Rebuilding a legacy

Alumni sell bricks to restore old McKinley High school

By KEVIN BLANCHARD

Two days after the old McKinley High School was destroyed by fire in July, a graduate of the school drove by and saw people taking bricks from the charred rubble.

Willie Mae Williams, McKinley Class of 1944, said she stopped her car and asked the people why they would take the bricks.

“We want a piece of history,” they said.

That sparked an idea for Williams, who, as a member of the McKinley Alumni Association, had already begun thinking of ways to rebuild the 71-year-old school.

“We’re going to provide people a chance to access the legacy,” Williams said.

People, organizations and businesses are being given a chance to buy bricks, with their names engraved on them, to be placed in the rebuilt school.

The fund-raiser kicked off Saturday at the Leo Butler Community Center.

Plans were already in the works before the July 3 fire to turn the school into a community center, said Doris Thompson, president of the McKinley Alumni Association.

The state had granted $1.5 million and the alumni association, which had bought the school building in 1992, planned a walk-through of the school for July 6, Thompson said.

But that Friday, the school burned down. Three juveniles, ages 13, 14 and 15, were booked with simple arson.

Fire officials said they were probably up to vandalism but not trying to burn the building down.

Bricks cost $100 for individuals, $300 to organizations and $1,000 to businesses. At least 46 bricks were sold by late afternoon Saturday, including one $1,000 business brick.

The association also sold about 600 barbecue dinners and provided entertainment with live jazz, gospel and blues music.

All the money raised will go towards the new community center, Thompson said.

Plans for the center include health services, tutorial services, Head Start, counseling services for the elderly and performing arts programs for the community, Thompson said.

One of the rooms in the new building may hold a display of the long history and distinguished graduates of the school, association member Geraldine Smith Brown said.

“Everybody who was anybody went to McKinley,” said Brown, herself a 1945 graduate. “I’ll be so happy when I see the building going up again.”

Thompson said: “For decades, since its opening in 1927, McKinley High School was the only school available for black students in the East Baton Rouge Parish area, Thompson said.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

He bought a brick Saturday, not to get his name on the new building, but to simply help out a cause close to his heart, he said.

“As long as they can get it restored, that’s the main thing,” Ferguson said.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

The school, on Thomas H. Delpit Drive, was converted to an elementary school in 1960, then was closed in 1973.

Roosevelt Ferguson, who left McKinley in 1950 to join the Marines, said he could not believe the news on television, the night the school burned down.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

But that Friday, the school burned down. Three juveniles, ages 13, 14 and 15, were booked with simple arson.

Fire officials said they were probably up to vandalism but not trying to burn the building down.

Bricks cost $100 for individuals, $300 to organizations and $1,000 to businesses. At least 46 bricks were sold by late afternoon Saturday, including one $1,000 business brick.

The association also sold about 600 barbecue dinners and provided entertainment with live jazz, gospel and blues music.

All the money raised will go towards the new community center, Thompson said.

Plans for the center include health services, tutorial services, Head Start, counseling services for the elderly and performing arts programs for the community, Thompson said.

One of the rooms in the new building may hold a display of the long history and distinguished graduates of the school, association member Geraldine Smith Brown said.

“Everybody who was anybody went to McKinley,” said Brown, herself a 1945 graduate. “I’ll be so happy when I see the building going up again.”

Thompson said: “For decades, since its opening in 1927, McKinley High School was the only school available for black students in the East Baton Rouge Parish area, Thompson said.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

He bought a brick Saturday, not to get his name on the new building, but to simply help out a cause close to his heart, he said.

“As long as they can get it restored, that’s the main thing,” Ferguson said.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

The school, on Thomas H. Delpit Drive, was converted to an elementary school in 1960, then was closed in 1973.

Roosevelt Ferguson, who left McKinley in 1950 to join the Marines, said he could not believe the news on television, the night the school burned down.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

But that Friday, the school burned down. Three juveniles, ages 13, 14 and 15, were booked with simple arson.

Fire officials said they were probably up to vandalism but not trying to burn the building down.

Bricks cost $100 for individuals, $300 to organizations and $1,000 to businesses. At least 46 bricks were sold by late afternoon Saturday, including one $1,000 business brick.

The association also sold about 600 barbecue dinners and provided entertainment with live jazz, gospel and blues music.

All the money raised will go towards the new community center, Thompson said.

Plans for the center include health services, tutorial services, Head Start, counseling services for the elderly and performing arts programs for the community, Thompson said.

One of the rooms in the new building may hold a display of the long history and distinguished graduates of the school, association member Geraldine Smith Brown said.

“Everybody who was anybody went to McKinley,” said Brown, herself a 1945 graduate. “I’ll be so happy when I see the building going up again.”

Thompson said: “For decades, since its opening in 1927, McKinley High School was the only school available for black students in the East Baton Rouge Parish area, Thompson said.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

He bought a brick Saturday, not to get his name on the new building, but to simply help out a cause close to his heart, he said.

“As long as they can get it restored, that’s the main thing,” Ferguson said.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1B

The school, on Thomas H. Delpit Drive, was converted to an elementary school in 1960, then was closed in 1973.

Roosevelt Ferguson, who left McKinley in 1950 to join the Marines, said he could not believe the news on television, the night the school burned down.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

But that Friday, the school burned down. Three juveniles, ages 13, 14 and 15, were booked with simple arson.

Fire officials said they were probably up to vandalism but not trying to burn the building down.

Bricks cost $100 for individuals, $300 to organizations and $1,000 to businesses. At least 46 bricks were sold by late afternoon Saturday, including one $1,000 business brick.

The association also sold about 600 barbecue dinners and provided entertainment with live jazz, gospel and blues music.

All the money raised will go towards the new community center, Thompson said.

Plans for the center include health services, tutorial services, Head Start, counseling services for the elderly and performing arts programs for the community, Thompson said.

One of the rooms in the new building may hold a display of the long history and distinguished graduates of the school, association member Geraldine Smith Brown said.

“Everybody who was anybody went to McKinley,” said Brown, herself a 1945 graduate. “I’ll be so happy when I see the building going up again.”

Thompson said: “For decades, since its opening in 1927, McKinley High School was the only school available for black students in the East Baton Rouge Parish area, Thompson said.

“I felt like I had lost my house,” Ferguson said.

He bought a brick Saturday, not to get his name on the new building, but to simply help out a cause close to his heart, he said.

“As long as they can get it restored, that’s the main thing,” Ferguson said.