

Hundreds turn out to celebrate opening of new school

By JAN DEAN
Staff

Threats of thunderstorms didn't keep anyone away from the official opening of Janet I. McDougald Public School Wednesday night.

When the front doors to the Hartsdale Ave. school opened at 6:30 p.m., there were hundreds waiting in each of two lines. The crowding was eased when students (who started school there last September) went to their classrooms to await stage cues and the gym was left for families and friends.

Students served as event emcees and each class took a turn entertaining the crowd.

The focus on students was the request of longtime trustee and chair of the Peel District School Board, Janet McDougald, for whom the school is named.

The school is built on the site of the former Lyndwood Public School, but principal Beatrice Jankowski says it's not a replacement for Lyndwood; it's an amalgamation of Byngmount Beach, Lyndwood and Neil C. Matheson public schools.

The decision to build a new school was made by the Board during the accommodation review of 2008-09 while the decision to name it after McDougald, who's been at the Board

for 25 years, was announced Dec. 1, 2011.

Reactions to both decisions were heated and passionate, but the Board held firm.

Not a hint of negativity was in evidence at the opening ceremonies.

"We have an amazing staff and the school is so big and new, the kids love it," said Jankowski.

Grade 5 student Mitchell Gedney, 10, proudly pointed out the tile he had painted in the school foyer. Each student painted one in his or her likeness and they will always be on display.

McDougald wasn't surprised the community has taken to the school.

"I went to school in this area myself," she said. "I can't remember a new school being built south of the (QEW) since the 1960s, probably the '50s."

She credited the school's staff and administrative team for making the school part of the community so quickly.

"This school brings together three communities to create a new one," she said. "There's stability here. That's important because these areas have been in decline."

McDougald says she's proud of the school named for her. Originally, it was to be called Janet McDougald Public School, minus the middle initial.

"I asked them to add the 'I,'" she said. "Isabel is my middle name and it's been a family name for four generations. It just seemed right."

Tony Pontes, the Peel Board's director of education, said it isn't

often they get to build a new school in an established community.

Vish Sampat held daughter Serena, 7 months, outside the gym where it was cooler. His daughter, Terena, 5, attends senior kindergar-

ten at the school and her mother stayed in the gym to take pictures of her daughter on stage.

"She loves it here because the yard has so much space," he said.

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Janet I. McDougald Public School officially opened Wednesday. Janet McDougald, longtime Peel District School Board chair, attended the ceremony.
Staff photo by Rob Beintema