

On October 6, 1975, Cottonwood Elementary School opened its doors to 575 elementary school students that had been sharing classrooms with other schools and using spare rooms in churches. The students, ranging from kindergarten to sixth grade, packed their belongings into tote trays and boarded school buses, eager to settle into their own classrooms. Cottonwood provided ample room for the students in its 24 classrooms, although the cafeteria wasn't quite finished when the students arrived. Students were bussed to Evergreen for lunch for several months.

The grounds of the school were also not completed at the time that students moved in. Students helped out during their lunch recesses, clearing rocks off the ground so that grass could be planted. The beautiful trees that can now be seen around the campus were also not planted at this time. With no student council, funds were not readily available for the supply of these types of materials. The school held a used book sale, with books costing less than \$0.25 a piece. All of the proceeds from the book sale went toward improving the school grounds, including the purchase of the mulberry trees that can be seen by classroom doors. The students celebrated Arbor Day by planting these trees, placing a special time capsule beneath each one.

The first few years that Cottonwood School was open, the students were very involved in community projects. Second graders painted trash cans to be placed around the school grounds. The third grade classes worked very hard at Casa Grande Mountain Park, cleaning the grounds and painting benches and other equipment to make the park better. Community donations covered the costs of paint, equipment, and other supplies. The third grade also completed an exhibit about past and present day Casa Grande and constructed a Bicentennial quilt. Both of these special projects were displayed at the Casa Grande Historical Society. The sixth grade classes also contributed to the celebration of the Bicentennial by constructing two quilts, which were embroidered to depict the history of America.

Not only were Cottonwood students involved in the community, but the community was involved in Cottonwood School. A hot air balloon pilot used one of the empty fields as a launching point, providing the students with a demonstration of how hot air balloons work. The field day held that year was rodeo-themed and, in addition to the traditional sack races and three-legged races, real cowboys came to show the students

lasso techniques and sing songs with them. The students also had the wonderful opportunity to take a field trip to Sky Harbor Airport as part of a study on transportation. They learned about loading the plane, taking off, and landing.

Traditionally, there is a celebration held in October to commemorate the opening of the school. For the past four years, however, it has been held in the spring. Cottonwood School has a rich history of hard-working kids who care deeply about their community, traits we hope to continue to see for many years to come.

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