

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

Director of Communications: Gregg Herrington, (360) 885-5337

PO Box 200 • Battle Ground, WA 98604-0200 • Office Location: 11104 NE 149th Street • Brush Prairie, WA
District Switchboard: (360) 885-5300

Nov. 7, 2011

Unused, deteriorated downtown school to be burned on Dec. 10

The old Central School, a home away from home to decades of children but in recent years a vacant, deteriorating eyesore and potential liability, is finally coming down.

Rather, the old school, which opened in March 1941, is going up – in smoke.

In a win-win-win arrangement for school district taxpayers, firefighters and the physical appeal of downtown Battle Ground, the school district has struck a deal with several firefighting agencies.

On Saturday, Dec. 10, firefighters will conduct “live-fire” training in part of the one-story, 39,000-square foot building at 300 N. Parkway, just north of Battle Ground High School. Smoke will be visible that day beginning about 10 a.m. Then, about 2 p.m., the remainder of the old school will be set ablaze.

Prior to that, from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. every day from Nov. 25 to Dec. 9, firefighters from various area firefighting agencies will get training at the old school. Upwards of 250 firefighters and cadets will benefit from this opportunity. **(See separate, attached press release.)** The training and the burn are being organized by Clark County Fire and Rescue under the supervision of Mike Ciraulo, training chief for multiple county fire agencies who is also the mayor of Battle Ground.

‘A rare opportunity’ for firefighters

“Training in a building of this size and complexity provides a rare opportunity for our volunteer and career firefighters, fire officers, and fire cadets,” Ciraulo said.

“The fire service in Clark County appreciates this opportunity to work in partnership with the Battle Ground School District, not only to save the district money but also to train our personnel in a realistic environment.”

Battle Ground Superintendent of Schools Shonny Bria said that after the debris is hauled away, the site will become a park-like open space available to the public, at least for the foreseeable future. She said Ciraulo has assured her that every effort

will be made to spare the trees along the front (east side) of the building. Eventually, the land could be used for a school district building.

Rose City Contracting is removing asbestos, mercury and PCBs at a cost of \$70,000. Cleanup costs are expected to be \$30,000 to \$40,000. However, the burning will save between \$40,000 and \$80,000 in demolition costs. The original building was almost 22,000 square feet and another 17,700 square feet were added in 1948.

First-year memories and long-lasting friendships

Pat (O'Donnell) Somdalen of Battle Ground was in the fifth grade when the school opened in March 1941.

“We started that school year (1940-41) in the old school at the corner of Main and Parkway,” she said. “The day we left for Easter vacation we had to clean out our desks and carry our books and supplies up to the new school and put them in our new desks. Then, we got on the bus and went home. When we came back after Easter, we went straight to the new school.”

When Central School opened in September 1941 for its first full year of operation, Bill Tucker of Battle Ground was in the first grade. His family had moved that summer from the community of View in north central Clark County.

“When you're a farm boy from View, a big school like Central impresses you,” Tucker said. “There were two first-grade classes. I was in Mrs. Ring's room. I didn't know any of my classmates at the start of the year.”

These days he goes to regular gatherings of the Battle Ground High School Class of 1953. Four of the regulars at those get-togethers were in first grade with him.

Over the years, Central filled numerous roles, mostly as an elementary school but later it also served as home for overflow Battle Ground High School classes, a pre school and some district offices.

After the building was totally vacated in 2001 there were occasional suggestions from the public that it be salvaged for other uses. That was seen as cost-prohibitive given the condition and quality of the building.

Sad for some, but prudent and a long-term benefit

Superintendent Bria said, “Central School played an important role in the educational and social growth of thousands of people still living in the Battle Ground area. We understand that some will be saddened to see the school gone.

“The building is truly unsalvageable,” she said. “From a financial standpoint, this is the most prudent and beneficial step. We’re happy that the fire department thinks the trees in front can be saved. The open space created after the site is cleaned up will be a plus for the community.”

Kevin Jolma, the school district’s director of facilities and operations, said, “The Central Building served its purpose well for 60 years. Even with the advanced technology of today’s buildings, a 60-year-life cycle is admirable.”



Central School interior, October 2011



Central School interior, October 2011



Mold under the carpets, October 2011



Central School exterior, October 2011

#

Reporters/editors: Possible interviewees, listed here with permission:

- Bill Tucker, Battle Ground, started first grade September 1941, (360) 687-3619**
- Shirley Brandenburg, Fairgrounds area, first grade 1941, (360) 693-7981**
- Ms. Pat Somdalen, Battle Ground, who moved into the new Central School as a fifth grader in March 1941, (360) 687-3790**
- Carri Kockritz, kindergarten through fourth grade beginning 1965, (360) 907-6044**

The Battle Ground School District provides equal opportunity in programs and employment and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin/language, creed/religion, sex, sexual orientation-including gender identity, disability, or the use of a service animal by a person with a disability, age, marital status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, HIV/Hepatitis C status and provides equal access to designated youth groups. Marcia Christian, Diana Gilsinger and Jane Mercier have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination. They can be reached as follows: Marcia Christian, Title IX Sexual Harassment Coordinator, 360.885.5415, christian.marcia@bgsd.k12.wa.us; Diana Gilsinger, Deputy Superintendent 360.885.5338, gilsinger.diana@bgsd.k12.wa.us; Jane Mercier, Section 504/ADA Coordinator 360.885.5318, mercier.jane@bgsd.k12.wa.us; or a letter may be submitted to the designated coordinator at the Battle Ground School District, PO Box 200, Battle Ground, WA 98604