

EAEOCS breaks ground on alumni plaza

By ANN M. TABB
Starkville Daily News

A historic ground-breaking brought together 75 Moor High and Henderson alumni, students and county school administrators for a day of fun, food and friendly competition on Saturday at the site of a new alumni plaza at East Oktibbeha High School they will make a reality by next summer.

Although it's still in the planning stages, the project at the high school will include 30-40 picnic benches, class roster walls for alumni and an amphitheater complete with lighting and landscaping, for graduations and community events such as reunions.

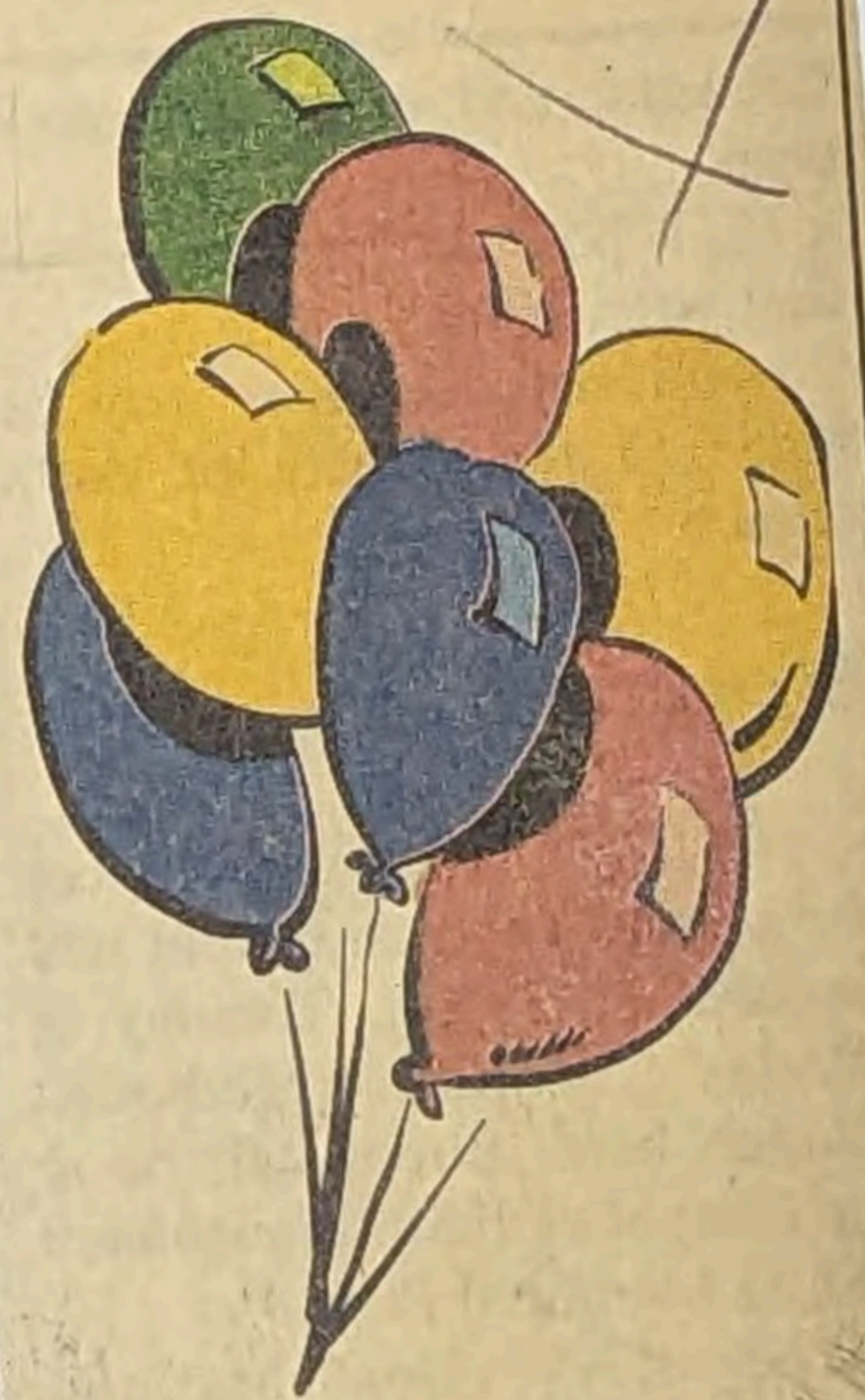
The event was in conjunction with the first "Village of Fun" at East Oktibbeha High School on Moor High Road and was sponsored by members of the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools (EAEOCS) and donations by county businesses and alumni.

"We hope to have the amphitheater and picnic benches here by next summer," said Jacqueline Ellis, president of the EAEOCS. "With the resources of alumni and people in the community, and the help of the Small Town Center, I have faith that we can get this built for our children and this community."

Ellis said the plaza will be designed by the Small Town Center, a non-profit organization within the School of Architecture at Mississippi State University. STC Director Kimberly Brown addressed the gathering Saturday about their work and how critical community input will be in the success of the project.

"We'll need donations, donations, donations," said Brown. "We have already raised about \$200 in a recycling fund raiser at Allen and Jiles Hall on campus in a fund raiser we have for a project at the elementary school. But until we can totally devote our time to this project, alumni with special skills like bricklaying or grant writing are needed."

EAEOCS chose the Small Town Center for help after seeing the Center's modernization of East Oktibbeha Elementary School and preliminary designs for a new playground for the K-6 school.



Ann M. Tabb/SDN

Top, young relatives of B.L. Moor and Henderson High alumni enjoy a romp in a "space walk" during the 'Village of Fun' festival and project ground-breaking at B.L. Moor High School on Saturday, including, from left, Sharice Gandy, 10, the daughter of Josie and Eddie Gandy; Jarvarous Guy, 9, the son of Latoya Guy and Marcus Stovall; and Jaquita Ellis, 9, the daughter of Freida Ellis. Above, members of the Educational Association of East Oktibbeha County Schools (EAEOCS) stir up some dirt at the future site of the alumni plaza. With the shovel, in front are EAEOCS Secretary Willie Thomas Sr., and EAEOCS President Jackie Ellis. EAEOCS members on the second row include Betty Ellis, class of 1970; Freida Ellis, class of 1979; Katherine Washington, class of 1974; Rosella Austin, class of 1970; Yvonne Ellis, class of 1975 and EOHS Principal Albert Williams. Holding the sign in the very back is Lutishia Ellis, class of 1975.

Lutishia Stallings, a 1974 alumnae of B.L. Moor, brought her three-year-old grandson, Octavian Stalling, to enjoy the day at her alma mater and watch the ground breaking. She has high hopes for the future of EAEOCS and the project.

"It's exciting," said Stallings, who is a leading member of the EAEOCS. "It's something that has never been done before. It's a new beginning and it's for the future — for a new generation. We are really trying to reach our goals in this and bridge the

generation gap."

Ellis said project costs between \$20-\$25,000, said that number is on the amount of community support.

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ernment grants that are being sought by the STC.

Formed on Sept. 28, 2002, EAEPCS was formed by Jackie and Yvonne Ellis to serve as a motivational tool for students and to show the students love and concern in the wake of a devastating fire in May 2002.

EAEPCS members are former students of Moor High and Alexander High Schools and any concerned citizens desiring to give aid to the administration and students. According to group spokesperson Jackie Ellis, the purpose of Saturday's event was to reward the students at East Oktibbeha schools for their achievements.

Shaquar Hart, recipient of the first EAEPCS \$300 Scholarship, made a few remarks at the ground breaking. Throughout the afternoon, prizes were awarded to students who won games and contests, and a friendly basketball game of alumni versus students was held in the gym.

County School Supt. Dr. Walter Conley was enjoying the beautiful weather and the barbecue alongside other B.L. Moor graduates and EOHS Principal Albert Williams. Both addressed the gathering at the ground breaking and Conley said the project will be a great addition to the gym and offices being rebuilt at the fire-damaged school.

"I'm certainly excited at what is taking place in terms of community involvement and the dedication of the alumni to their alma mater," said Conley. "This kind of commitment is what is growing this school in the right direction. I want to commend Mrs. Ellis and the Board of

Directors for their determined effort to make a difference."

Conley said he hoped the County School Board "would look at possibilities for funding in the future."

"For right now, we are looking into the community to help in funding the project," said Conley. "Once the people in the community realizes how determined this group is, it will really get going."

Williams, who is retiring in June after five years as principal, commended the members of the EAOCS for their vision.

"I think its real good that alumni want to give back and want to do something for the students," said Williams, who is retiring in June after five years as principal. "A lot of good things cam come out of this for the future."

Members of the Starkville Alumni Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta (Phi Iota Zeta) brought a huge decorated cake for the 2003 graduates and helped serve food at the event.

"We were delighted to come and be a part of what they are trying to do," said Gloria Conley, president of the group and wife of Dr. Conley. "You have to have a vision and we all realize that everyone has some connection in the community."

Other sponsors from Mississippi State who came out to help were Student Body President Josh Blades and Dan Coleman, past president of the Black Student Alliance.

Blades brought frisbees courtesy of the MSU Student Government Association and Coleman said the BSA would provide school supplies to the High School for the upcoming year.

"The BSA is a minority-group that tries to do outreach in the local community," said Coleman. "We saw the need and wanted to come out and help."