



YHS celebrates 30 years

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September 9, 1976 Yosemite High School opened its doors to 421 students. Thirty years later, there are close to three times as many students enrolled at 1188.

The road that led to the opening of the first high school in Eastern Madera County was long and hard. Before the school could be started, voters had to approve five elementary school districts (Ahwahnee, Bass Lake, Coarsegold, Oakhurst and Raymond) breaking from Sierra Joint Union High School District.

This was accomplished September 18, 1973 when voters within the five elementary school districts voted 1659 to 244 (86.5 percent) in favor of separating from SJUHSD and forming their own district. The voter turnout was 70 percent.

Yosemite Union High School District became the first new district to be formed in California in nearly 30 years when the Madera County Board of Supervisors certified the vote October 9, 1973.

The main issue in the separation was the distance students had to travel to receive their high school education. Some spent as many as three hours a day on the bus and most were not able to participate in extra curricular activities.

SJUHS had purchased 90 acres of property in 1961 to build a high school in Oakhurst. The land cost \$50,000 and is the current site of YHS. The new district acquired the 90-acre site when it became an official district. It has since added land and is now about 100 acres.

Today, the campus looks very much different from the one that opened to students 30 years ago. The original octagonal buildings remain but have been turned into self-contained classrooms and offices instead of the open space buildings they were. A major \$30-million expansion / renovation project has recently been completed at the school.

Among the new facilities are a cafeteria / multi-purpose room, swim complex, 23-classroom building, music classroom, and an all-weather track. Other buildings were remodeled to become a library-media center, administration building, science classrooms and laboratories, and performing arts center.

A soccer field and riding arena are yet to be completed to finish the construction project that started in 1999 after voters approved an \$11.76 million bond. Additional funds came from state matching funds, state bond funds, private donations, developer fees, loans, and grants.

Steve Raupp is principal of YHS, having served in that position for six years. He first came to the district in 1978 as a football coach and business teacher.

“I have seen a number of changes in my 28 years at Yosemite High School,” Raupp says. The school has grown tremendously over that time, in enrollment, facilities, and most importantly in student achievement.

“We are fortunate to work in a beautiful setting, and with the completion of the construction project we have an outstanding facility in which to educate our students. We have an exceptional staff that works very hard to meet the educational needs of our students. This year we will be certifying that 100% of our core teachers are highly qualified and meet the No Child Left Behind requirements.

“Most importantly, we have a great group of students to work with,” the principal comments. “We are extremely proud of the accomplishments of our students and the quality of the programs at our school. Yosemite High School has earned two California Distinguished School awards in the past six years, was recognized as an Exemplary Career Technical program, and has won numerous awards and championships in athletics, Mock Trial, Academic Decathlon, band, choir, drama, and various student organizations.

“Our test scores and annual Academic Performance Index numbers rank us among the highest achieving schools in the region. We have certainly come a long way over the last 30 years and will continue our efforts to make the school a source of pride for our mountain communities,” Raupp says.

Bill McCabe has been district superintendent since 1996. He came to the district in 1980 as the agriculture teacher.

He is very proud of YHS and all of the accomplishments of the students and staff. “This is one of the best high schools in the central valley,” he says. “Our test scores are among the best in the valley; our facilities are second to none and we have an outstanding staff that does a great job with our students, who are also tops.”

McCabe says he feels very fortunate to be able to work here. “I can’t think of a better place to work or live,” he says. “Yosemite High School is truly an asset to the mountain community and has been for all of its 30 years.”

Four original teachers are still at YHS: Betsy Blum, library media teacher; Valinda Clevenger, hired as physical education teacher, now head counselor; Mike Cole, teacher; and Ellen Peterson, teacher. Two more of the original staff are still working in the district: Kevyn Moberly is director of maintenance, operations and transportation, and Dennis Otterson teaches in the alternative schools.

A common theme runs through comments made by the original staff members – how fast the time has gone.

“The years have rolled by so quickly and brought so many changes,” says Peterson, “yet the joy of working with high school students – teaching, coaching, and just being with them – has never changed for me. Add to that a staff of great long-term friends, some even are my former students, and it’s the only place I’d want to be.

“I realized I have spent more than half my life here doing exactly what I love doing,” Peterson adds. “Lucky me!”

“It’s flown,” says Clevenger. “I can’t think of a better thing to have done with my life. I haven’t lost my enthusiasm and I love working with former students as colleagues.”

There are 15 YHS graduates on the staff this year, including nine teachers, a counselor and support staff.

“Time flies,” Otterson says. “From 1976 to 2006 I have had the fortunate opportunity to be a part of the tremendous growth and changes and progress made at YHS. It has all been done for the youth of the community.”

He adds that “YHS has been good for the mountain area; it has provided a nucleus for the mountain area and students and it continues to be a pivotal part of the community. It’s been a good ride,” he says.

Blum recalls that “the first years of YHS were unique.” She remembers “on Fridays during the winter, Buddy Cudd drove a bus full of students to Badger for physical education credit. I was the ski instructor!”

Cole says the best thing about his career at YHS has been the wonderful students he has gotten to know and “being able to work in such beautiful surroundings.”

Moberly, who started work at YHS at 19, says it has been the most fun time of his life. “People are more like family than co-workers. There is a great group of people.” He says he looks forward to his three youngest children graduating from YHS.

“It has been fun to watch the campus evolve into the beautiful place it is today,” he says. “There is no end to what we can achieve here.”

YHS graduates who are currently teachers at YHS are Michelle Boland, Phil Branstetter, Michele Chenowith, Rebecca Hardison, Kent Lincoln, Kellie Solomon, Tammy Thacker, Tammy Treber and Walker Vaughn. Greg Hill is a counselor.

Members of the support staff who are YHS graduates are Amanda Bielanski, attendance; Richard Gonzales, construction; Jeannie Jordan, responsibility center; Roger Mercier, Jr., utility / bus driver; Mike Schaffer, electrician and Jerilyn Williamson, counseling technician.

The YUHSD lasted over 32 years. It ended July 1, 2006 when it became part of the Yosemite Unified School District. In November 2005, voters approved the unification of YJUHS with Coarsegold Union School District.

YHS has a long list of accomplishments of which Raupp and his staff are very proud. There are numerous athletic awards; the school has been the Madera County Academic Decathlon champions for 17 years and the county Mock Trial winners for 15 years. It is one of approximately 50 schools in California with a full diploma International Baccalaureate program. There have been numerous awards for the music and drama department.

YHS was honored in 2004 as a California Distinguished School for the second four-year term. It has recently been accredited for six more years, through June 2012.

Raupp emphasizes that YHS strives to meet the needs of all of its students. In addition to the academic program that offers IB, Advanced Placement, and Honors classes, there are programs for those students who struggle academically. These programs include math and English labs, Title I tutoring, peer tutoring, after school and lunch time tutorials, resource classes and more.

YHS was recognized in 2004 as having one of 12 Exemplary Career Technical Education programs in California. There is also a Regional Occupational Program (ROP) on campus that provides advanced career technical courses for students.

When many schools throughout the country have reduced or eliminated their fine arts program, YHS has expanded its program. A new music classroom was built for band and choral classes and one of the original buildings was renovated into a performing arts center that also serves as a classroom for drama. Several IB classes are offered in the arts.

YHS offers art classes and AP art classes. The building that houses art and home economics was renovated last year and includes the Badger Art Gallery that features student work from the high schools and elementary schools in the mountain area.

The school hired a student support facilitator three years ago who works with students experiencing difficulties in their personal lives. There are two academic counselors and two counseling technicians. This year, the district hired a special education director who also will serve as the district psychologist. For the past several years, campus supervisors have been added to the staff.

YHS has a peer mediation program and a peer counseling class. Students in this class have helped with Challenge Day the past four years. This program is brought to the campus two days each year to help students recognize what they have in common and that they are not alone in their problems.

Challenge Day is funded by community donations and by the School Improvement Program. Technology has been a key focus for the district and at YHS the past several years. There are computers in each classroom and there are five computer labs on campus. Several funding sources will be used this year to upgrade the school's technology.

Yosemite High School has grown in the number of students and staff and in facilities over the past 30 years. McCabe says the campus is adequate to serve students for about another 15 years before more facilities will need to be added.

"The community support we enjoy is phenomenal," McCabe says. "We would not have become a reality 30 years ago if it had not been for amazing community effort. That support has continued throughout the years and we are most appreciative. This campus belongs to the community; those of us who work here are simply the caretakers."