April 15, 2016

“50th Anniversary” Ceremony Speech

In keeping with tradition, we are following the identical agenda used when the school first opened its doors to students, staff, and the community in 1965. Tradition is the glue that binds us together as families and communities. Van Wyck is about building on its rich tradition that dates back to 1965 beginning with Principals Vanderpoel, Ponti, Rinaldo, Biasotti, Carpenter and now me. My predecessors made my job so much easier by setting the standard of excellence that we continue to appreciate and value today.

It was a powerful beginning that Sunday in 1965 with Principal Vanderpoel at the helm with many school, community, and religious leaders taking their place in local history. The actual dedication of the new school was held on Sunday, November 7, 1965 from 2:00-7:00 pm. Van Wyck family members were in attendance, including Edmund Van Wyck, Charles Boos, George Stringham, Superintendent Joe Keegan, Board of Education President Dr. John Mitchell and many other district principals, assistant principals, faculty and staff. The dedication was the opening of the new school. During the school’s 30th anniversary under the leadership of Gretchen Carpenter, the large plaque in the lobby was officially dedicated to the Van Wyck family...And now our 50th. How time flies!

The more things change the more they remain the same. While technologies have changed, the district continues to spare no expense in providing our students with an unparalleled educational experience. Today we use technologies, such as smartboards, e-beams, brightlinks, Promethean Boards, 3-d printers, etc. etc. etc. Our District leadership continues to ensure that our students are exceptionally educated and prepared for the challenges they face in the world. People of notoriety such as Jeh Johnson, Secretary of Homeland Security; Keith Lockhart, Conductor of the Boston Pops Orchestra; Joe Panik, 2014 World Series Star for the San Francisco Giants, come to mind; with countless more who received a strong liberal arts education right here in historic Wappingers Falls..

The constant in the midst of change has always been our outstanding faculty, staff, and administration. These uncommon individuals were outstanding then and continue to be outstanding today without exception. Those professionals who work in Wappingers are carefully selected, well educated and always well trained. We remain number one in the Hudson Valley among competitive districts in building capacity and preserving our investment in education. I am proud to work and live right here in the WCSD.

I often say I wish I began my research about the Van Wyck family ten years ago. I could have done so much more to advocate for this historic family. Both Theodorus and Cornelius were remarkable people having been loyal and prominent figures in local, state and national politics. Their influence was felt throughout our great state, especially right here in the Hudson Valley.

Here are some important pieces of information that I learned along the way:

1. The Van Wyck family had a personal relationship with Patriot John Jay, the first Chief Justice to the US Supreme Court. John Jay wrote a letter to a member of the Van Wyck family that further substantiates this remarkable relationship. John Jay went to King’s College, which is now
2. It is likely, therefore, that John Jay High School was named after Chief Justice John Jay because of his relationship with the Van Wyck family.

3. The family settled in New York and later migrated to the Hudson Valley where many made their home.

4. The Van Wyck family were pious people and were regular attendees of the Dutch Reformed Church in Fishkill and later the Dutch Reformed Church in Hopewell Junction.

5. There was a very special connection between the Van Wyck’s, the Brinckerhoff’s, the Montfort’s, the Stringam’s and the Bretts through marriage. Madam Brett’s father, Francis Rombout along with another gentleman, Gullian Verplank, bought a large parcel of land from the Wappingers Indians that was later sold off by Madam Brett to provide for her family.

6. The Van Wyck’s were family people and often wrote tender and caring letters to brothers, sisters, and cousins that specially expressed their love and affection for each other.

7. The Van Wyck family kept meticulous records, both personal and professional, and preserved these records and artifacts that we will be donating to the East Fishkill Historical Society today.

8. Fanny Van Wyck Boos donated a large piece of property where Fishkill Plains Elementary School is now located.

9. Many of the homes that the VW family members lived been been restored and lived in today.

10. This area was a regular stop-over for General Washington and his men because of its strategic location in route to Boston. The Griffin Tavern, the old brick structure in ruins next to Royal Carting is where General Washington, La Fayette, Putnam Steuben, the Continental and French Soldiers would relax and have famous meetings.

In closing, the only thing that I can say is...Wow...

What a school and community we really have to honor and cherish!

Dr. Steven H. Shuchat,
Principal, Van Wyck Junior High School

"Van Wyck Junior High School's faculty, staff and administration, in partnership with our parents, students, and community, will provide a safe and orderly learning environment that supports the academic, intellectual, personal, and social development of children, while maintaining rigorous standards and embracing curricula that prepares our students for college and careers."