

School marks 25th anniversary

By Wanda McConnell
Herald Editor

Twenty-five years may seem like an eternity to young people, but for others it zips by in the blink of an eye.

It's an important length of time though, says Don Reed, vice-principal of Valley Gardens Junior High School. "It's enough time to establish a proud tradition of caring, service, energy and commitment that Valley Gardens has come to represent."

Reed was speaking to a gymnasium full of guests gathered Oct. 27 to celebrate the school's 25th anniversary. All of the school's past principals - Walter Melnyk, Dwight Botting, Carolyn Lintott, Ron Hildebrand - and current principal Al Yoshino were among the dignitaries on the stage.

Trustee Bob Fraser, chair of the River East School Board, paid tribute to the former principals, citing the fact that Melnyk went on to become the division's superintendent, Botting now has a post in the Department of Education and Training, and Lintott and Hildebrand are both assistant superintendents in the division.

"If you want to be successful, you have to come through Valley Gardens," Fraser joked.

One person who was at Valley Gardens the day it opened and is still there, is shops teacher Howard Wohl. "I'm the brunt of many jokes," he admitted cheerfully. "Something about having long term memory but not short term."

But, he says, he's stayed at VGJH as long as he has because the job has "never become stagnant...there's al-



photo by Wanda McConnell

Former principal Walter Melnyk and current principal Al Yoshino peruse the memorabilia in the time capsule that was created when the school first opened.

ways been something to keep me here - new staff, and the diversity of cultures, for example."

Yoshino agrees that ethnic mix at the school makes it special and has become a proud tradition.

There are as many as 12 different ethnic groups represented in the student body currently, he says. "And what's amazing," he adds proudly, "is how well they all get along, how they respect each other and treat one another."

Valley Gardens was built at a time when the community was exploding in population, and new educational ideas were being introduced. The open classroom concept was used at Valley Gardens.

First principal Melnyk remembers that it allowed teachers to team-teach easily and to break students into groups according to ability.

A few years later though, Yoshino adds, the walls started going up because the noise was too distracting.

Valley Gardens also had the distinction of being the only school in the division to be built in combination with a community club. Yoshino says the shared use has worked well over the years.

Another feather in the school's cap is its exchange program with a school in Ujiie, Japan. Next year, the school will make its fourth trip to Japan.

That kind of travel, Melnyk points out, is reflective of the focus on the global community, something that wasn't thought about much 25 years ago.

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