

Alumni returning to Johnson Elementary for 40th birthday celebration

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Johnson Elementary School is officially over the hill.

And with 40 years of top-notch education comes a string of alumni, most of whom are now in their professional careers and beyond, who have made it back to the beloved community surrounding Oak Hill Drive in Bryan to have their own children learn and grow in the same hallowed halls.

On Friday, students, alumni and community members will celebrate Johnson's 40th birthday with a reception at 1:30 p.m. and a program, complete with a parade and ice cream, from 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. at the school.

Amy Thomman, a fourth-grade teacher at Johnson, said the school fosters strong connections among students, teachers and administrators.

"I'm going to steal a famous quote I've heard a time or two," said Thomman, Aggie cCass of '05. "From the outside looking in, you can't understand it. From the inside looking out, [you can't explain it]."

While Thomman was living in Conroe three years ago, she said her mom called to tell her about an opening at Johnson Elementary.

Thomman got the job and relocated with her husband, who commutes to Conroe daily so that Thomman can work at her dream school.

"This is the Johnson family," she said. "Once my husband attended his first Jaguar event, he knew exactly what I was always talking his ear off about."

The school has been recognized through the years as a National Blue Ribbon School, Texas Honor Roll School and a Top Ten School by Texas Monthly.

Johnson Elementary is also the first and only open concept school in the Brazos Valley.



Johnson alumni return for birthday celebration

Bryan's Johnson Elementary's Jaguar mascot sports a party hat Thursday while Johnson students Kimber Badget and Tyson Turner look at art prepared by pupils celebrating the school's 40th birthday hanging on walls in the main hall at the school. A celebration of all things Johnson will be held at the school Friday to mark the four decades of service the school has provided area children.

"We don't have walls," said Carol Happ, the school's principal of 18 years. "It's really a family atmosphere. Each teacher takes responsibility not just for their class but for the entire school."

Happ said the school is beloved in the Bryan community because of involved parents and devoted staff.

"Our teachers are very innovative and creative ... we have a staff that is second to none," Happ said. "When parents are involved, the children do better. We have parents who are highly involved ... It's part of our culture. We want people to feel cared about, and our staff creates that."

Chris Peterson, the founding attorney at Peterson Law Group, said he was moved from Omaha to Bryan in the third grade. As a timid and short new student, he recalled, he was introduced to Gaye Kay, who would become his favorite teacher of all time.

"Mrs. Kay is short, too," Peterson said. "She was my fourth-grade teacher, and she used to tell me all the time that dynamite comes in small packages. She was strict but loving and has always been my favorite teacher throughout high school, college and law school. I learned so much, but the bigger thing was she really gave me a lot of confidence."

Peterson said he and his wife moved back to "the oaks" community after he graduated from law school, and their two children, Bethany and Caleb, have both attended Johnson Elementary.

"It has always had a really strong principal, and the teachers are like a family," Peterson said. "You'd be surprised at how many Johnson alum there are and how many raving fans there are."