

Press Release



Battle Ground Public Schools

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As its demise nears, Central provides rare training opportunity for firefighters

Firefighters from across Clark County have been getting all kinds of training in Battle Ground's dark, dingy and long-vacant Central School as its Dec. 10 date with the torch approaches.

"This is a great training opportunity," Bill Dunlap of Clark County Fire District 6 said. Dunlap, a 27-year fire-fighting veteran, is one of the instructors who has been leading drills at the old school since the weekend after Thanksgiving.

"It'll be a big burn for us," he added. "It's the kind of fire you might see only two or three times in an entire career."

Firefighters from much of the county, as well as high school cadets in Battle Ground schools' Career and Technical Education programs, have been taking advantage of the site for drills in forcible entry, checking roof integrity, venting a roof, escape (in case a wall collapses behind firefighters and blocks the exit) and rescuing occupants and downed firefighters. In the rescue drill, dummies weighing between 90 and 200 pounds are used.

Agencies participating in training at the 39,000-square-foot building, 300 N. Parkway, are: Clark County Fire & Rescue (Battle Ground, La Center, Ridgefield); Woodland Fire Department; Clark County Fire District 6 (Hazel Dell, Felida, Salmon Creek, Mount Vista, Fairgrounds); Clark County Fire District 3 (Hockinson, Brush Prairie) and the Vancouver Fire Department.

Time to start the fire – About 9 a.m. Saturday, Dec. 10, the training will be ratcheted up with actual fire and smoke in one part of the building. About 2 p.m. that day, the entire structure will be set ablaze.

What about the bricks? -- More than 1,000 bricks from the school have been put aside and as many as five each will be given free to the public, although donations to the Battle Ground Education Foundation are encouraged. A Foundation volunteer will be present at the giveaway site in the Battle Ground High School north parking, immediately south of Central School.

The brick-giveaway will be from 1 to 5 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 8, and again from 1 to 5 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 9. It is asked that only former students and employees of the school show up for free bricks between 1 and 3 both days. If any bricks remain, they will be distributed on Saturday.

Should any brick walls remain standing and appear to be a potential hazard after the fire, they will be knocked down, said Kevin Jolma, director of facilities and operations for the school district. The site will be under 24-hour security the weekend of Dec. 9-11.

Future of the site -- Central elementary opened in the spring of 1941 and was last used in 2001. Restoration was even then considered cost-prohibitive. Kevin Jolma, director of facilities and operations for the school district, said the badly deteriorated structure brings down the value of the 136,000-square-foot parcel on which it rests.

While it is possible the school district might some day offer the land for sale, there are no such plans at this point. It also could be the site some day for classrooms or school district offices, shops, a warehouse or some other building. In any case, says Superintendent Shonny Bria, the near-term future for the site will be as an open space accessible to the public.

Skipping down memory lane -- Former students and employees of Central have been submitting written recollections of their time at the school. Those memories can be seen at battlegroundps.org. The link is at the top of that page.

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