

CHAPTER THREE

The Great Move

As the struggle to consolidate and create the Poudre R-1 School District began in Larimer County, the schools of Fort Collins were also shifting and evolving to accommodate changing student demographics. This included Laurel, as kindergarten and the first few primary grades moved to Harris School in 1968. This act solidified the relationship between Laurel and Harris, as they now behaved as sibling structures that shared a greater student body, instead of both buildings housing children from kindergarten to sixth grade. Under this new arrangement, Harris hosted children from kindergarten into third grade, then passed them on to Laurel for fourth through sixth grade. In spite of how Poudre R-1 initially promised that Laurel's grades would be reunited once the school could accommodate more children, the arrangement lasted far longer than intended, and the relationship itself between Laurel and Harris was an enduring one. The constancy of this bond was especially beneficial as Laurel entered a great period of transition at the start of the 1970s. Luckily, she also had a strong leader to guide her: Bernard Keith Johnston, who returned as the Harris-Laurel Longhorn's principal in 1968.

A year after Mr. Johnston took the reins, the school board elected to schedule Laurel School and LaPorte School for replacement through the district's building program. What that meant for the future of the dedicated school was unclear—it could not be

denied that almost 63 years of educating Fort Collins' children had taken a toll on the buildings. Yet the school board did not decide whether the building program would involve a proper renovation for the aged schools, or their destruction and replacement by entirely new institutions. However, real action on the vote did not proceed until 1972. In the meantime, Laurel's students found themselves



Mr. Bernard Keith Johnston, Laurel principal

the recipients of an exemplary education, full of diversity and activities that ranged from creating a school magazine, holding Mexican fiestas, and even a bicycle hike that began at Mr. Johnston's home.

But as discussion continued to swirl around Laurel's fate, the school fought to show its relevance in a bid to avoid being utterly replaced. The year of 1972, The Coloradoan declared that "Laurel's old structure [was] no barrier to innovative ideas!" Laurel was refurbished with new carpets in the echoing hallways between classrooms, the office on the second floor was converted into a teacher aide room for small groups of students, a basement room was turned into an audio/visual material lab, and several small study areas were incorporated around the school. In addition to these improvements, Laurel also introduced their Independent Guided Education (IGE) program. The IGE allowed for Laurel's students to learn at their own paces and reorganized the school's educational structure. Instead of 'grades,' children were grouped together by unit, with students between a two-to-three-year age span in each unit. Four teachers and an aide were responsible for each unit, within which the teachers planned their lessons together. They also allowed for activity periods where students could explore their interests inde-



Lincoln School, renamed Harris School in 1938-1939.

pendently through voice recordings and printed materials.

In addition to this, Laurel also had the only elementary school woodworking classroom in Poudre R-1, headed by the indomitable Abbie Schnorr, whose tenure in all three buildings lasted over 40 years. For her, the class was a labor of love from day one. She and Dean Reimer, the head of industrial arts, began the program with hand tools and wood pilfered from dumpsters around town, and taught their students from the boiler room in the basement. Lessons only ceased after the transition from the boiler room to modular units used at Laurel's next location, when the movers managed to walk away with Mrs. Schnorr and Mr. Reimer's hard-won tools.

But Laurel's dedication to providing her students with an education in all areas extended beyond the boiler room. In 1973, Mrs. Schnorr and four other Laurel teachers named T Westbrook, Robbie McGuire, Buzz Tobin, and Sally Modahl (counselor), as well as one of Laurel's enduring paraprofessionals, Eileen Lebsack, also started the first outdoor education trip in the school district. In what would come to be known as Eco Week, Mrs. Schnorr, Mr.

Westbrook, Mrs. McGuire, Mr. Tobin, Mrs. Modahl, and Mrs. Lebsack took their charges to Meadow Mountain Girl Scout Camp for three days and two nights, giving them an adventure which many of the children might never have experienced or expected. For some of the students, this was their first time camping beyond their own backyards, and some only brought a sheet and blanket with which to sleep in the mountains. But this did not discourage the staff in any way. To give each student the best experience possible, the six core staff members took on the lion's share of work to make the event a reality, down to the smallest detail: They raised all the money for the program, bought the food, sought out the proper equipment, cooked the meals, cleaned the dishes, taught the classes, and created a love for the outdoors that has been a Laurel trademark ever since. In 1975, Poudre R-1 even adopted Eco Week as a program for all schools and moved the experience to the CSU Pingree Park campus.

Yet despite Laurel's student-oriented efforts and beloved place in the community, some still found reason to complain about the old school. Shortly following the news that Laurel was making strides to update itself and switch to the IGE program, a letter to the editor of the Coloradoan sailed in, publicly decrying the school. The erstwhile writer, R. Paul Drake, said that Laurel was old, outdated, and should be condemned, even going so far as to question the teaching ability of Laurel's educators (even though many of them had earned college degrees). Drake finished his tirade by declaring that "education is exactly what the students at Laurel are not getting." This caused great consternation throughout Fort Collins as her citizens, young and old, rushed to Laurel's defense.

Letters poured into the newspaper, declaring that students, parents, and employed teachers all loved working and learning at Laurel and had the utmost faith in her faculties. John and Jean

Yule, whose children had just moved into Laurel, wrote “In our opinion, the staff is not only highly trained and skilled, but they bring much more to their job. [They bring] qualities of energy, ingenuity, interest, and enthusiasm, and we have seen... [these qualities] in our children.” Several students also wrote in protest, including fifth grader Kitty Azari, whose mother was to be a mayor of Fort Collins. “I think most of the children love Laurel, and so do the teachers,” she reported. Even Charles G. Wilber, a professor at CSU, wrote in to the Coloradoan, giving his words of support for the school. In his firsthand experience, he wrote, “it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find a better school than Laurel anywhere in the United States.” The response to the editorial was so overwhelming that by February 15 (not even a week after the initial complaint had been published), the paper had to close their mailbox to further responses to the letter. In the end, the response was near unanimous—Laurel was a beloved fixture in the community, and those who would besmirch her honor would do so at their own peril.

Yet even as this amazing demonstration of loyalty played out across the newspapers, Poudre R-1 was considering how to best go about replacing Laurel. In 1972, a committee was formed to investigate potential sites for a new school, finally submitting their findings to the school board on March 31. In their report, the committee exhaustively detailed possible placement options while paying heavy regard to the socio-economic balance of the school, the cost of busing children in from the neighboring countryside, and the costs of helping the poorer children whose families could not afford family cars. The committee also didn’t want the children too close to the downtown area, where they might become prone to such destructive behaviors as loitering and mischievousness. Yet they could not have the school too close to CSU either, in order to

keep the children away from the undue influence of the students at the University.

In March of 1972, the school board decided to consider another radical option for Laurel in lieu of replacing it: modular buildings. This was a new concept at the time, in which schools would have one building surrounded by several modular units. These movable buildings could be moved to other schools in order to adapt to changes in enrollment from year to year, thus allowing Laurel a more flexible capacity. Overall, the school board was impressed with modular schools’ utilitarianism and resiliency, only lamenting that what the modules had in pragmatism, they lacked in beauty. Besides the modular renovation, the only other option the school board considered was one that would involve replacing LaPorte School (which would later become the Fullana Learning Center) and Laurel School separately. Yet should this program have been implemented, renovations and room additions at Harris school would have stood in for Laurel’s replacement entirely, condemning Laurel to closure. This was not a preferable option to the school board, as Harris School was almost as old as Laurel, had rooms that were too small to renovate and did not have enough land for the school to expand as the growing student body demanded. Due to these reasons, the school board concluded that turning Laurel into a modular school would be the best option.

In spite of the school board’s decision, some still preferred to renovate Harris and close Laurel—one such man being Harold Jungbleuth, who the school board hired to evaluate the plot of land they were considering for for Laurel’s new site. As the committee assigned to oversee the selection of the new school plot waited for Jungbleuth’s assessment, days turned into weeks, and weeks into months with no news. Rumors began to fly that Jungbleuth



Laurel Elementary School on Locust St., the modular Laurel.

was delaying the delivery of his findings in order to benefit his preferred plan, but the effects of his actions would have much farther-reaching consequences.

In the end, the committee recommended that the new Laurel be built close to the old Laurel, but as a modular unit. By April of 1972, the school board authorized the purchase of a plot of land in eastern Fort Collins and an architect, William Robb, was hired to design the new Laurel. However, all was not well with the new purchase. In July 1972, the owners of the land, Lee Stark and Gilbert McGarvey, resorted to legal action against Poudre R-1, claiming that the asking price had been set unfairly because expert testimony on the subject had been disregarded by the school board. The men said that they had evaluated their land with the help of third-party real estate agents, and using their expertise, had come to an asking price of \$194,190.50. Yet when the school had sent Jungbleuth to evaluate the site, his sparse appraisal had estimated the land to be valued at about \$27,500. Perhaps it would have been easier to abandon this particular plot, but it was the only serviceable, school-worthy land

that was both on the market and in the right area. Therefore, the school board was left with only one method of recourse, and that was to fight the inflated price. So, that same month, Superintendent Don L. Webber recommended that condemnation proceedings for the plot begin, regretfully stating that negotiations with Stark and McGarvey were of no more value.

By the end of July, the school board began the condemnation process for the land they needed. But it was not a smooth one—it took almost a year for the condemnation process to work its way through the courts, finally ending up in the Colorado Supreme Court in December of 1973. By Dec. 8, Judge Miller, who was working on the case, granted Laurel with an early holiday gift: As court proceedings continued, payment and work on the new school was allowed to continue. By the end of the month, Dick Graef, the Director of Administrative Services for Poudre R-1, sent a memo to Superintendent Webber reporting a favorable end to the trouble, with the agreed-on price for the land squaring out at \$41,860. Laurel's lawyers recognized that Stark and McGarvey could appeal, but were confident that the two men would do no such thing. Finally, by May 2, 1973, the court proceedings had ended favorably, and Laurel's principal, Mr. Johnston, could begin working with the architect, Robb, on the design of their new school. In spite of how the plans could not be finished until the various engineering tests and data work was done, Johnston still hoped to have the building finished that same year.

Yet even once the legal hurdles had been cleared, the path to the new Laurel was still fraught with difficulty. The problem was that a George Weitzel owned property that blocked the necessary road to Laurel, a property whose asking price (according to him) was \$1,500. But once again, the infamous Jungbleuth valued the

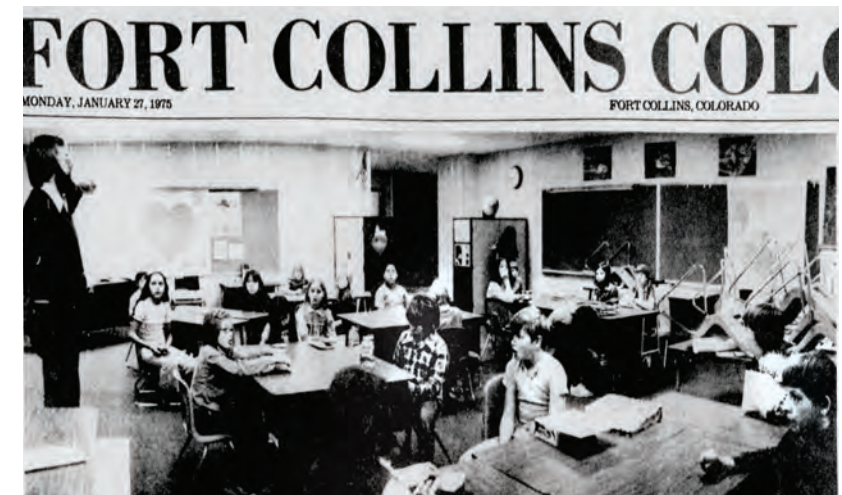
land at far less, saying that the blocking property was worth \$250. If the land was to be condemned the same way Laurel's actual site was, then the school would have to pay \$800 for the process alone. In order to avoid another battle in court, the school board offered Weitzel \$1,050 for his land—with the veiled assumption that if he refused, the school would pursue condemnation in court. In addition, Laurel also needed the land necessary for the extension of Locust St., property which was owned by Ben Olds and a generous Mr. Griffiths. In the end, the answer to Laurel's property struggles came from Olds trading part of his property with the school and Griffiths donating the rest of the required land along his southern boundary. Between the two men, Laurel was able to circumvent the property value problems mirroring Mr. Weitzel's land, and the cost to construct a connecting road to Laurel was covered.

With this done, the school board was finally ready to begin work on the new Laurel. As the new site hummed with construction workers, the Old Laurel continued to serve its student body in spite of problems stemming from the increased student population. The new building could not come soon enough, as the school was truly beginning to show its age in 1973: That year, Halloween festivities at Laurel had to be delayed due to plumbing problems. But by 1974, the new Laurel was almost complete, and her design was winning accolades for her architects. In fact, the shifting design of the modular units was selected to be exhibited at the convention of American Association of School Administrators that year, leading to a period of relative fame for the school.

The new school was to have a traditional core area surrounded with six movable units, each of which would be equipped with water and heating. The central building was to behave as a community center as well as the school's gymnasium, lunchroom, kitchen and

library. But beyond the building's functionality, the students and parents of Laurel planned to set up a Nature Center on school grounds, adding an ecological touch to Laurel that has been a recurring theme.

Finally, after \$792,000 and three years of work, the new and improved Laurel Elementary School was ready to open its doors by late January 1975. The 4th, 5th and 6th grade children moved to their new building the only way they knew how—they walked, carrying their belongings and school supplies in brown paper bags. Much like the stormy month when Hall had contemplated building Laurel School in the first place, Mrs. Lebsack remembered the chilly rain that beset the students and teachers as they moved to the new Laurel. Water dripped in freezing rivulets from lampposts and pooled on the ground, soaking the school supplies that students inevitably dropped as they walked, littering the streets with pencils and erasers. But once they arrived, the kids were delighted with their



First day at the new Laurel building, January 27, 1975. Mr. Westbrook, teacher.

new school, including a young Stephanie (Madsen) Pixler. Upon arriving at the new buildings, Stephanie cast her eye over her new school—she didn't know that what she saw was only supposed to be temporary, only that it was a far sight better than what she had just left behind. The temporary modules were covered with warm wooden facades painted with brightly colored circles that caught the eye, and inside, the children found classroom pods that allowed for rooms to be divided, creating a wide, open learning environment.

In addition to the physical change of moving to a new building, Laurel also underwent a few more integral changes to its physiology. A year after their move, Mr. Johnston, as Laurel and Harris' joint principal, decided to begin incorporating a bilingual element into the two schools. Laurel's sister school, Harris, went first, building the bilingual program grade level by grade level from kindergarten onward. Mr. Johnston did this gradually, always taking care to hire



Mexican migrants working in the fields around Fort Collins.

bilingual teachers to replace those who moved on to other prospects. This trend continued from Harris to Laurel, with resounding support from the parent and teacher communities of both schools. The incorporation of the Spanish language into the two schools was not merely done on a whim; it was a sensitive and sensible decision for the children each school served. One of the reasons the program was able to work was because of support from the active parent community of Laurel and Harris, which included CSU faculty and those who lived in the now largely Spanish-speaking Buckingham area. As such, the inclusion of the Spanish language was supported by both demographics as a culturally comprehensive and community-enhancing move.

The necessity for a bilingual program was especially apparent for the children of the predominantly Spanish-speaking migrant families from Buckingham, who attended school in the annex west of the main building. This was tricky at times, as these students' schedules varied widely as their parents travelled to different locations due to the nomadic and agricultural nature of their work. This meant that often the kids would attend school during both the academic year and the summer. But while others might have allowed such children to slip through the cracks, Laurel merely took the situation as a challenge to teach creatively. One of these dedicated teachers was Jim Thurston, the inaugural instructor for the bilingual program in the 1970s. He taught his students both in English and Spanish, thus doing the double-duty of helping strengthen his students' English skills while also providing them with an exemplary general education. With the aid of a fellow teacher, Mrs. Schnorr, he was even able to get buses to go into the countryside and pick up migrant kids during the summer, ensuring that no child was excluded at any time of year.

CHAPTER FOUR

An Interim

As Laurel moved through her period of turbulence and evolution, the U.S., too, found itself in a period of unrest. While Laurel built and moved to a new location, the U.S. struggled through the failed Bay of Pigs invasion during the spring of 1961 as well as escalating tensions with the Soviet Union. This was then followed by a period of grief when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated shortly thereafter. Then the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s swept the country with activism and courage, even beyond the second traumatic assassination of the decade when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. Yet even as these nation-shaping events flowered around the country, with equally remarkable displays of peace as there were of violence, Fort Collins and Laurel remained largely untouched. Laurel had always been a place of marked diversity and acceptance, even as the rest of the nation worked to catch up. Laurel's students also saw Neil Armstrong become the first man on the moon in 1969, igniting their dreams of space travel. Finally, the year that Laurel brought her students to her new location on Locust St., the Vietnam War also dragged to a close.

After the war ended and Laurel moved to her new building, the school was back to educating children in an engaging and immersive manner as the 1980s arrived. The new decade saw sixth graders continue nature trips to the CSU Pingree Park Campus

for Eco Week, as well as intermediate students' participation in an innovative sports program intended to help students be more engaged in school.

Eco Week was certainly the highlight of the year for most Laurel sixth graders, as they spent two nights and three days high in the Colorado Rockies. There, they bunked in Pingree Park, hiked to Mummy Pass and held an evening campfire at the end of their busy days. Karen Courtney, the school's vivacious music teacher from 1973 to 1996, led them through many a song around the fire, and even managed to convince the young pre-teens to square and line dance. They "were some great times," Mrs. Courtney grinned, thinking back on her mountain adventures. "We 'specials' [music, art and PE teachers] really appreciated getting to know those sixth graders in a different way (most of the time...)"



Team building exercise during Eco Week.

Another way that Laurel's teachers were able to connect with their students in a more meaningful way was through lunchtime sports tournaments, which became a highlight of each school year. The Laurel Sports Program was initiated by Richard Sadowske, the school counselor; Jim Ogan, a sixth grade teacher; and Bud Hill, the PE teacher. Together, they created a grassroots program that brightened Laurel's culture with friendly competition, while also filling the lunch recess with a pastime that brought all of Laurel together. As Laurel graduate Ashley Waddell recalls, "Whether it was flag football, basketball, or softball season, most students participated and got to experience the camaraderie of a sports team, and even improve our skills along the way! This, too, helped build friendships and trust across the student body, and let us get to know students outside of the classroom."

But even though the tournaments were only meant for fun, sometimes the school did go the extra mile to make them an event to remember. One of these highlights was the 1987 football 'Holiday Bowl,' when the field behind the school was officially marked with chalk, the national anthem was played, and the retiring secretary, Shirley McKenzie, was driven onto the field in a convertible, much to the delight and applause of the staff and student body seated on the sidelines.

Laurel also hosted many other amazing interactive days for their students, such as the M.A.S.H. day (a staff Halloween dress-up event) where the teachers, with the cooperation of the local National Guard, brought army tents and jeeps for the kids to see. Later, an annual fourth-grade tradition where the students staged a meeting between trappers, traders, and Native Americans became beloved as well. Inspired by the district's annual "Rendezvous" event, Laurel's version was full of authenticity for the students to explore.



LEFT: Memorabilia from the big game.
ABOVE: Sportsmanship after the Laurel Holiday Bowl.



With plenty of undeveloped land around the school that was ripe for adventure, the school held storytelling within an authentic homemade teepee and guided the kids through a variety of stations, immersing the fourth graders in Native American culture. The stations challenged the students' skills in archery and "cow chip" (frisbee) throwing, allowed them to compete in foot races, let them trade artifacts they had created, and taught them how to cook fish over an open fire. With activities such as these, it's easy to see how the Laurel Rendezvous quickly became a favorite for many years. One even ended with a sixth grade teacher, Karen Streeter, getting kidnapped by a man riding a red horse, leading the students on a daring rescue that students never forgot.

However, what happened to the old Laurel after the students trooped away into the rain in 1975? Not wishing to waste a building that was still serviceable, Poudre R-1 allowed an adult high school and special junior high education program to use the premises. A year after the initial exodus, the North Central Association of Schools and Colleges officially accredited the Adult School Program as Centennial Adult High School. Three years later, the Alternative Learning Center was incorporated into the school's Day Program, serving middle and high schoolers looking for other programs of study.

But as the old Laurel continued with her mission of education and enlightenment, Fort Collins itself was evolving. The town that had endured since the mid-19th century was in a continual process of modernization, and as such, the old Laurel found itself in the unique position of being one of the last public buildings in Fort Collins designed by Montezuma Fuller. As a result of Fuller's impact on the town and the old Laurel's exhibition of his utilitarian style of architecture, the subject of granting the old Laurel historic designation was broached in 1983. If it were passed, historical designation would mean that the building could not be modernized or torn down, which could limit its current-day uses. This was the sticking point for old Laurel's designation, especially given that she was still a working school. But on a lovely Tuesday in May 1984, the Fort Collins City Council voted on an ordinance to designate Laurel's historical standing. The vote was close, turning out four to three in favor of Laurel's historical landmark standing, which was officiated on May 31, 1984. This officially made the old Laurel a local landmark in Fort Collins, and included it in the new 217-acre Laurel School Historic District.

Yet even as the old Laurel was cemented in the history of



Laurel rendezvous, 1985.

Fort Collins, the new Laurel undertook a changing of the guard. After 22 years as Laurel's principal, the indefatigable Mr. Johnston was finally ready to retire. He passed his mantle on to Luisa Vigil, a warm, attentive woman and the first Latina principal in Poudre R-1. She never wanted to be a distant, unreachable figure in the school, but made herself an immediate presence in the children's lives. Often-times, when hamburger day rolled around in the Laurel

cafeteria, she would stand at the end of the procession with the condiments and squeeze each kid's initials onto their food. Unfortunately, Mrs. Vigil's tenure as principal only lasted one year—she died just before school began in 1985.

She was followed by Sherry Ritch, a woman of great energy, who watched over the school with a steady hand. During her first year as principal, Laurel considered changing its name from Laurel Elementary School to one modeled after Mr. Johnston, to honor how he saw Laurel through her move and implemented Laurel's bilingual program. In the end, the school decided to leave the decision to the parents, who had an election on the matter in July of 1986. The initial parent survey had revealed that Laurel's parents were divided, with 77 votes in favor, and 73 in disagreement. On one hand, some

thought that the name 'Laurel' no longer had any significance for the school, as it was no longer on Laurel Street, and that the confusion between the old Laurel and the new was only increased by keeping the name. On the other side, many parents appreciated the 80 years of tradition behind Laurel's name and wondered if there might be a more noteworthy figurehead in Laurel's future whose name would be worth honoring. The results of the election came in a mere two days later with a solid decision: The name 'Laurel' was to stay. "We just don't feel that [a name change] is necessary," came Mrs. Ritch's brisk reply when asked for comment.

But despite the personnel changes and the question of renaming Laurel, the school never stopped trying to improve itself, particularly through the arts and personal exploration. For instance, Laurel was inspired by a sixth-grade teacher, Mrs. Streeter, to help children become more rounded individuals by appreciating their talents and strengths outside of the academic realm. To do so, Mrs. Streeter worked to create the aptly named Discovery Program (a plan to address the needs of different kinds of giftedness), which captured the imagination of the school by declaring that there were many ways to be smart. This was revolutionary thinking for the time, particularly when education had typically relied on purely academic learning as a measure of success. But through the Discovery Program, Mrs. Streeter was able to bring weekly enrichment opportunities to Laurel's students, allowing them to expand their horizons and learn about their own capabilities as multifaceted people. "Laurel's teachers and staff were comprehensively devoted to developing the full humanity of students for a lifetime," former student Brandon Kirby said over a cup of coffee, "well beyond the elementary school walls." As a result of this holistic development, Laurel's students found themselves on the receiving end of an edu-

cation that developed their full range of potential, growing them emotionally as well as intellectually.

Laurel also began to invest in its arts programs in earnest during the 1980s and into the 1990s. The musicals were largely orchestrated by the music teacher of the time, Mrs. Courtney, although the productions took labor enough for a village. And Laurel's village responded with gusto. Each year, the art teacher and the PE teacher joined the cause, building sets and painting backgrounds along with Mrs. Courtney's husband, Lynn. In the meantime, Mrs. Courtney took on the role of director, teaching her students the songs, lines, and dance moves they'd need for the production. From their efforts, musicals like "The Inside Pitch" and "Goin' Buggy" came to life on Laurel's stage (which itself was an anomaly, as Laurel was one of the few elementary schools in the city to have its own stage). In fact, the beautiful outcome of the joint efforts between the music, art, and PE departments were so acclaimed that they became an annual tradition that stands to this day.

When the children of Laurel weren't singing and dancing on stage, they were given the opportunity to perform more formally, even competitively. The 'Expressions of Laurel' choir was so successful that it represented its school at the Colorado Music Educators Convention (CMEA) three times during the late 1970s to early 1990s. Because elementary schools were not usually chosen to perform at CMEA, the event was a particularly unique honor for Laurel and allowed her children to travel to the Broadmoor Hotel in Colorado Springs for an eye-opening experience.

Truly, the list of opportunities that Laurel provided for her students is nearly endless and full of equally as much joy. To bring education to life, Laurel held events that covered every aspect of learning and development. There was Laura Walton's

States and Capitals Competition for fifth and sixth graders, the Mayflower Experience for sixth graders, the Book Buddy Partnership for primary and intermediate grades, the Poetry Café, the Laurel Longhorn Broadcasting Network (LLBN) and much more. From the serious to the ridiculous, Laurel's teachers spared no expense in what they could give to their students, making memories that followed children long after they left Laurel's halls.



**"World's Largest Burrito" 1985,
55.5 feet long.**

After all, who could forget Phil Huerta, a fourth-grade teacher and former Fullana Elementary School principal, leading the school in the creation and consumption of the World's Largest Burrito? Even if Guinness World Records did not respond to the momentous occasion, everyone who participated knew, in their hearts, that they were the true burrito champions of the world.

Overseeing the logistics for many of these adventures was long-time office manager Sandy Kammerzell. Hired by Mrs. Ritch to replace Mrs. McKenzie, Mrs. Kammerzell was the bubbly center within the office space, facilitating many programs conceived by Laurel's creative teachers. And facilitator though she was, Mrs. Kammerzell never missed a chance to participate in the school's programs herself. In fact, some will remember her speaking over the P.A. into the gym, pretending to be the captain of Dove Airlines as she sent students on a fictitious journey to Oslo, Norway for the

presentation of Laurel's Peace Prize, an event created by another of Laurel's fantastic staff, Tinka Greenwood. Just like Mrs. Kammerzell and Mrs. Greenwood, everyone at Laurel threw themselves into every aspect of education with endless energy and spirit. Perhaps it was this dedication and the results it created that made many teachers consider this period as the 'golden years' of Laurel, when everyone worked together to make the school as great as it could be—which was noted by Laurel's students. One former student, Brandi (Harris) Molin, summarized her time at Laurel during this period as "the perfect fit for my outside-loving, athletic, tomboy side as well as my academic side with the math Olympiad team, Mrs. Streeter's gifted and talented group, the science fair, dissecting chinchillas, and so much more. [Laurel] was truly an exceptional place for me and my willingness to learn."

One could wonder why a small elementary school in the heart of northern Colorado would go to such great lengths for its children, particularly at every level of the institution. After all, Laurel was only an elementary school meant to prepare her children for junior high, no more, no less. Yet even if this was Laurel's technical mission, the staff never treated it as such. To them, education was always something bigger, something better than rote learning and sums and books. To them, as Mrs. Streeter put it when asked to describe how Laurel impacted her, "every person who lived and grew in the Laurel School Family enriched his/her life with the educational experiences and genuine care offered there. It is the hope that the promise of these individuals brightened and benefited the world around them." It was this culture, this spirit of giving back and celebrating the good in every child, that helped to make Laurel the special place it became, and continues to be to this day.