Are We There Yet?

No, folks, not quite there yet but doesn’t the Chinook School Gymnasium look fabulous? In the words of a neighbor, “Oh those beautiful windows! This gym is a real gem!” And a former Chinook School teacher wrote, “Just wanted to let you know how great I think the Chinook Gym is looking! Every time we drive by it makes me smile. . .”

As written in the Chinook Observer recently, this amazing renovation project has pushed forward about as far as current funds will carry. The Port of Chinook owns the property and non-profit Friends of Chinook School raises the funds and plans the forward progress. Port Commissioner Corky Wilson directs a small legion of professionals and volunteers in the first-class renovation project. We have had wonderful donations of time, materials and heart. However, such an amazing renovation as this gym also needs funds. Many materials from permit fees to banister paint must be purchased, labor must be compensated and the lights and water must remain on. If we keep moving along we are likely to be hosting the 2010 Oktoberfest in the Chinook Gym. Help us get there. Say yes to the benefits of membership and the joys of a community project well done!

Oh Wait, Oh Wow!

We just heard some really great news! FOCS and The Port of Chinook are proud to proclaim that our refurbished gymnasium will be ready (enough) for the 2010 Oktoberfest. While there will be many details still awaiting completion, we will be able to house our enthusiastic “Oktoberfesters” inside the restored multipurpose site. Revelers will get a good, long look at the fabulous new space. It will be quite some time before the building is ready for community uses. However, for this one special celebration, we have permission to present the bright new gymnasium to an eager citizenry. Save the date, mark your calendars: October 23, 2010. Just you wait!

I always wondered why somebody didn’t do something about that. Then I realized I was somebody.

–Lily Tomlin
Many of us have known electricians called “Sparky” but a plumber named “Smokey”?

Chinook has such a fellow and he is one smokin’ hot volunteer for the Friends of Chinook School. FOCS is thrilled to have him.

Marion “Smokey” Ballinger, proud member of Seattle Local 32 Plumbing and Pipefitting Union, is retired and living in Chinook now but he remains actively in touch with members and doin’s of Local 32. And, as an active member of Friends of Chinook, he has orchestrated a wonderful donation to the Chinook Gym restoration project.

Smokey was born in Oklahoma in 1924. Most of his adult life was spent in the Seattle and Longview areas working and raising a family. But Smokey had long loved the Peninsula and came often for river and ocean fishing. He was working primarily as a traveling plumber and was thrilled when given the opportunity to travel here to direct the Ilwaco High School and Naselle Youth Camp plumbing jobs. He was also given the opportunity to travel to the Korean conflict with the United States Navy. It was while serving on a submarine tender that Ship Fitter II Ballinger was given the nickname that stuck for life. Returning stateside, Smokey resumed duties as master plumber and masterful husband and dad.

When it came time to retire and Smokey had lost his beloved wife, Florence, the family looked seriously at relocating permanently to the Peninsula. His daughter Vickie and her husband Terry Branch were part of the big move and have owned and operated Chinook’s bead store, M&D designs, for seven years. Vickie became a board member of FOCS and Smokey had such an interest in the grand old school house that he came along to many meetings. It occurred to him early on that his honored Local 32 just might have materials and people power that could be of service on a project such as historical school restoration. Smokey continued coming and listened and thought about all that plumbing! (He knew. He had worked on many school sites in his day.) Smokey also knew his union provided help to nonprofit organizations and suggested we contact them. The board wrote a letter outlining our needs. The union agreed to provide Al Peterson and his specially outfitted van to donate all the plumbing installation. A couple months later Smokey mentioned that the union sometimes gives “monetary” donations as well. Another letter resulted in Seattle Local 32, together with Zurn Plumbing Products and Rosen Plumbing Supply, donating all fixtures for the four new and renovated bathrooms in the gym. It is a most generous and appreciated donation. Way to go, Smokey!

A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows.

St. Frances of Assisi

Help Us Meet Our High Water Mark

Join the wave of new and renewed memberships, volunteer commitments and thoughtful donations to The Friends of Chinook School. We are happy to welcome you!
Memorials

Monetary donations since the last newsletter have been received in memory of:

Teena Goldman
Kenneth Tetz, Jr.
Jeane H. Tetz
Joe Church
Edward E. Anderson
Walter L. Hansen

A Tale of Two Architects

The shiny new gymnasium we see emerging from a broken but proud Chinook building brings to light a tale of two architects. Original designer-builder was John E. Wicks, renowned early 20th century Astoria architect. The architect leading the design team toward the beautiful building restoration is Long Beach architect David Jensen. This newsletter gives you a peek into the life and works of John Wicks. In our next edition you will read about David Jensen and his contributions to the rebirth of this special, historic building.

“I am an architect. Do you know what an architect is? An architect is a master builder!” Thus began the dedication speech of John E. Wicks at the 1921 unveiling of Chinook School’s new gymnasium. The new gym brought P.E., stage and cafeteria opportunities to the citizens of Chinook. This beautiful building was to become an anchor in the community and would soon be joined by a school at the site. Wicks was also master builder of the school building completed in 1924. What went on in his life as this building emerged is a glimpse of history wonderful to understand.

John E. Wicks (nee Wiik) was born the summer of 1878 to a Swedish speaking family in Vassa, Finland. He immigrated to the United States in 1899, worked as a carpenter in the mines near Denver and learned English. His interest in drawing and building led him to a three-year architectural course at a small Kansas college. He completed the study in just one year, traveled to Astoria and opened an office here in 1904. He was, in fact, on his way to use a scholarship at Stanford University but a visit to his brother here convinced him that there was plenty of work to keep him busy and he stayed. In 1910 he applied for final naturalization papers at which time he and brother Alfred ended years of a misspelled and mispronounced name and legally adopted “Wicks”. With the name he adopted a new country leaving behind as part of that decision years of struggles against Russian and German forces. The Wicks family remained, however, happily active in all things Scandinavian. His prominence came in no small measure from a commitment to become a worthy U.S. citizen. He worked hard as an architect and as a contributing member of American society serving in Rotary, Finnish-American groups, the Lutheran church and professional organizations.

John Wicks married Maria Cederberg in December, 1905 and they raised three daughters. An interesting piece of history relates a return to Finland for study and work. Since he planned to remain there with Maria and their two daughters for about six months, he pre-arranged passage for their return on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. Business intervened and the trip home had to be cancelled. It is said that many Astorians were saddened as they read that a John Weeks and his family were lost on that voyage. John Wicks and family returned to Astoria in 1913. A third daughter was born to the family in 1914. Ebba Wicks (Brown) became an architect and later joined her father’s firm.

In addition to an impressive number of Astorian buildings, Wicks ferried across the Columbia where he designed the Cathlamet Hotel, restored the Ilwaco High School, built creameries in Grays River and Deep River and designed the Chinook School and Gymnasium. He was affectionately said to have “built hell for stout” likely to put a one-story building on a ten-story foundation. Thus we have two stout buildings needing love and restoration to serve many more generations of Peninsula citizens. How could the FOCS, the Port of Chinook, indeed the citizens of a wide and wonderful area leave them to eventually crumble? We could not. Join us, please, in honoring John Wicks, master builder, and saving these wonderful community anchors.

They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.  
Andy Warhol
Send Us Your Ideas — Tell Us Your Dreams

Members of the FOCS Board of Directors are eager to gather ideas and dreams Peninsula citizens may have for the renovated Chinook gymnasium. There are so many possibilities for uses in the beautiful new space. It is too soon to make promises about gym uses but it is never too soon to imagine and brainstorm community hopes for utilizing the enhanced stage, enlarged kitchen and refurbished gym floor. Please let us know what you hope to see happening in this building.

Send your list of hopes to FOCS, P.O. Box 243, Chinook, WA 98614; call a board member or come to a board meeting (always the 3rd Monday of the month) and express your ideas. Community support and interest means so much as we push to complete the work on this shiny new community anchor.

To accomplish great things we must dream as well as act.

— Anatole France