

Party for a friend

Branciforte school turns 80 years old

By JONDI GUMZ

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — One of the oldest schools in Santa Cruz will have a birthday party Friday.

Principal Mary Anne Salazar is inviting alumni to the 80th birthday celebration of Branciforte Grammar School, which opened in 1915 at North Branciforte Avenue and Water Street.

The school's glory days are detailed in a booklet, "Branciforte's Past," by Pam Brouwer, a parent who became unofficial historian during the diamond jubilee five years ago.

She collected historical information for students who were studying each decade of Branciforte's existence, and found alumni "remembered grammar school better than high school." Brouwer will sign copies of the booklet Friday.

The stately building was designed by a well-known architect, William Weeks, who also did the Boardwalk Casino and Santa Cruz High. Construction cost about \$74,000. When Ebert's Department Store opened nearby on Seabright, people thought he was crazy to locate in such a rural area.

During the 1930's, the school was renovated, with the Parent-Teacher Association helping pay for new curtains for the stage.

After World War II, the Eastside grew, with more children needing more classrooms. Branciforte Junior High was built, and after 1950, the grammar school went up only to sixth grade. Major repairs were undertaken during this decade to make the building strong enough to withstand an earthquake. The work proved to be a success when the Loma Prieta temblor struck at 5:04 p.m. Oct. 17, 1989.

Among the school's graduates is Tom McMillan, who served as student body vice-president and returned to be a teacher until his retirement this year.

Roy Nelson, superintendent of the Santa Cruz city schools, also took his turn at Branciforte, serving as principal from 1981-1987.

To get into the spirit of the event, students are being encouraged to wear costumes from past eras. Memorabilia on loan from alumni will be on display.

The party will begin at 10 a.m. when alumni can visit classes. The "world friendship garden" will be dedicated at 10:40 a.m. during an outdoor assembly. Volunteers will be recognized and the school orchestra will perform "Happy Birthday." An ice cream social will follow. For information, call 429-3898 or 423-0251.