 100 S. Gateway Blvd.
 541-942-2061
 Pastor: Dave Bragg
 Worship: 11:00am Sunday
 Bible Study: 7:00pm Wednesday
 www.hopefellowshipupcc.com
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Living Faith Assembly
 467 S. 10th St. • 541-942-2612
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 Youth Worship Sundays: 11a (all ages welcome)
 Mondays: 5:30p (6th-12th grades)

Non-Denominational Church of Christ
 1041 Pennoyer Ave
 541-942-8928
 Preacher: Tony Martin
 Sunday Bible Study: 10:00am
 Sunday Worship: 10:50am & 5:30pm
 www.pennoyeravccoc.com

Old Time Gospel Fellowship
 103 S. 5th St. • 541-942-4999
 Pastor: Jim Edwards
 Sunday Service: 10:00am
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Our Lady of Perpetual Help and St. Philip Benizi Catholic Churches
 1025 N. 19th St.
 541-942-3420
 Father John J. Boyle
 Holy Mass:
 Saturday Vigil - 5:30 PM
 Sunday - 10:30 PM
 For weekday and Holy Day of Obligation schedule see website OLPHCC.net
 Confession: 4 PM to 5 PM
 Saturdays or by appointment

St. Philip Benizi, Creswell
 552 Holbrook Lane
 Sunday 8:30 AM

St. Andrews Episcopal Church
 1301 W. Main • 541-767-9050
 Rev. Lawrence Crumb
 "Church with the flags."
 Worship: Sunday 10:30am
 All Welcome

Seventh-day Adventist Church
 820 South 10th Street
 541-942-5213
 Pastor: Kevin Miller
 Bible Study: Saturday, 9:15 am
 Worship Service: Saturday, 10:40
 Mid-week Service: Wednesday, 1:00

Trinity Lutheran Church
 6th & Quincy • 541-942-2373
 Pastor: James L. Markus
 Sunday School & Adult Education 9:15am
 Sunday Worship 10:30 am
 Comm. Kitchen Free Meal Tue & Thur 5:00pm TLC Groups
 tlccg.com

United Methodist Church
 334 Washington • 541-942-3033
 Pastor: Lura Kidner-Miesen
 Worship: 10:30am
 umcgrove.org

"VICTORY" Country Church
 913 S. 6th Street • 541-942-5913
 Pastor: Barbara Dockery
 Worship Service: 10:00am
 Message: "WE BELIEVE IN MIRACLES"

CRESWELL:
 Creswell Presbyterian Church
 75 S 4th S • 541-895-3419
 Rev. Seth Wheeler
 Adult Sunday School 9:15am
 Sunday Worship Service 10:30 am
 website www.creswellpres.org

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Cottage Grove
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