

Flag pole project secures legacy of Portville's Class of 1959

By Tom Donahue, Olean Times Herald | Posted: Monday, July 7, 2014 2:15 pm

PORTVILLE — The Class of 1959 at Portville Central School had been looking for a legacy project, a way to commemorate their enduring camaraderie and loyalty, when happenstance stepped in.

“We had considered a number of things over the years, planting trees, plaques for deceased classmates, but nothing ever flew,” said Tom Torrey, a member of the class and part of its “local nucleus” that still meets a couple of times a year and publishes a periodic newsletter.

About two years ago he bumped into a classmate, a trustee for the Portville Historical and Preservation Society, who gave Mr. Torrey a status report on restoration of Portville's historic one-room schoolhouse at Bedford Corners, just north of the village of Portville on Route 305.

“My friend said they were going to replace an old flag pole at the school and, gosh, almost immediately I said, ‘Holy cow!’” said Mr. Torrey.

He took the flag pole idea to his class committee, agreement was unanimous, and the class pledged \$5,500 to erect a new flag pole and build a memorial brick walkway at its base.

But there was a problem. “We had maybe \$300 in our treasury,” said Mr. Torrey.

“So I put out a plea to just our classmates and within two months we had almost \$10,000,” he said, enough for the flag pole project and enough left over to fund two scholarships, which will be presented to two members of this year's graduating class at Portville Central School.

The presentation will be part of activities surrounding the historical society's dedication of the restored schoolhouse at 11 a.m. on Sunday, July 13. (See related story.)



Flagpole project

Cindy Keeley, president of the Portville Historical and Preservation Society, and Tom Torrey, a member of Portville's Class of 1959, sit on rocks near the flag pole and brick walkway that the class contributed to the one-room schoolhouse restoration project at Bedford Corners.

Many members of the Class of 1959 will be returning that weekend to celebrate their 55th reunion, three days of activities ending with Sunday's schoolhouse dedication.

Following those formal dedication ceremonies, the class will hold a meeting in the school and award the two scholarships. The 2014 Class of 1959 Scholarship Award, a \$2,000 scholarship, will be presented to Makayla Wells, valedictorian of this year's graduating class at Portville Central. The second scholarship, the \$1,500 Joanne Nasuta Sosnowski Memorial Award, will be presented to Stephani Sosnowski, a student at Fredonia State and the granddaughter of the late Mrs. Sosnowski.

The latter award will be presented in memory of all deceased members of the Class of 1959 and holds special meaning for the surviving classmates.

"Back in 1955, when we were freshmen, Joanne Nasuta was elected class secretary, and she served as secretary ever since, right up until her death two years ago," said Mr. Torrey. "She was the kind of glue that kept our class together."

It may have taken years for the Class of 1959 to determine how best to preserve its legacy, but Mr. Torrey said when his classmates see the flag pole and brick walkway, complete with the names of all 68 class members engraved in gold-colored bricks, they'll agree it was worth the wait.

Besides, he said, fate had a hand in sealing this deal.

Mr. Torrey was going through some childhood memorabilia when he came across a program that included the motto for the Class of 1959. The motto reads: "The foundation of life is built with the bricks of character."

It was another "holy cow!" moment.

"It's almost like we could foresee that we were going to do a brick project here," he said.

(Contact reporter Tom Donahue at tdonahue@oleantimesherald.com.)