

## PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Alumni, student families, neighbors and anyone with a love of Washoe County School District's oldest school are invited to participate in a series of events planned to celebrate Mount Rose Elementary School's centennial. Events are planned over the next five months and during the 2011-2012 school year that marks 100 years that the school educated Reno's southwest and downtown young. The highlighting event will be an old fashioned themed picnic planned for October 2, 2011 on the school grounds located at 915 Lander Street. An open house with displays of archived photos, newspaper clippings and worldly events from the era is also planned.

Mount Rose Elementary School is one of only two remaining "four sisters", a grouping of schools approved by 1908 and 1910 voters that commissioned schools built in a similar Mission Revival architectural style. The other remaining school is the City of Reno's McKinley Arts and Culture Center. The school holds a place in Nevada's literary history as it is discussed in Walter Van Tilburg Clark's 1945 novel *The City of Trembling Leaves*. In an early passage in the book that is descriptive of Reno's pre-war heyday, the main character meets his future girlfriend as Reno High School freshman. By way of introduction, they tell each other which elementary school they attended. She attended "the Mt. Rose" and he, the now demolished Orvis Ring, one of the fallen sister schools.

Mount Rose's centennial is of notable importance because in the 1980's Mount Rose Elementary School almost met the same fate as its sisters. The school was saved from the wrecking ball by the advocacy of neighborhood parents who understood as urban writer Jane Jacobs wrote in the *Death and Life of Great American Cities*, "successful neighborhoods improve their schools by fighting for them". The committed resident activists persuaded the school district Board of Trustees to reverse a decision to close the school and rather, to renovate the building that had fallen into disrepair so that urban Reno children would have a school within their neighborhood.

Newlands neighborhood resident Ted Schroeder was one of the leading proponents to save the school. "The neighbors felt the school was the heart of the neighborhood and to close the school, would rip out the neighborhood's heart." Schroeder explains that old southwest Reno residents advocated for a school improvement bond that was approved by the voters and secured funds for Mt. Rose's renovation and for that of other schools. "So in that way, other neighborhoods won by our activism, in also having their schools improved."

In celebrating the centennial, efforts to document the school's history is planned. Efforts include a three-part rotating exhibit in a display cabinet at the school's entry to be curate by Nevada Historical Society staff. The first exhibit that was installed last year, explored the school's construction at then the far extent of urbanized Reno. The second installation planned for this spring, will be focused upon Mount Rose's golden years of the post-war era when social life of old southwest Reno and downtown families centered around the school's community.

Former teacher Clarissa Crisalogo, who taught from 1995 to 2010, remembers that on Halloween children would parade around the school grounds that encompasses the entire block bound by Arlington Avenue, Lander Street, La Rue Avenue and Taylor Street. "The annual Spook Walk was a community event. Parents and neighbors would line the other side of the street and watch the children parade. Both teachers and the principal dressed up as well."

This exhibit will also explore the urban dynamics associated with Mount Rose in response to neighborhood changes. Jenny Brekhus is the mother of a Mount Rose 4<sup>th</sup> grader and an organizer of the commemoration celebration. She has reviewed the historical collection of former school district Rose Bullis that was bequeathed to the Nevada Historical Society.

Among the documents discovered is a news account that Mount Rose because of low enrollments, was the destination for a voluntary urban busing program in the post civil rights era.

“The record needs to be more fully researched, but it appears that at one time students attending Glenn Duncan school were offered the opportunity to be voluntarily bussed to Mount Rose school as the district explored integration through that approach.” Glenn Duncan is located in northeast Reno, one of Washoe County’s areas of early black settlement.

In addition, there are numerous accounts of school events like teas, installation dinners for the newly elected PTA leadership and a fundraising event called the “Mother Goose Bazaar”. Brekhus’ daughter will perform in this year’s Young Chautauqua program as Mamie Towles, a beloved teacher and principal who had a 40 years career at the school and for whom the northwest Reno school is named.

Veteran principal, Krissy Brown, is in her first year at Mount Rose Elementary School. She hopes to bring back some of the school’s special events like the Spook Walk and notes that the discussion of school reform nationally focuses upon urban schools like Mount Rose. “As the oldest school in the district, Mt. Rose has gone through the full cycle from being the central focus of community life for the downtown and old southwest neighborhoods, to near demolition and years of changed population demographics. The pendulum is now swinging back with families recognizing that the small school size, unique building and grounds, a multicultural population, and proximity to cultural amenities, makes Mount Rose an attractive educational environment.”

In addition to the October 2, 2011 picnic other planned events and efforts include:

- A commemorative street tree planting along Arlington Avenue in cooperation with the City of Reno;
- A proclamation by the Nevada Legislature commending Mount Rose’s 100 years of educating Reno’s youth;
- The collection of oral histories about Mount Rose Elementary School obtained from former parents, students and staff.
- A request by Mount Rose parents to the district Board of Trustees to place the school on the city registrar of historic properties in order to ensure that future building improvements are respectful of the building’s architecture.
- A commemorative tile plaque installation on the premises and commissioning of a song by an Americana singer-songwriter.

Individuals who would like more information or to help it with the centennial celebration are directed to the school’s website at <http://www.washoecountyschools.org/mtrose/> or can contact the school directly at 333-5030.

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