

Fond farewell for longtime Calgary teacher Barry Marks

BY RICHARD CUTHBERTSON, CALGARY HERALD SEPTEMBER 2, 2010

CALGARY -- On his first day at Ernest Manning High School, teacher Barry Marks probably felt like many of his students, entering the classroom with some trepidation and hesitancy.

That first day was in 1968.

It certainly worked out well, with Marks teaching art at the high school for 41 years, retiring just a year ago.

"I needn't have worried because the senior class I took over was one of the best senior classes I ever had," Marks says of his first day at the school. "They were just a wonderful bunch of students. "

This week at Ernest Manning will be the last time students mark their first day back in class. When this school year finishes, the doors of Ernest Manning, first opened to students in 1963, will close. It is scheduled to be demolished after June 2011 to make way for the new West LRT, with a new high school being built further west.

Many things changed over the years that Marks taught at the school, but he says the student interest and passion for art remained much the same. He does regret, however, what he sees as an increasing emphasis on academic subjects, which means less time to spend in art class. "There still are students who are passionate and involved, but their time is so cut back," he says.

Tonight and Friday evening, the high school will open after hours so former students and staff can tour their former haunt, said John Bauer, an Ernest Manning graduate who is the acting chairman of a committee putting together a big reunion at the school.

On Saturday, the Jamaica Farewell dance at the school is sold out, with more than 1,000 tickets purchased. The event harkens back to dances of the same name that were once a staple at the school.

Interest in this weekend is strong, with graduates from every year attending. "This is the last time they'll ever see the old school, because the wrecking ball is going to hit it sometime in the summer," Bauer said.

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