

Chalkboard

By

Randy C. Barrett, Superintendent
Gentry Public Schools

Time and tides indeed wait for no man. Seconds add up to minutes then hours and days then weeks and months and then a year ends and a new one begins. So it has been in modern history and so it shall remain until time is measured no more. Sorry, but the ending of a year always makes me a tad melancholy.

Scientists would postulate that the earth is about 4.5 billion years old. Many in the field of religion would argue for the age of the earth being in the thousands of years. Either way, billions or thousands, a lot of days, as man measures time, has passed by never to be reclaimed. Given that the Gentry community has only been in existence since about 1894, and that the old Hendrix Academy preceded what is now Gentry Public Schools, the school district is probably no more than a hundred years old.

Last year the district spent some time reviewing and rewriting its mission statement. The final published statement read “The mission of the Gentry School District is to work with the community in providing safe and successful educational experiences for each student.” How does that statement relate to recent weeks discussions about school facilities and plans for the future?

It relates because time and tides wait for no man. Apparently, on reading various articles, the Hendrix Academy, in what was then the Orchard community, was a great addition to what would become the Gentry community. Accounts indicate it was a very modern well-equipped educational facility, which no doubt must have helped serve the learning needs of the times. But in time, after about 10 years, it closed. That was roughly 100 years ago. By published accounts, it was built for about one quarter of one percent of what the new K-2 Primary School cost to build 100 years later.

It is fairly easy me to project next year’s facility needs. As noted last week the need for new construction is about nil. It would be nice to look at adding a P.E. gymnasium for the Primary school but that would be just that, nice but not absolutely necessary at the moment. Gentry Public Schools’ immediate short-term need is to maintain the facilities that we currently occupy.

It becomes harder to look at 10 years down the road. Part of what influences the school district’s needs will be what happens to the Gentry community in that period of time. Certainly what happens to the Gentry community is contingent upon what happens overall in Northwest Arkansas. If the western side of the county begins growing in population again, and if enrollment in the school district

begins to grow again, then either a new Intermediate school or a new high school will have to be considered.

Also to be considered is the nature of both education itself and the denizens who seek it. If the Gentry School District is to survive as an entity over the long haul it must be competitive in what it offers its students in terms of not only academics but also activities and athletics. Public School Choice has made choosing a school to attend, for parents who are willing to transport their students, akin to reading the menu at a restaurant.

I cannot project what the needs of the Gentry School District will be 100 years from now. Nor do I presume to have a need to do so. But unless the Maker of All Things rolls up the scroll, some school age children living in the roundabouts of latitude 36.267N and longitude -94.484W will need to obtain an education. What we do between now and 2018 will begin to shape the future of education for our children's children's great-grandchildren.