

Saving history

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Petitions are floating around Galion. They are asking the Galion board of education to reconsider its October decision to demolish the old Galion High School. Unofficial estimates as of Wednesday number the signatures at over 300 in support of saving the Church Street building.

Carole Kemle sees the 1917 building as a place to honor the teaching legacy of Galion. "There is no place to honor all those educators and students to 2007. It is a great place to document and save this history."

Kemle named a few of the teachers, that impacted her life: Miriam Sayer, Helen Smith, Josephine Tracht and Mrs. Chase. "They took their teaching to a professional level — an honorable profession."

Kemle sees saving the 1917 building as honoring the teaching history of Gallon. "It's a chain effect — teacher impacts student and student impacts the world."

"Keep it," says Noel Mason. "Use it. There are plenty of organizations who will use the facilities. The building is a part of this town's culture and personal histories."

Nancy Cummings thinks the old Galion High School should be saved "because there is a really good plan to save it. Because some things are worth fighting for. Because once it's gone, it's gone. Because future generations deserve to see this building and know what is possible with a little bit of hard work and determination. Because it is an absolute outrage that demolition is even being considered. Because there is a very viable plan on the table to repurpose the building but it needs a chance. Because the pessimistic Galion Board of Education won't have to live with the long term effects of their mistakes. Because pessimism is no excuse not to try something new."

"I don't think it's going to be an empty building," said Marti Cecil. "I think it can be used for lots of things. I'm really impressed with the brainstorming and ideas that were presented at the meetings (summer meetings of the Cultural Arts and Conference Center)."

"There are plenty of meeting rooms," said Cecil. "Do we have to tear down everything that's beautiful?"



INQUIRER PHOTO/RACHEL MENDELL

The former Galion High School building is the center of attention for a large group of people desiring to see it be reused rather than demolished.

"I remember when the old hotel sat vacant for a lot of years," said Dan Derfler, "and the building was in terrible shape — the roof was collapsing and it was in a sad state of disrepair. Many would have called for it to have been torn down and if it had been we would now have a few more parking spaces uptown instead of the gem on the public square that now exists."

"We're now facing the prospect of losing one of Galion's true historic treasures, the old Galion High School building. How many thousands of GHS graduates spent several years of their lives within those walls getting an education and preparing them for the world that awaited them?"

"Saving this grand old building is not going to have far reaching effects in our nation, or even our entire state," Derfler said, "but it is going to affect our lives right here in Galion. My son, who now lives in Virginia, on one of the occasions when he came back to visit, took a camcorder and went around town photographing all the places in town where he lived and also all the schools he attended because it really meant something to him to hold on to that piece of his past."

"I'm not saying we can live in the past," said Derfler, "of course we can't. We can't change the past but we can change the course of the present and affect the future in one of two ways. We can eliminate all vestiges of the past by destroying our historical legacy or we can try to preserve it by refusing to let our past disappear for convenience sake."

A past which will be lost forever — if the old High School building goes, it isn't coming back."

"When I look at the old high school," said Missy Harris, "I can see Galionites of all ages and backgrounds bustling around the beautiful building, striving for a Galion that is more hopeful, more industrious, more helpful to each other as human beings and fellow citizens, partners in improving our city. Diverse programs could serve the community effectively and could be housed harmoniously."

"Ideas that have been researched for the proposed re-use of the high school building include but are not limited to: Job training programs; family mediation services; counseling services; arts and music instruction and performance; office space; conference center facilities, to serve the needs of groups both from within and outside Galion; movie projection in the auditorium of classic and foreign films; a sewing center; a gardening center; an astronomical observatory; use of the gymnasium by a variety of community groups who have expressed interest; martial arts and yoga instruction; a hub for non-profit organizations; a computer lab for resume preparation and job searches; a recording studio; a film and video lab; a weight loss center; a small business development office; teacher certification programs; continuing

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education for adults; an art gallery; an Internet cafe; a tutoring center; a college exam prep center; meeting space for community organizations, with close proximity to the center of town; a beautifully restored, historic auditorium that can't be matched in modern construction; and a reception hall in the former cafeteria (original gymnasium) for hosting family reunions, wedding receptions, and dances. As you can see, the limits are only those of limited imagination. This is a community asset that can be utilized for the benefit of the whole community."

Petitions in support of saving the old Galion High School can be found at Rite Aid, Poland Tru Value Hardware, Pop's Sweet Shoppe, Pizza Hut, Charley's Market, M&R Restaurant and Darlene's Dari-Bar. For more petition information call 419-468-9125.

For those who are too far away to sign a local petition they can get online and go to <http://www.petitiononline.com/1917ghs/petition.html> Also, the MySpace site is live, and the URL is: www.myspace.com/saveghs. All old Galion school buildings are featured at www.oldschools.com.

Petitions bear the following language: "To the Galion City Schools Board of Education: The undersigned urges the Board of Education to allow the re-use of the old Galion High school buildings so that it can remain a community asset."