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Students at Belmont Elementary School sing the school song during the special 60-year celebration.

**EDUCATION**

# A shining 'diamond'

## Belmont Elementary celebrates 60 years

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Dwight D. Eisenhower was president, Elvis Presley was the hottest thing going and the space race was ushered in via the Sputnik satellite.

And at 31 MacNaughton Road in a storied part of town, 1957 also saw Belmont Elementary School open its doors for the first time.

On Friday, Rattlers and staff members present and past marked the school's diamond jubilee with a spirited pep assembly that illustrated, in word, song and expression, the overwhelming loyalty and pride Belmont has inspired through the years.

A genuine love and allegiance more akin to high schools and universities than a school serving kindergarteners through fifth graders.

In its six decades, the Belmont Elementary School has had but four principals — Marvin Elliott, Frank Taulli, Jose Duarte and the current leader, Stephanie Smith. A litany of teachers happily spent their entire careers at Belmont, educating several gener-

ations of families along the way.

At present, six Belmont teachers are former Rattlers who eagerly returned to their alma mater, some leaving higher-paying positions to do so.

The retired educator with the deepest Belmont roots is June Saldana, who owns the unique distinction of being on board when the school welcomed its first batch of Rattlers in 1957.

For her 40 years of service on MacNaughton Road, Saldana was given a heroine's welcome Friday.

"It's great to come back 60 years later," Saldana said.

"It looks a lot the same — wonderful custodians that have kept it looking the same. The grounds also look wonderful.

"It's a wonderful building that I loved."

From fellow educators to parents to the children who filled the



CHIEFTAIN PHOTOS/JOHN JAQUES

June Saldana, who taught at Belmont Elementary School for 40 years, gets a hug from physical education teacher and former student Mike Latino as she is honored at the school's 60-year celebration on Friday.

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classrooms, Saldana said the Belmont family bond is strong like no other.

I still live in the area so I still see a lot of the children that I taught, she noted. I never forgot them and they never forgot me.

Mike Latino, who helped coordinate the diamond jubilee, is one of the current staff members who began their educational journey at Belmont.

I left a job in administration in another district once I found out there was an opening here, said Latino, who teaches physical education. I'm very proud to say I've been a Belmont Rattler since I was 5 years old. And my fondest memories are when I was a student here.

Latino heralded Belmont as a gem in this community whose remarkable, long-lasting luster is the result of a stable and dedicated staff, strong parental involvement and alumni support, and a student body anxious to uphold the Rattler legacy.

A legacy based on respect, responsibility, a caring attitude and a positive, success-based mental outlook.

I love a lot of things about this school, but the best thing is my friends, said fifth-grader Craig Allen. Belmont kids are nice. We help each other when we are feeling down.

It's like a huge family a 500-people family.

Friday's celebration included the reading of a proclamation by City Council members Lori Winner a former Rattler who acknowledged the presence of her kindergarten teacher Rosetta Pecoraro and Chris Nicoll declaring Sept. 22, 2017, as Belmont Rattlers Day.

Mark Holcomb, the school's custodian of 30 years, was recognized for his shining efforts and dedication with a rousing ovation and a plaque in the school colors of blue and gold.

There also was the mass singing of Happy Birthday and The

Belmont Rattlers School Song, a 60-year-old, two-part ditty sung to the tune of The Marines Hymn and Roll Out the Barrel.

Once a Rattler, always a Rattler, said Pecoraro, who attended the celebration with another longtime Belmont educator, Edna Thalhamer.

I did teach at two other schools, Columbian and Irving, for five years each and I thought I would just stay here at Belmont for five years.

But I loved it so much I stayed here 30 years. I never wanted to go anywhere else.

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