

**UFFELMAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HAS HISTORY
OF
'FAMILY' SPIRIT, COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

By Bailey Darrow, Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN Staff
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Uffelman Elementary School has changed. Since the school was first opened in the late 1940's as Uffelman Elementary School, the building, its staff and the community that fills and supports it have seen some big changes. From a fire to a building full of fresh faces, the Uffelman building has been center for community support of education in Monterey for more than 50 years.

Uffelman Elementary School opened September 19, 1949. Before that time, students in first through 12th grades were all housed in the same building. The school opened with classrooms for student in first, second, third and fourth grades. Ten teachers and some 300 children filled the space that first year. Eventually, fifth and sixth grades were also housed there and the school grew, adding on more classrooms, a gym, cafeteria, gym and more library space.



The school was named for Columbus Uffelman. He had moved to Monterey in 1915 and worked for the railroad system for a number of years, staying involved in the Monterey community. Uffelman served on the Putnam County school board, taking a special interest in advancing the educational opportunities for students in Monterey. Because of his role in securing the elementary school for the area, the school was named in his honor.

Mrs. S. M. Leftwich was the first principal at UES, serving until her retirement when Geneva Weiland took over as principal.

THE FIRE:

It was Monday night in 1970 when a fire started at the school. The fire destroyed a large portion of the building, leaving only the cafeteria and gym.

The school was rebuilt in 1972. In the meantime, the Monterey community came together to make sure that Monterey students had a place to learn. By Thursday of the same week the school caught fire, students were attending class again at local churches and the community center. The students finished out that school year and attended all of the next school year in community buildings until the school was reopened in 1972.

At that time, the classrooms were designed for "open concept" teaching. There were no classroom walls and teachers taught in stations. Metal walls were added to the classrooms in 1993, but many of the classroom area still have an open feel to them.

The school was named a Tennessee School Board Association award school and has even seen some students to grow up and return to the building as teachers.

COMING BACK TO SCHOOL:

Suzy Jackson is one of those.

“I grew up in Monterey and went to Uffelman for elementary in the original school until it burned when I was in fifth grade,” Jackson said. “By the time the new building was built I was in 7th grade and at Monterey High School. I have always wanted to teach at Uffelman and give back to my community where I grew up. After teaching in other



schools, I finally got the opportunity to.”

(Pictured: Uffelman Elementary School in Monterey reopened following a fire in the 1970s. The building will now become Monterey High School).

In 2001, Burks Middle School was built in Monterey, taking Uffelman from a kindergarten through sixth grade facility to a kindergarten through third grade school.

“We are all very close and many teachers grew up at Uffelman as well, so the faculty and staff are as much a family as well as professional educators,” Jackson said. “Uffelman has a very caring and educational atmosphere. We make students and everyone welcome and will do our best to give all students the best education we can. We really care about the total child.”

It is that family element, added to the long history that many teachers have with the building, that has made the most recent changes for Uffelman so intense.

At the start of the 2012-13 school year, Uffelman Elementary School will be no more. Students in kindergarten through eighth grade will all be housed at the expanded Burks Middle School, now named Burks Elementary School. The building that has been home to UES will become Monterey High School as the former MHS building is vacated due to fire hazards identified there.

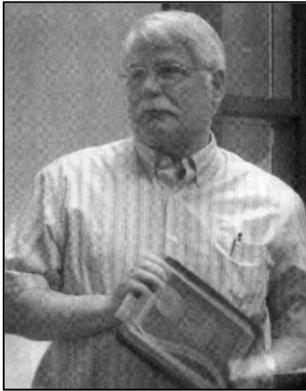
“Uffelman Elementary is not just a school, it is a family,” UES secretary of 19 years Lorna Matheny, said. “We know the parents who we went to school with ourselves.

That is the main word to understand what is Uffelman, FAMILY. It is sad to break it up but, as in life, changes will come.”

Though the move has been bittersweet, Matheney said the Uffelamn “family” is trying to look toward the future.

A TREASURED LEADER:

For 34 years, Eddie Nipper led the UES “family” as principal of the school. Nipper has retired with the end of the 2011-12 school year, but as UES librarian Shannon Auberson said, “He has not been a boss; he has been a leader.”



“He is one of the nicest and most professional educators/principals I have ever met and/or worked with,” Jackson said. “I do not know of any person who cares for everyone of his students as he does.”

(Pictured: Retiring Uffelman Elementary School principal Eddie Nipper was recently awarded an “I Make a Difference Award” by the Putnam County school board).

Nipper has taken so much care with Uffelman students that each day, he walked each group of students out to their bus to make sure that they made it there safely. He made regular checks with teacher to make sure they had the things they needed and that their concerns were addressed.

“He is very fair with the students and will help the teachers improve their skills where needed to give the best to our students,” Jackson said. “His main concerns are the students and his faculty and staff. It has been a pleasure and an honor to have worked with him.”

A NEW LOCATION:

In recent weeks, Uffelman faculty and staff have been busy moving classroom items out of the Uffelman building so that it may become a high school. They are filling up classrooms in what has been named the Uffelamn wing of Burks Elementary School. The transition has been bittersweet, teachers say.

For Auberson, whose library in the Uffelman was open in the center of the school, being at the front of the Burks building, far away from her student’s classrooms is going to be a big adjustment, she said.

Despite the challenge of change, the teachers are confident the students will still feel the Uffelman family spirit.

“We’ve been very happy here,” long-time teacher Mildred Bilbrey said. “We know what is working and will continue that there.

*Read more Schoolyard Tales at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>