

George Street Public School plans to go out in style



By Brock Weir

George Street Public School goes by the motto: "the little school with the big heart."

Living up to this philosophy, the school wants to embrace the community before they close their doors this summer for the last time after nearly 60 years.

Students and staff at the school, which hosts kids from kindergarten through Grade 3, will start the 2015-2016 school year at a newly renovated Aurora Senior Public School.

With the two schools merged under one roof, a new name for the combined school is yet to be decided, as is the ultimate fate of the George Street building, but organizers at the smaller school are looking to go out with gusto.

If you are a former student, staff member, or simply a member of the community, mark Saturday, May 23 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on your calendar as organizers throw open the school's doors not just for a community celebration, but a walk down memory lane.

"This school was a very special place - small, safe, contained, warm, loving and welcoming," says Brenda Bulfon, who began teaching at George Street in 1991. "It was just a lovely little place. Its closing is kind of sad for me. It is like home, but we're moving into a bigger house with a blended family! It's sad for me, but it is just a new beginning."

Vice Principal Claudia Fischer first walked through George Street's doors four years ago and was immediately struck by the small size. It is, after all, a single hallway with a gymnasium tacked onto its southeast corner. Despite its stature, however, the building comes with a long history and will leave behind a large legacy.

"Even though it is a small school, there are a lot of big things that have happened here, whether they are initiatives taken on by the staff or students, and it just speaks to the size of the school and the immensity of what we have done over the past," says Ms. Fischer. "The fact the school is very contained means everyone works together."

"[The closure] is sad for everybody, but I also see the positive side of bringing two communities together because a lot of our students here have siblings at [Aurora Senior Public School]. They are divided, and there aren't opportunities for older kids to do

things with younger kids, and vice versa. Blending the two together, becoming one bigger community, and one bigger staff, I see the positive in that.?

George Street Public School was opened in 1957. At the time, it was the first elementary school built on the west side of Yonge Street to serve a rapidly growing Aurora.

Event organizer, former student, and now George Street parent Robin Scanga recalls a school that used to run the gamut of grades, boasted a baseball diamond, and once housed an outdoor pool on its grounds built and maintained by the Aurora Lions Club. The baseball diamond and Lions pool are part of history, and grades were whittled away over time to the current K ? 3 due to declining enrolment, but memories are as vivid as ever.

?[The community celebration] will be about reminiscing ? and it will take you five minutes to do it,? says Robin, referring to the school's size. ?It is just a walk down memory lane if people want to show their kids where they went to school because it will no longer exist. We want to give the community an opportunity to have one last look.?

Adds co-organizer Lora Georgiou: ?For the students that go here, it is a closing just to say goodbye, to celebrate that they have had the opportunity to come here in the short period of their lives from K-3, and to see us all come together to say, ?Hey, this was our school, this was your school; it may be closing, but let's go out with a party.' It's a celebration of life and we want to celebrate what George Street was for the past and present.?

A full program of activities for the May 23 celebration are yet to be finalized, but organizers are looking to the community for some help. If you have any photos, memories, or any other artefacts you would like to share to mark your time at George Street P.S., the party planners would like to hear from you. To share your suggestions, email george.street.ps@yrdsb.ca. To follow details of the closure and commemoration, visit georgestreetps.blogspot.com.