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1950s rock again at Kellond

School goes back in time to mark 50th anniversary
By Shelley Shelton

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First-grader Avery Weber strikes a John Travolta-esque pose as he dances to 1950s rock 'n' roll at Kellond Elementary School's 50th anniversary bash. Root-beer floats and 1950s-era clothes added to the atmosphere of the era that Elvis ruled.

Poodle skirts, bowling shirts and root-beer floats — on a school day?

The retro garb and such a rare exception to the new junk-food ban could mean only one thing for Kellond Elementary: The school is celebrating its 50th anniversary, and the students were partying like it was 1956.

That's how it was last Friday for the roughly 360 students who attend the school at 6606 E. Lehigh Drive.

And when former Kellond teacher Manolo Padilla took the stage that afternoon — dressed as Elvis in a blue jumpsuit with gold sequins — and began singing "Teddy Bear," the students shrieked as if the real King of Rock 'n' Roll were in the building.

Padilla once taught English as a second language at Kellond, said Sally Evans, who in May retired as the school librarian. She stayed on as a member of the anniversary planning committee.

A Cuban immigrant, Padilla learned English by singing Elvis songs, Evans said.

"Elvis" kept his performance G-rated — nary a hip was gyrating — sang a couple of songs and then students were in the limelight, with different classes performing to tunes from the 1950s.

The celebration began the day before when the school sponsored a tea for alumni, former staff and neighborhood residents. Student Council members took people on school tours, and students performed for the old-timers.

Wearing a bowling shirt rented from the Gaslight Costume Shoppe, Ryan Ramsower, a fifth-grade Student Council member who has been at Kellond since he began school, said he was surprised by how many people came for the tea.

"It was a lot of people," he said. During the school tours, "lots of people were amazed by the changes, like the new building," meaning the multipurpose room that opened last year.

To keep pandemonium at a minimum for last Friday's sock hop, the school was divided into two groups. Students in kindergarten through second grade spent the first half of the afternoon in the new multipurpose room, where a DJ spun '50s songs while the children jumped around.

Meanwhile, third- through fifth-graders filed into the cafeteria, where they were served root-beer floats that they drank while taking in the onstage entertainment.

"I'm amazed at how many poodle skirts there are," said Pamela Clarridge, who is in her fifth year as Kellond's principal. Clarridge was on hand to help dish out the ice cream and root beer. She said the daughter of the school's first principal was at the alumni tea, and it was an honor to meet her.

Though the woman was in her teens at the time, she is a senior citizen now, Clarridge said.

But there are some traditions that have stayed with the school over time.

"What sets us apart is, we have always, for many, many years, been involved with the fine arts and visual arts," she said.

Third-grader Bailey Grijalva, 8, supported that.

When asked what is the best thing about her school, she replied, "music and art, probably."

Older students had similar feelings.

Fifth-grader Daniela Dyke, 10, who has attended Kellond since third grade, said she likes the art program and using the school computers, and she enjoys the Peacebuilders character-education curriculum.

Carlos Zamora, 10, another fifth-grader who has been at Kellond since third grade, said the school has good teachers. "It's a good school to be at."

Evans said the school manages to maintain the feeling of a small community despite having children bused in from other parts of town as part of TUSD's desegregation order.

"It's a real mix," she said.

After the final class of third-graders finished their performance, teachers led the students out of the cafeteria toward the newly vacated multipurpose room as younger children came into the cafeteria through the door on the opposite wall.

New ice cream was scooped and more root beer was poured on top. And the DJ played on.

East

By the numbers

- In the "boom years" of the 1950s, Tucson Unified School District built:

3

high schools

4

junior high schools

23

elementary schools

SOURCE: Tucson Unified School District

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