

# History of

# Harbins Elementary School

The history of Harbins Elementary is found largely in the history of its community. In researching the stories of our area, we have found that it is a community rich in family, neighbors, and pride.

Dacula High School students Amber Brown, Eli Stancil, and Daphne Sims wrote one of the best descriptions of the Harbins community history in 1994 when they were proposing the name “Harbins Elementary” to the Board of Education. The following account is an adaptation of the students’ work:

Life was hard in the early 1800s in the area east of the Alcovia River. The population was forced to struggle with the stress of everyday life and lived in fear of Indian assault. The majority of families struggled to make their living by farming. Frequently, widows and small children were left to take care of farm chores that were previously attended to by the men in their families. In 1840, John Harbin filled the role of community provider by becoming captain of what became known as Harbin’s Militia District and later, the Harbins community (the apostrophe was dropped from the original “Harbin’s”). His duties included taking care of the poor, widows, and children, and defending against attack. In addition, Harbin was Justice of the Peace (1849–1853), and the 1850 census report described him as 68 years old, the owner of a 660-acre plantation, and worth \$2,000.

There has been a tremendous amount of pride in the Harbins community for many years, indeed. In a

## FAST FACTS

**Address:** 3550 New Hope Road  
Dacula, GA 30019

The following have served as principals of Harbins Elementary School:

1995–2004	Dr. Patty Heitmuller
2004–Present	Dr. Cindy Truett

**School Colors:** Navy Blue, Burgundy and Hunter Green

**School Mascot:** Hawk

newspaper column called “The Chamber Speaks”, Jim Matthews, Manager of the Gwinnett County Chamber of Commerce, shared what he learned about the Harbins community while attending a special meeting at the Community House:

“From around every corner there seems to shout the expression ‘We are proud of ourselves.’ It certainly is not boasting either-- it is what has been achieved following a lot of honest to goodness hard work. To really show how organized they are in Harbins, when they have one of their famous covered dish dinners, the treasurer finds that the total cost to the club amounts to only slightly over eight dollars-- and when one considers the numbers served, the individual is filled with amazement as to how



it can actually be done. Without any trouble, it would be easy to fill a book with what has been accomplished and what is now being done in the community. Hats off to a group of individuals who have proven first hand to the world around them how effective organized effort can be.”

Schools have long been an important part of the community's history. There were several schools located in the Harbins area including: Lowrey's Academy (Bold Springs Road), Carter's Academy (New Hope Road), Ebenezer (at the corner of the cemetery at Ebenezer Baptist Church), and Oak Grove (Harbins Road). Each of these schools housed one or two teachers. In 1938, the four schools consolidated into the Harbins School. When the Harbins School closed in 1957, the land went back to the community.

In his “History of the Harbins Community for the Last 50 Years”, J.W. Knight wrote, “Last year the County Board consolidated Harbins School with Dacula. The people of the community went to the Board and asked for the school building to be used for a Community Center, and this request was granted. We now hold the title to the property, and if we continue to work as the people here have in the past, we believe the people here will live in peace and harmony for the next 50 years and longer. We are always proud for others to visit the Harbins Community and see the progress that is being made.”

In 1995, the Harbins School returned to its community through citizen passage of the 1993 School Bond Referendum. Dacula High School students and members of the community were instrumental in convincing the Gwinnett County Board of Education that the new school could only be named Harbins Elementary. As the students wrote, “The people of the community are proud of their heritage, and Harbins Elementary School is the obvious and most popular choice for naming the new school.”

Since 1995, the staff, students, and community have worked together to ensure the Harbins Legacy will live on. In the school foyer, there is a large mural depicting the rural setting that typified Harbins for many years. Included in the mural is a scene of the “old school” with teacher Sadie Hall standing in front to greet her students. Across from the mural, there is a permanent display of pictures from the old Harbins Consolidated School configured with class and staff pictures of the second wave of “Harbins Originals” who opened the school in 1995. When people who have lived in the area for several years come to vote, they love to stop and look at familiar scenes and faces in the display. Most importantly, the

staff has made it a top priority to maintain a welcoming environment that is so characteristic of the community it serves.

When the facility was dedicated in the spring of 1996, dozens of people who had attended the first Harbins School as well as Lowrey's Academy, Carter's Academy, Ebenezer School, and Oak Grove School participated in the dedication festivities. Mr. J.W. Benefield, a former GCPS Superintendent, Oak Grove student, and Harbins resident, shared the keynote address.

The school population grew by leaps and bounds from 1995-2004... from 590 to 1580 students!! To accommodate the tremendous growth, the citizens once again approved funding for a new school-- Alcova Elementary. Approximately 700 Harbins students and their families became the nucleus for their sister school.

Throughout this growth and change, Harbins has been a contributor to the local community and the wider world. Students and staff contribute annually to local food banks and organizations assisting those in need. The Harbins community has always been ready to assist families dealing with anything from debilitating illness to house fires, and loss of family members. Annual fundraising for the American Red Cross spiked as students and staff responded to the devastation of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 and Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2007, the school's total contribution to the American Cancer Society, after nearly a decade of support, topped \$100,000! All these efforts, and more, represent the school's willingness to build leaders as well as learners.

New students and staff comment on the school's sense of tradition. As previously described, there is a strong tie to the community. Within the school, traditions bind. Events such as hoe-downs and sock-hops, Breakfast with Santa, and Instructional Fairs bring out Harbins' families. The Teacher-of-the-Year parade is the Harbins way of honoring each year's most exceptional teacher. End-of-school year events include Lunch on the Lawn, the Fifth Grade Walk, and the Fifth Grade Celebration honoring Harbins Hawks who are moving on to middle school.

In 2005, Harbins Elementary enjoyed a celebration of 10 years of Excellence in Leading and Learning along with the completion of an addition to the existing facility and several renovations. The media center, cafeteria, and gym were expanded. An additional 24 classrooms were added with the completion of a new two-story addition, as well as a new computer lab. If history repeats itself, the community won't be surprised to see a Harbins area cluster emerge one day.