

Chalkboard

By

Dr. Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

Consider this your official invitation to graduation. Barring rain, it will be held this Saturday, May 20, 2006, at 10:00 a.m. in Pioneer Stadium. Should rain be a factor, the ceremony will move inside to the high school gymnasium.

A week later this school term will be in the record book as the last day for students and teachers is Friday, May 26, 2006. This year's kindergarten class will only have twelve more years of public school education until they become the Class of 2018. The seniors who walk across the stage this Saturday will be around the age of 30 at that graduation. Some will be married and have children enrolled in Gentry Public Schools; perhaps kindergarten, and, God willing, the cycle of life will continue.

What will the Gentry Public School System be like in 2018? What appearance will the community have taken on. I cannot predict either but I doubt if either will look as they do today. Change will have occurred. A four lane will connect Gentry to US 412 and there will be a McDonald's on the corner.

If you question whether change will have occurred, I ask you to take a moment and hit the rewind button of your mind. What were you doing 12 years ago in 1994? What were you paying for a gallon of gasoline? Have children? How old were they? Are you driving the same vehicle? Is your mailing address the same? Is your last name the same? Did you have the same cellular phone you carry today? Did you have a cell phone then? Are the same numbers on your paycheck stub? Do you weigh the same? Same hair cut? Is that enough examples to make a point?

Sometimes change is just sneaky. I heard a story one time about how to boil a live bullfrog. If you get the water to a boiling point and try to put the frog in that scalding water, the frog will immediately jump out. However, if you place the frog in the water at room temperature before you begin to slowly heat the water, the frog will just sit here. The poor frog adjusts to the change without being consciously aware that change the environment is occurring. (I did, in 1965, stuff a large bullfrog kicking and jumping into a large jar of formaldehyde in Tommy Dickinson's, who is now a state representative, sixth grade class but that is a story for another day.)

As the seniors are leaving, and a month, before the fiscal year ends on June 30th this summer, plans for the next school term will be underway. In actuality that process began in early April as it always does. The boundary lines in the process of “closing down” and “starting up” are always blurred. Finances, personnel, facilities, transportation issues, student issues, program issues, and so forth in the area of infrastructure demand attention. The doors will not open for the graduating class of 2007 and their successors by accident.

This summer will be exceptionally intense as with all the other routine “change-over to a new year” items, the district will also be moving into a new K-2 Primary School. Barring any new chapters being written into Murphy’s Law, the physical move should be happening toward the end of July or the beginning week in August. That should be an exciting time for both the school staff, the school board, and for the community as the doors open to a modern, safe facility for Gentry’s very youngest students. In that cycle referred to earlier, at least 50 graduating classes should begin their education in Gentry by walking through the front doors of that structure.

Does that seem real? It does to me. I was five years old when the wing building next to the Gentry elementary playground, where some of the kindergarten classes are now housed, was constructed.

Some other superintendent of the Gentry Public School District will have to decide, under the guidance of some future Gentry School Board, whether its more cost effective to demolish the new K-2 Primary School in 2056 or to renovate it. By that time, it will not be an issue to me.

How to end this bit of prose? All the school staff may be hopping around like frogs this summer but that will only mean that they are reacting to change rather than being overcome by it.

Here’s hoping (hopping?) to see you at graduation.