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Oakwood C.I. celebrates 100 years

BY CLARK KIM

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Generations of students have graduated from Oakwood Collegiate Institute with a sense of pride that comes from attending a school known for its consistent excellence in academics, athletics and the arts.

Now past and present students will be coming together to share some of their memories as the Oakwood Avenue and St. Clair Road high school marks its 100th anniversary next week.

"Oakwood was a high point in my life," said John Corkill, who will be celebrating his 60th anniversary with the class of 1948. "Oakwood was a very happy school. Students were happy to be there."

In those days, Corkill recalled that everyone walked to school - "uphill all the way" from where he lived. One snowstorm, in particular, made for a memorable outing.

"Many of us staggered to school and found out it was closed," he said.

But Corkill had many fonder memories including the many dances he attended, the bugle band he joined and the Latin courses he took in his five years at Oakwood.

"Scholastically, we were quite good," said Corkill, adding that Oakwood Collegiate really focused on getting students to university. "A lot of people got scholarships."

Another strength, he said, was the school's athletic department, which boasted powerhouse teams in football and basketball at both the junior and senior levels.

John Iaboni, an "Oakwoodite" who graduated in 1970 and went on to become a sports writer for the Toronto Sun in the 1970s and 1980s, agreed.

"The school had great traditions," said Iaboni, especially noting the basketball team, which continues to excel to this day. "Oakwood, for me, was the best educational years of my life. It was a wonderful community for all of us. I'll never forget it."

Iaboni missed the 75th anniversary back in the early 1980s because he was assigned to cover the NHL playoffs in Long Island during the "Dynasty Years" of the New York Islanders.

But there's no way he'll be missing Oakwood's centennial anniversary with a series of events planned next week and several opportunities to mingle with his former schoolmates.

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"It'll be like catching up on a conversation, which stopped whatever number of years ago," Iaboni said.

Kicking off the four-day centennial anniversary festivities is a concert at the Toronto Centre for the Arts on Thursday, May 1 with appearances from such notable Oakwood alumni as recording artist Jully Black, jazz pianist David Restivo and symphonic composer Ron Royer.

Current students will also be performing and showcasing their talents at the music concert as well as organizing assemblies at the school early next week with a presentation documenting 100 years of Oakwood Collegiate.

Principal Renata Gonsalves said Oakwood continues to pride itself on excelling in the arts, academics and athletics.

"Not many principals get to brag that we have OFSAA (Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations) provincial champions in various sports," said Gonsalves, listing such sports as rugby, archery and field hockey, to name a few. "So the tradition continues. It is alive and well."

Other 100th anniversary events taking place include a pub night in the school gym on Friday, May 2 and a school open house on Saturday, May 3 where alumni can visit their old stomping grounds. A gala dinner and silent auction will follow at Presidente Banquet Hall with tickets costing \$100.

Something new for all current and former students is the museum created within the school, containing Oakwood memorabilia throughout its 100-year history. The museum dedication is planned for Wednesday, April 30.

Visit www.oakwoodalumni.ca for details on the 100th anniversary events.

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