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HOME/NEWS

Today's students celebrate new name, logo for Westside High in Jacksonville

But the Class of 1964 may ignore new name at 50th reunion

By Denise Smith Amos Fri, Aug 8, 2014 @ 7:21 pm | updated Fri, Aug 8, 2014 @ 7:29 pm



Denise.Amos@jacksonville.com Seniors Daniel Prado and Ryan Stephens raise the flag outside the newly named Westside High Friday.

It's a done deal: what was Nathan Bedford Forrest High last year is now Westside High this year. The Rebels are now Wolverines.

Duval Schools officials Friday debuted new school signs, logos and a mascot as dozens of new students attended orientation.

Mikayla Stanfield, a senior who was named Ms. Westside High, smiled when she saw for the first time the new logo and painting of a Wolverine, seeming to burst from a gymnasium wall.

"The wolverine shows you what kind of fight we have," she said. "It's like with the name change — we just kept going for it and we got it done."

In December, Duval's school board approved changing the name of Nathan Bedford Forrest High after most students, PTA and the School Advisory Council voted for the change. Most of the community members and alumni who filled

out surveys voted against the name change.

Stanfield said that when students voted, many expected to be ignored. They thought the school would remain named after Forrest, a renowned Confederate general and first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

Students were pleased with the results.

"It shows that we do have a voice and we can be heard," Stanfield said. 'It released a weight off my shoulders. It definitely makes me feel a lot better about going to this school. I feel comfortable with it."

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2:40pm

But even as school officials and students celebrated the change, some alumni said that conflict over the name change still smoulders.

Ann Withorn, a 1964 graduate of Forrest High who is a social policy professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Boston, said she has been trying for three months, mostly unsuccessfully, to get a discussion about the name change onto the program for her class's 50th reunion, which will be Aug. 22-23.

She also has tried to get her classmates to donate to a fund to help Duval Schools offset the cost of the name change, which has been estimated at \$242,000. So far, local donations are \$2,857 cash and in-kind donations of school signs.

Most of the goal — \$180,000 — would replace team uniforms that were old enough to be replaced already, Principal Gregory Bostic said.

Withorn said most of her classmates back then didn't know or didn't care about Nathan Forrest's history, but they should be able to at least discuss it now.

"Our group of that graduating class should be celebrating that we no longer have the stigma of that name on our school and that somebody took it away," she said. "If we can thank them for it, to me that's progress."

Organizers of the Class of 1964 reunion rebuffed Withorn's efforts.

"There is no place for your cause at our reunion," the organizing committee wrote in an email. "To pursue this during the planned weekend would be an intrusion."

Dr. Charles "Chip" Williams, an 1964 alum who lives in Louisiana, said although he doesn't object to the name change, he doesn't plan to contribute to the fund.

"That's what taxes are for," he said. "If the government cannot run schools effectively on the budget provided by taxes, they should either realign the budget, raise taxes ... or get out of the school business and allow the private sector to run it."

Kevin Saunders, a Jacksonville attorney who graduated from Forrest High in 1976, said he understands why the reunion committee doesn't want the Forrest name change battle to be discussed during the reunion.

"Why would anybody want to talk about something they can't do anything about?" he asked. "That's sort of like rubbing salt in a wound."

Saunders, like other opponents of the name change, criticized name-change advocates for not raising anywhere near the needed donations. He called their promises of help fraudulent.

"That is another reason that vote should be taken again or re-looked at, because of the expense," he said. "I don't see how you can justify the expense."

Regardless of who pays, changing the name removed a point of embarrassment from the school district and community and was a symbolic victory over racism, said Steve Lance Stoll, an adjunct professor who teaches sociology at Florida State College Jacksonville, Jacksonville University and Flagler College.

"Whether it's \$40,000 or \$400,000, it's worth the cost," he said.

Denise Amos: (904) 359-4083

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Ron\_Jax80

Friday, August 8, 2014 @ 11:45 pm

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The name change does appear to be a done deal. It is sad it was done merely for appeasement and the people for the name change has set a new precedent according to their interpretation of history.



The School Board and Superintendent Vitti was invited to the museum of Southern History, but they really didn't care to divert from their agenda.

Attempting to keep track of the renaming process of Forrest, allusive and misleading. Then as soon as the so called vote to rename Forrest to Westside High, Forrest was quickly swept under the rug.

I have yet to see the accountability. A precedent was set to care less about History promote an agenda that never made any sense except to maybe the appeasers.

Principal Bostwick reached out and the School Board backed by Superintendent Vitti burned the bridge.

I am a 1965 Forrest Alumni, and was there in 1959 for the naming of Forrest. Almost 50 years later and 50 graduating classes later I witness a fast track process that with a progressive agenda that took out Forrest unjustifiably. Recognizing the petition of a 160,000 signatures on change.org labeling Forrest as a KKK school was sad, disappointing and misleading.

Until this renaming process fiasco, I always thought education was to learn and get to the truth, not to help distort it. If only the School board members and their Superintendent had even considered visiting the museum of Southern History.

There were a lot of assumptions made based on the information that the backer supporting the name change would cover all the costs. That assumption is reflective of the entire renaming process, what ever it took to get the name changed.

I recommend waiting on the supporters of the name change to any up. We are finally seeing some of the results due to the name change and the name change process. I was surprised to see the request for donations surface, I assumed the funding would continue to be handled behind the scenes.



Snakepilot

Saturday, August 9, 2014 @ 11:49 am

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This whole episode seems an example of one of the rants by Rush Limbaugh on the agenda of the American Left.



Ron\_Jax80

Saturday, August 9, 2014 @ 2:47 pm

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Snakepilot,

It would be great if Denise Amos the TU Journalist, who wrote most of the stories, before, during and after the episode (Vitti's renaming process of Forrest, could share the disconnects between her and the school board.



The longest disconnect was no articles on Forrest from 15 Nov, until the day after day 1 of 2 to cast your vote (survey) for or against renaming process. The evening of the voting Denise was getting the information from the school board. Denise emailed me the information, as soon as she got it, then I forwarded it to the people I knew so they would know to vote.

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There was definitely a disconnect between the TU and the School Boards agenda.

The next biggest ploy by the School Board was the closed door session with the students and faculty of Forrest. I don't know if the session combined the faculty and students or if they were separated. There was very little said as to who (2 speakers to save Forrest and 2 to change the name). After the talks each student and faculty member was given a ballot to vote. That is the same as leading your horse to water and making him drink.

The biggest ploy is the statement that the name change would be paid for by the backers of the those promoting changing the name of Forrest and you can see how truthful that was.

Forrest had over 55 years of legacy, memorabilia, trials and tribulations.

It would be great if Denise Amos could share her side of the story.

If the TU were to compile every comment made on Forrest since Principal Bostic wrote his inspiring letter (Sept 2013) they would see there would be less than 15 percent commenting for the name change. If the TU went back to their online polls they would see about the same percentage.

The Westside High Wolverines is there by way of appeasement and Superintendent Vitti's recommendation (with his board members following inline). Westside High is Vitti's present to Principal Bostic for reaching out to the community and Forrest alumni.

What reaps the most reward deception or truth. I see no reward in the renaming of Forrest.

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