

Dunbar Reunion Celebrates Heritage

“Homecoming Around the County”

Ann Williamson
Staff Writer

Every two years the alumni from Dunbar High School return to their roots and gather for a reunion weekend in the county seat of Green Cove Springs to celebrate their proud heritage. These reunions have become a tradition and have been occurring for over 30 years.

Nearly 100 former students of Dunbar High School attended the reunion and traveled back to Clay County from California, Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia.

Before desegregation in the mid-1960s, Dunbar High school was the hub of education for the black population of Clay County and students who did not live in Green Cove Springs were bussed in from all over the county, including the areas of Middleburg and Orange Park.

The former high school, built in 1942, was named in honor of Paul Laurence Dunbar who was a noted African-American poet, novelist, and playwright of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The reunion was held on Friday, June 20 and Saturday, June 21 and was based on the theme “Homecoming around the County” with activities in Middleburg, Green Cove Springs and Orange Park.

On Friday a fish fry was held on Forman Circle at Hunter-Douglas Park in Middleburg,



Ann Williamson/staff
Cynthia Brister, Johnathan Andrew Brister's mother, accepts scholarship award donated by the Dunbar High School Reunion board of directors.



Ann Williamson/staff
Dunbar High School Class of 1957: Frank Jenkins, Eva Mae Simmons, Geraldine Brown Longmire, Issac Brown.

followed by a picnic on Saturday afternoon in Spring Park, Green Cove Springs. Later that evening a banquet was held at the Astoria Hotel in Orange Park.

The school colors were purple and white and the “Panthers” the school mascot, so many of the attendees wore these colors as a reminder of the school spirit that still exists among the former student body.

At the banquet, Barbara Garner offered the greeting and said, “We have nothing left but our mission to preserve our heritage – the school is gone. We all know we were there and we want to continue to let everyone know we were there. We enjoyed our days at Dunbar High School and our faculty who taught us, led us and guided us. We owe them a debt of gratitude. They gave it their all. Sometimes they even stepped in the role as our parents and cared enough for us to make us stronger and better people.”

Garner recognized two former faculty members were present at the banquet, Mrs. Mary Tuggles and Mrs. Jenkins.

The program included the invocation by Isaac Brown, the singing of the alma mater, a litany, honoring departed classmates and faculty with a moment of silence, and service awards.

This year, the classes of 1963 and 1964 were honored.

Highlight of the banquet was the awarding of a scholarship to Johnathan Andrew Brister of Orange Park. The award was presented to his mother, Cynthia Brister. Johnathan is the son of Cynthia and Anthony Brister and is a product of the Clay County School District from elementary through high school. He maintained an A/B average throughout his school years and is a member of the Beta Club and National Society of High School Scholars. He plans to attend Florida A&M University in the fall and majoring in architecture. Johnathan said his plans also include joining the Navy once he graduates from college.