

REHOBOTH HIGH ALUMS

True to Their School

When she first learned the old Rehoboth High School on the banks of Silver Lake was slated to be torn down, Gail Nowakowski Stenger wasn't particularly happy. "I couldn't say that I was angry," says the 1969 RHS grad. "But I really didn't want it to be demolished."

Then, about a year ago, she and several other former Seahawks toured the building, in the company of Cape Henlopen School District Superintendent Robert Fulton. (The Rehoboth School District had been combined with counterparts in Milton and Lewes to form the Cape Henlopen district. Cape Henlopen High School opened in the fall of 1969.) And during the tour, Stenger saw why it was necessary to replace the building, which up until the end of school this past June housed Rehoboth Elementary School.

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"Bob explained about population growth in the area, and how the school was too small," she says. "It all made total sense to me. Now, I'm OK with the demolition. I understand why it has to be done."

Rehoboth Elementary School consisted of two buildings, one completed in 1940 as Rehoboth School and designed to serve all grades and the other completed in 1959 to serve as an elementary school. Demolition of the younger (and smaller) of



the two buildings took place in July; the older building is slated to be torn down later this fall.

Construction of a new Rehoboth Elementary School started in March 2018, on land next to the old buildings. The facility is scheduled to open on Sept. 3, the first day of the school year. Brian Bassett, the district's director of capital projects, says once demolition is completed, work will start on new athletic courts and recreational areas along the lake.

Hope Wilson Lavachia, RHS Class of 1963, was a participant in last fall's tour, led by Superintendent Fulton. Like Stenger, she saw that the building's useful days were over. Lavachia and her husband, Joe, also a 1963 graduate, "appreciate the level of education in the Cape Henlopen School District, and approve of what they're doing."

Even so, she was pleased to learn that parts of the old building are being preserved for use in the new one. Some of the school's gym floor is being reused in the new building's

From left, Ron Gray, Gail Nowakowski Stenger and Scott Walsmith stand in front of their alma mater, Rehoboth High School. Ron is wearing his RHS jacket, Gail has on her black-and-white sweater on which is attached the letter she earned through participating in athletics, and Scott sports an RHS Alumni Association hat. The old school is slated to be torn down this fall.

"history room," which will also have display cases that came out of the old school's lobby and bookshelves that were in the library.

Bricks from the original building will be used in sidewalks. (Alumni are invited to arrange to have their names engraved on the bricks. Details about how to do that are expected to be announced this month or next.) Salvaged bricks will also be used to build benches, an outdoor "learning wall" (designating an area that can be used as a classroom) and what Bassett calls "a few other surprises."

In addition, the high school's cornerstone, dated 1939, will be set atop an arch-

way that will span a sidewalk leading across the school campus to the lake.

Scott Walsmith graduated from Rehoboth High in 1957 and was a member of the Rehoboth School Board when the districts were consolidated. He admits to feeling "bittersweet" about the destruction of his alma mater. But he is also excited about the new school, which he calls "state of the art."

"It's the way of life, for the old to make way for the new," he says. "I can't be the least bit sad about it."

Stenger, whose mother, Janet Nowakowski, was a coach and physical education teacher at Rehoboth High, played all three girls' sports that the school offered — field hockey, basketball and softball — and was active in school clubs. Wherever she went, whatever activities she participated in, she was always proud to say she was a student at RHS.

That pride continues today. And it's not diminished because the building where she attended class will soon no longer exist.

"I will always remember that building and what went on there," she says. "My memories are from within that building and aren't the building itself."

"A building is just bricks and mortar," adds Lavachia. "What is really Rehoboth High School to us is the memories that we made there, the teachers we had and the administrators who led the school. All of that can't be destroyed."

"Rehoboth High School is alive and well and it always will be, as long as we are here." ■

— Lynn R. Parks