

Anderson Journal

Local schools are playing the name game

BY ANNA B. MITCHELL
staff writer

The two oldest schools open in Anderson – by name if not location – are T.L. Hanna High and McCants Middle.

And it is no accident that they are also the only two schools in the 15-school system named after people, not places, in Anderson County.

McCants, founded as Anderson Junior High in 1935, is named after Elliott McCants, a teacher and superintendent for 45 years in Anderson until he retired (at age 80) in 1945. Hanna is named after that school's first principal, a man who presided over Anderson Girls High for decades and stuck around for a few more years in an honorary position.

Since the late 1960s, however, Anderson School District 5's school-naming policy has encouraged its institutions to be named by their geography – evoking the name of an old community, natural feature (like a creek) or a road. Exceptions can be made if some prominent individual has been dead at least 10 years, but the school system's Board of Trustees has stuck with geography for the last half century.

With those guidelines in mind, Anderson School District 5 has announced it is open to anyone's ideas for naming a new middle school to be built on Dobbins Bridge Road near the intersection of S.C. 28 Bypass.

Ann Huitt, an Anderson District 5 board member for more than 30 years, said her colleagues try to avoid politics and controversy where possible.

"Traditionally, schools in South

Carolina have been named for places," Huitt said. "Otherwise, emotions can get in there, and someone gets hurt."

In the case of McLees Elementary, which opened in 2003 on Dobbins Bridge Road, the school was named after an older school that Huitt said was still standing when she joined the school board in the 1970s. A picture of the aged building hangs in the new school today.

"Looking out the front door of McLees, you can see the property where the old McLees once stood," Huitt said. "People in that community had such wonderful memories of going to school there."

Bill Baker, spokesman for the school district, said the board recognized a long time ago that there are far more people who deserve to have a school named for them than there are institutions available. Naming a school is serious business, he said, seeing as the community will likely have to live with that name for decades.

Whole communities within the district can become identified with the school in their midst, he said. Schools such as Homeland Park Elementary, Centerville Elementary and Nevitt Forest Elementary stand out.

The passion evoked by these institutions is most apparent when one is slated for closure – officials faced organized opposition from parents, alumni and neighbors when South Fant closed as an elementary school in 2003 only to be reopened as an early-child development center the following year.

"People feel strongly about our schools," Baker said. "We want a name that people



Michelle Mogavero/Staff

NAME THAT SCHOOL: The Calhoun Academy of the Arts doesn't draw its name from the famous South Carolina statesman – at least not directly; rather, the elementary school is located on Calhoun Street.

are happy and comfortable with."

He will continue compiling suggestions for the Dobbins Bridge Road school until Nov. 25 and has collected about 25 suggestions so far (including Dobbins Bridge Middle). Names will be submitted to the school board's building committee, and that group will make a recommendation to the full board.

The new middle school will replace Southwood Middle, which will retain its name as it is transformed into an arts

academy for middle- and high-school students. Located just southwest of S.C. 28 Bypass, the new school isn't far from the Anderson Regional Airport, Three Mile Creek, Big Generostee Creek and the West Market Child Development Center.

To submit a name suggestion, contact Baker at BillBaker@anderson5.net or 260-5040 for more information.

Contact Anna B. Mitchell at 356-8183 or amitchell@andersonjournal.com.