

Dr. G.W. Williams community prepares to say farewell to home of more than 70 years

Its Dunning Avenue halls have served as a hub of learning, community and friendship for 73 years, and as the Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School community prepares to say farewell to its landmark home ahead of the opening of its new building on Bayview Avenue at Borealis this fall, it's planning to do so in style.

Organizers are putting the finishing touches on a farewell celebration on May 30, in which every person who ever attended school in the building is invited to return.

One such person is Bob McRoberts. The former Aurora deputy mayor and public school trustee was not only a teacher at the school for the lion's share of his education career, having the chance to teach both his son and his daughter at different points, but also the scion of the building's first principal ? his grandfather, J.H. Knowles.

?I spent two thirds of my teaching career at the school ? I taught 33 years and 22 of them were at Williams, so I am there as a former student as well as a former staff member.?

The roots of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School go back to 1888 in a now-demolished building that stood on the site of the former Wells Street School. Wells Street School itself was purpose-built as Aurora District High School ? the forerunner of Williams ? and remained so until the current building on Dunning Avenue opened in 1952.

It has served the community well since then, but given shifts in population within Aurora and the majority of its students now coming from newer subdivisions in the Town's northeast quadrant, the York Region District School Board decided to build a new school closer to this area.

The Board plans to retain the Dunning site, repurposing it for continuing education.

?This isn't a reunion as such; it's more of an opportunity for former students and staff to come over to the school, walk through, reminisce, and maybe find their old locker,? says McRoberts. ?They will have student art displays, some students are going to play music from different decades, and the Aurora Museum & Archives will have a few displays of their artefacts over the years of the school being on that site. It's more of a celebration of the current Williams building since 1952. In April of 1952, the students of Aurora District High School, which was located in the Wells Street School building, apparently took stuff from their lockers and marched through the streets to the new high school.

?When it first opened, it was the only high school other than St. Andrew's College in Aurora. It was a focal point. For example, at municipal election time, Williams' auditorium is where they had all candidates' meetings. Different sports teams over the years have used the gymnasium and the fields on the outside, different music groups have played there over the years for school dances. It's got a long history ? not just being a school, but a focal point for various things held within Aurora. From my time there, and I'd like to think it carries on, it's been known as a friendly school and there's good vibes.?

Those good vibes are set to continue at the school on May 30 from 6 ? 8 p.m.

Organizers behind the celebration say they've had a good response from alumni, some of whom have signalled their intention to keep the good times ? and reunions ? rolling at local restaurants and other venues after the formal part of the evening is concluded.

That said, however, they are hoping to have a good idea of numbers well before the event itself.

If you're interested in taking part in Dr. G.W. Williams' farewell to their long-time home, you're invited to complete the registration form here: bit.ly/4kRS7dP.

By Brock Weir