

Old Davie School Museum shows visitors Broward's past

Museum, structures capture the spirit of a pioneer town

By C. Ron Allen | South Florida Sun-Sentinel - April 20, 2008

Davie - The old Davie School is back in session.

After closing its doors for almost 20 years, the early landmark of [Broward County](#)'s westward development reopened in 1998 as a historical museum.

A group of residents created the [Davie](#) School Foundation in 1984 and later restored the 90-year-old building at 6650 Griffin Road, making it Broward's oldest existing school building.

Every year, about 2,000 schoolchildren tour the museum, getting a feel for what it was like to sit behind a 1920s desk, pump water from a well and juice an orange. They also learn about Davie's pioneer days, when people milked cows in the corral and got their eggs from chickens, not a grocery store.

"I enjoyed the part where we got to make orange juice and [learned] how they had to grow their own food and sew their own clothes," said Madison Worley, 7, a second-grader at Flamingo Road Christian Academy in [Cooper City](#), during a recent tour.

At the museum, visitors can eat produce fresh from a farm, maintained by a Junior Master Gardeners 4-H Club. Adults can step back in time through artifacts, photographs, and hands-on activities to investigate life as it was in the largely undeveloped rural area that was known for farming.

Former students like Noreen Mains Medlin travel from Florida's west coast to serve as one of the costumed docents who provide guided tours of the museum. "I do it as often as I can. It's always been interesting," said Mains Medlin, who owned an airboat tour business in Davie before she moved. "They need to know where their parents grew up, they need to know the changes that have happened.

At the recent 90th anniversary celebration Mains Medlin listened to town officials share their vision of a town gradually shedding its image of a farming community and becoming a university-driven, high-tech corridor.

They talked "about what they're getting ready to do with Davie with more homes and it breaks my heart when I think about it because I lived here when there was nothing but [Everglades](#)," she said.

Bobbie David also had some lasting memories of her time as a teacher in the school house, dating back to 1969.

"It was hot," the former fifth-grade teacher said, adding that they had no air conditioning. "I'm telling you. You'd take the kids outside to play and come back in, and you could hardly stand it."

The Broward School Board gave Davie five acres and architect August Heiger, who built many buildings in Dade and Broward counties, designed the two-story structure. It was dedicated on May 10, 1918, as the first permanent school building in the Everglades. It continued operating as a school until 1980 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

C. [Ron Allen](#) can be reached at crallen@sun-sentinel.com or 954-385-7917.

For more on the museum, go to Sun-Sentinel.com/olddavieschool