



MEDIA CONTACT:
Sonya T. Gordon, APR
Public Information Officer,
Department for
Communications &
Community Engagement
(225) 922-5611 office
(225) 328-4763 cell
sgordon@ebrschools.org

Press Release

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****TWO PHOTOS ATTACHED****

**Four Mascots, Thousands of Students and Fifty Years:
Westdale Heights Academic Magnet Celebrates Anniversary Sunday**

Baton Rouge, LA – Christmas came early in December 1959, when School System officials dedicated the new Westdale Elementary School. Staff, students and parents will celebrate 50 years of education at the same site, 2000 College Dr., at a special event 1-4 p.m. Sunday, October 11, at the school.

The site, now known as **Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School**, will be displaying memorabilia and photos from former students and teachers. In addition, students have been studying the school's past and making predictions for its future, as will be shown in several projects. The free event is open to the public, and hot dogs, jambalaya and other refreshments will be on sale. The profits will help pay for the fifth grade's trip to the Grand Canyon next year.

At an enrollment of 446 students at the Pre-K-through-fifth-grade school today, the Westdale Elementary School of 50 years ago was much smaller – both student-wise and building-wise. According to the speech read at the school dedication in 1959, the school had been built with 12 classrooms housing first through sixth graders due to the “rapid growth which has taken place in our community within the past few years.”

At that time, 48 schools had been renovated, numerous additions and improvements made to other schools and 10 new schools – including Westdale Elementary – had been built. The near future plan was to renovate 13 more schools and finish construction on another seven new ones.

“It is your hope, I know,” the dedication speech by **Dr. Lloyd Funchess, the district's then superintendent of schools**, states, “that the boys and girls attending this school will come to be good, upright, useful citizens in a community which provides opportunities for each and everyone to grow and develop in direct relationship to his own interests, abilities and ambitions. You hope that your children will have opportunities in this school which will prepare them to take their places in our American way of life.

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WHAM 50th/2

“... We pledge to you our best efforts, and we express the hope that through these efforts, there will develop a pride in this school second to none to be found anywhere. ... And so, as we dedicate this building this afternoon, we recognize that it represents a satisfaction in a job well done, a faith in the future and a hope for the best in all of us.”

Those hopes were well founded. As the school later added a library and three kindergarten classrooms, it even later added six classrooms to become a special education facility serving orthopedically impaired students who received physical therapy at the McMains Center next door. In 2004, the school obtained Magnet Program status. **Since that time, the Westdale Heights Academic Magnet School has earned numerous awards, including:**

- Magnet School of Excellence, 2008
- No Child Left Behind National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, 2008
- East Baton Rouge Parish School System Principal of the Year, 2007 (**Cheryl Singer**)
- East Baton Rouge Parish School System Teacher of the Year, 2007 and 2009
- East Baton Rouge Parish School System Student of the Year, 2005 and 2008
- East Baton Rouge Parish School System Elementary Fitness Meet awards, first place in 2006 and 2008 and second place in 2007
- Louisiana State Health Award, 2009

As the mascot changed over the years from the Wildcats to the Cheetahs to today's Wizards, the school maintained its emphasis on excellence in education. **What began with the original principal, Scallan E. Walsh, remains today under Principal Singer.** Over the years, the school has graduated a number of students who went on to be successful. For example, **Kenneth Hoffman, director of Education for the National World War II Museum in New Orleans,** is an alumni of the school and lived in the neighborhood across College Drive. In addition, **Sean Reilly, who owns Lamar Advertising,** is a former student.

When the school opened, **Ginny Hornsby** was a student in the sixth grade class, which was taught by Mr. McDonald. All the students had a great time (*see the two photos attached*) at the class' end-of-the-year party, which was held at a Mrs. Walsh's house at LSU lakes (actually at the neighbor's swimming pool next door). Hornsby had just recovered from pneumonia and couldn't go swimming that day.

Hornsby still lives on College Drive, and **former student Steve Cox of McComb, Miss.,** remembers riding his bike to school along a quieter street (at that time). He liked to play dodge ball and listen to his sixth-grade teacher Mrs. Adams. “I remember Mrs. Entriken as well (maybe third or fourth grade),” Cox said. “She had knuckles as hard as my head. I know that because she used them there to get my attention a time or two. I don't know why; I'm sure I was a model student.”

At recess, Cox would either play kickball or be a reluctant member of the “I Hate Girls Club.” “We would lock arms and walk toward a group of girls as a display of our disinterest in them, I suppose,” he said. “I was one of those kids who thought lunchroom food was really good (mom didn't love cooking), and I always knew who the picky eaters were and sat beside them so that I could have some of their lunch. Ah, the good old days.” **For more information about the anniversary and the school's event, contact Principal Singer at (225) 926-5421 or csinger@ebersschools.org.**

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