

File photos

Centennial Elementary School, at top, shortly after it was built in 1949. The school served the Wapakoneta City School District for more than 50 years. Centennial Elementary School Principal Wes Newland, above, reads a story to students shortly before its last day of class this spring. Newland, at right, will be a co-principal at the new Wapakoneta Elementary School, but his office will still permit him to see the children enter and leave school each day.

Principal Newland: Connection to past, present and future

By: **MEGAN VEIT**
News Correspondent

From the window in his new office, Wes Newland has a glimpse of Wapakoneta City School's past, present and future.

"I want to see the kiddos coming in," Newland, co-principal of the new Wapakoneta Elementary, said of his view.

He said he was excited to receive his room with

a few that looks out onto the new side entrance and drop-off for students.

During the school year, Newland will see his more than 900 students arrive. For now, he's able to see Northridge, the raising of Wapakoneta Elementary Schools' grounds and the grounds of the high school.

This blending of old and new, of Wapak's history and future, is a strong

theme in Newland's summer days.

For the last 14 years, Newland has been the principal of Centennial Elementary and has established a deep history and sense of community with Wapakoneta City Schools. As dates were set for the school's demolition, the city stirred with memories and mementoes of the school's 60-year history.

"The history outlasts

the historians," Newland said.

There was no established record or storage for Centennial's history, but when they began sifting through offices and storage, Newland gained a new understanding of what the elementary school meant to the community.

From community open houses to auctions of the school's equipment and

furnishings, Wapakoneta residents have come out to share their personal histories with the school's last principal.

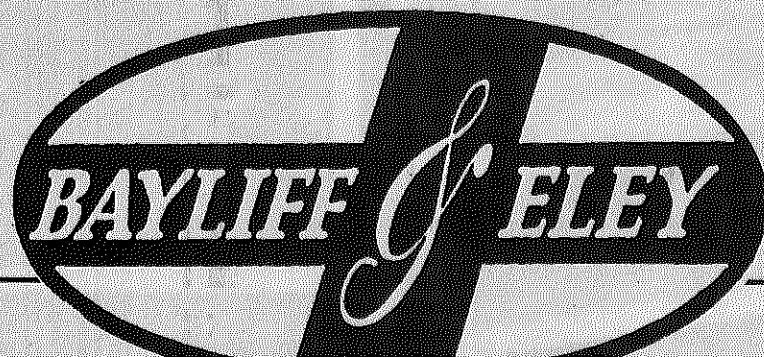
"It's been interesting to share their stories," Newland said.

Newland now carries pieces of Centennial's past with him and has a connection to the school that reaches well beyond his

"A lot of the stories I've heard about (Joe) Carter have to do with his temperament. He handled things gracefully. He used intuition. He was a gentleman."

Wes Newland

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Wapakoneta's Joe Carter instituted a lot of changes at Centennial Elementary School during his tenure at the building. He worked hard to meld teacher strengths with the services the children needed. Starla Kent, at right, helps a student with a spelling assignment.

Photo provided



Long-time principal started with the birth of Centennial

By MEGAN VEIT
News Correspondent

The year was 1948. Wapakoneta was building a new elementary school. To get the job done, John A. Johnson, one of the nation's largest contractors, had been called to town.

A young man, a college freshman, was spending summer break at Centennial Elementary's construction site. That young man was Joseph Carter.

John A. Johnson hired Carter for a summer of double duty. By day, he was a construction hand. By evening, he kept records and books. When construction was completed and it was time to ensure that there had been no waste of materials,

Carter was put to work. "I counted every brick in that school," Carter said with a smile and a shake of his head.

He counted the building's bricks. He counted the remaining bricks. He cross-referenced. Then, it was time to count tiles.

When Virgil Lee, a fellow worker, asked him why he didn't stay on and work at the new school, Carter gave a small laugh. He replied that he was studying business, readying himself to be a chief

executive officer. Carter later changed his mind. Seventeen years after working on the construction site, Carter entered the principal's office of Centennial Elementary — a position he retained for 24 years.

While studying business, Carter took an additional semester and graduated prepared to teach high school business. He mastered shorthand, typing, sales and business law

among others. "I thought I'd have two items to go with," Carter said.

He was keeping his options open, a mindset that served him well in his career as an educator.

A Wapakoneta native, he returned to his hometown and began teaching at Wapakoneta High School.

During the years, he married his sweetheart, Ruth. She also was a teacher, teaching government in the Wapakoneta City School District for 30 years. She graduated with a bachelor's degree from the University of Dayton and a master's degree from Wright State

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Principals

- Catherine Culletin
- Kenneth Dahill
- Joseph Carter
- Gregg Douglas
- Linda Moser
- Wes Newland

Fast facts

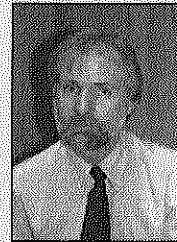
Centennial Elementary School was built in 1949.

The first contract to build the school was for \$550,000 and included six wings on the building. The second general contractor John A. Johnson accepted the bid for \$550,000 with five wings.

The design of the building was to bring the outdoors inside with many windows for viewing. The classrooms were to be larger so the students could do activities in the classroom.

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14 years. A portion of the history he holds dear are the "Joe Carter stories" he has heard not only at work but out in the community.



Newland 90s



Newland

Carter was Centennial's principal for 24 years beginning in 1965, making a switch that he described as unexpected in a move from high school business teacher to elementary school principal.

He has the longest tenure in the elementary's history, and he had a passion for student achievement that Newland said he would be honored to be compared to.

"A lot of the stories I've heard about Carter have to do with his temperament," Newland said. "He handled things gracefully. He used intuition. He was a gentleman."

The two have become acquaintances, stopping to say hello at restaurants and community functions.

Part of that history came to Wapakoneta Elementary School in boxes, alongside Newland's megaphone and office supplies while the rest has gone onto safekeeping with the school district's records.

Though the wings of Centennial are closed, Newland does his best to bring its spirit to his new school.

This will be Newland's 27th year as a principal. Like Carter, he was a bit hesitant to make the switch at Big Walnut Elementary in Sunbury. At that time, he was a sixth-grade teacher. While he took over as

principal, his predecessor returned to her position as teacher.

While Newland is not a Wapakoneta native, he has strong family ties. His father was a graduate of Blume High School, while his mother grew up near St. Johns.

Fourteen years ago, Newland was looking at principal positions throughout central Ohio, but he said his final decision was made "irrespective of ties family-wise."

"It looked like a good match" for his family and two young children, Newland said.

Keith Newland graduated from the University of Cincinnati this summer while his sister, Michelle, still attends.

Newland believes their time in Wapakoneta City Schools prepared them well and that the technology and changes that come with the new elementary will continue

to attract teachers and students "for the next 50 years."

"The Wapak school district is already a good place to teach, learn and grow," Newland said.

Newland said he feels that his role as a principal is to touch on all sides of education.

"I still hold the idea that I could go back to teaching," said Newland, who noted he sees his position as co-principal of Wapakoneta Elementary School as a way to teach students, teachers and their parents to enhance their education.

Newland spends his days in the Administrative Complex, where he and co-principal Mark Selvaggio are preparing their offices and themselves for the September start of classes. In the meantime, the halls are filled with summer health and summer school students, construction workers and teachers.

Memories are already in the making.

“The Wapak school district is already a good place to teach, learn and grow.”
— Wes Newland

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