

# Anaheim High reinvents itself

[By ERIC CARPENTER](#)

2009-10-10 00:00:00

ANAHEIM The historic campus of Anaheim High was established in 1898, making it the county's third-oldest high school. And in the past several years, its age was clearly evident.

Paint faded. Structures cracked. Landscape was mostly dirt and weeds. Portable classrooms crowded the campus.

Pride had dimmed.

But Thursday night, things were quite different after a three-year, \$34.6 million campus improvement, which includes 49 new classrooms, new paint, freshly planted landscaping and two new campus entrances.

District officials were so thrilled with the new look that they planned a “grand reopening” celebration for the historic campus during homecoming festivities and invited alumni to come take a look.

Hundreds of former students and teachers took them up on the offer Thursday night. Some cried tears of pride as the band led them in a singing of the school's alma mater.

“I'm delighted,” said Joe Carter, 80, the science department chairman at Anaheim High for 13 years beginning in 1956. “The city's oldest campus is finally getting the remodeling it deserves. It needs to be a place where students and teachers can have pride – and that's exactly what has happened here.”

Groups of students from across the decades returned to walk the halls, peek into their old classrooms and get a look at the new buildings and walkways.

Becky Harline joined a group of friends from the Class of 1974 and laid down next to the school's logo at the entrance to the main office for a photo.

Elmer Thill, 96, from the Class of 1932, walked the campus with his son, Richard, from the Class of 1958.

Elmer Thill talked to the current band director about how he learned to play clarinet at the school.

“I was looking for the old fish pond where we used to throw in the freshman,” he said. “They don't have that anymore. But the campus looks just great.”

The improvements include:

Renovated quads next to the music building, art classes and the cafeteria.

Removal of 42 portable classrooms around the campus, including in front of the historic gymnasium.

The addition of two regulation softball fields, eight basketball courts and a sand volleyball court

on four acres where portables once stood.

New east-west and north-south pedestrian corridors.

A 43-classroom building was redesigned to mirror the art deco motif of the school's main building.

The upgrades were funded as part of a \$325 million improvement plan districtwide, which included a \$132 million bond voters approved – Measure Z.

The district's handling of the project, however, was criticized by watchdog groups and became the subject of a grand jury investigation. The grand jury eventually determined that the district cleaned up its act beginning in 2005, when Superintendent Joseph Farley was hired and Tim Holcomb took over as deputy superintendent and chief facilities officer.

At Anaheim High, critics complained that the original design of the new classroom looked more like a prison. The design of the building was reworked to blend in with the rest of the campus. District trustees referred to the campus Thursday as the “jewel in the crown.”

“The transformation is truly remarkable,” said trustee Anna Piercy.

The school's band, choir and dance programs performed. Student-government representatives led tours.

“I think it's really interesting to see how people who went to this school a long time ago have come back to see how the school has changed,” said Daniel Guerrero, 16, a junior.

Ivan Recinos, who graduated last year and is a freshman at Cal State Fullerton, said when he received an invitation in the mail, he knew he had to come back to see the results.

“For a long time, I felt like Anaheim (High) didn't get as much acknowledgement as other schools,” he said. “Seeing everyone here feels really good. I'm proud. Very proud.”