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Buckeye Union High School District celebrates 90 years

by **Eddi Trevizo** - Sept. 16, 2011 09:55 AM
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First, there were two students at Buckeye High School.

Nowadays, about 3,700 students are enrolled at the Buckeye Union High School District as the district launched its 90th anniversary celebrations Friday.

Parades, football [games](#) and a wall of history in one of the district's oldest buildings will commemorate the near-centennial birthday.

Faded sepia and black and white photos line the walls of the Buckeye Educational Center, which will be used by Estrella Mountain Community College to accommodate classes for college students living as far west as Gila Bend.

The college will host a soft opening of the building from 5:30 to 7 p.m. today to honor the 90th anniversary celebrations.

The new classrooms are housed in the school district's oldest building, called the A-Wing, which has been renovated, but still holds some historic items like the tiles adorning the bathroom floors, concrete walkways and iron "B" motifs mounted on the building's highest pillar.

Inside, visitors can walk along a wall of history, depicting graduating classes dating back to 1946, when the district first began to photograph its seniors.

In 1946, the girls sported carefully coiffed, shoulder-length curls and boys wore their hair slickly gelled into place.

Almost all students wore pristine, starched-white collars, and their portraits blend into newer generations of graduating classes that stamp their identities in portraits with colored T-shirts, tank tops, and long or spiky hair.

Buckeye Union High School District officials said the district came to life the year its first seniors graduated.

That was in 1921, when Buckeye High School awarded diplomas to sisters Cordia and Ethel Cambell.

"At that time there was only one school. We think it is important to celebrate the past as we launch into the future," said Beverly Hurley, district superintendent.

The school became Buckeye Union High School in 1930, the same year the school chose its current mascot, the Hawks. Before that, the students were called the Wildcats.

Verlyne Meck, a [retired](#) Buckeye Union High School librarian and local historian, graduated from the school in 1958. Meck helped reframe and hang the graduate pictures displayed in the Buckeye Educational Center. She recently recalled the changes her alma mater underwent over the years.

"Girls didn't have sports teams, except for tennis," said Meck, who was a tennis coach and physical education teacher at the school from 1962 to 1966.

That was before Congress passed Title IX in 1972, prohibiting exclusion or discrimination from participation in publicly funded activities and educational programs based on gender.

Meck helped organize the Girls Athletic Association in her school. The association set up intramural volleyball, softball, track and basketball games for girls in the school. Meck said the women's teams still didn't earn letters, but the school helped fund banquets and events.

"It was a nice addition. It was continued until Title IX allowed for women's sports," Meck said.

About 80 years after it started, the district opened Estrella Foothills High School in Goodyear. The school has 1,026 students. Its mascot is a wolf.

Youngker High School, the district's third school, opened in August 2007. The newest traditional school has 1,408 students and a mascot dubbed the Rough Rider.

This year, the district opened the Learning Center, a facility that houses alternative-education options and special-needs [services](#). The center has 106 students and is near Dean and Eagle Mountain roads in Buckeye.





"The size is the biggest change. Sometimes, you see that students don't have the relationship with teachers that we did," said Arlene McLaughlin, career and technical education director at the district.

Hurley said the goal of the 90th anniversary celebrations is to create more district unity among the three schools and learning center.

"Some of our focus community groups said they don't have the sense that we are a district," Hurley said.

That's why the school will host parades, a cook-off, baseball and football games with 90th anniversary themes at different campuses this month.

"It's exciting to see the growth for the future, but very important to honor the foundation on which that growth was built," Hurley said.

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