

Remembering Claire

By **HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN**

PUTNEY -- About 200 people showed up to the Currier Center on The Putney School campus Saturday to remember Claire Oglesby, the longtime Westminster West teacher who died of cancer on Aug. 5.

Organizers held the event at the large performing arts hall, expecting a capacity crowd, and the Currier Center was almost filled when the celebration of Oglesby's life and career began just after 2 p.m.

Oglesby taught for more than three decades at the small, two-room schoolhouse in the center of the village.

She was remembered Saturday for her dedication to education, her love of the arts and her role in tying together the community of Westminster West through her work at the first-through fourth grade school.

"Claire made us all feel like family," Pastor Lise Sparrow said before leading the room in a group sing of "Country Life," the song Oglesby had her students sing before class began.

Outside the performance hall, the galleries of the Currier Center were filled with photos, student work and Oglesby's own writings.

Former students, some in their teens, some in their 50s, pointed to old class photos, talked about some of their favorite memories and reunited after not seeing each other for years.

The progression of Oglesby's career could be seen in the photos which ran from grainy black and white

to color and then to digital, marking the 36 years she taught in Westminster West.

Oglesby opened her classroom to countless young interns who went on to become teachers, and teachers from throughout the region attended the celebration Saturday.

Bev Major, who was inspired to go into teaching by Oglesby, said her friend and mentor taught by instinct, in the days before No Child Left Behind, often frustrating administrators who tried to control what went on in her classroom.

"Claire's methods were generally tolerated because the students in her class were successful," Major said. "She didn't like meetings. She didn't like testing and she didn't like administrators. Students learned how to read in Claire's classroom by reading."

Kathy Richardson was one of Oglesby's students as a child, and later her three children attended school in Westminster West.

Richardson was asked to volunteer in the class, which led to her becoming a part-time paraprofessional, and in turn she became a full-time teacher.

She said she still uses lessons she learned in Oglesby's school as she leads her own classes.

Many of her former students, some carrying their own children, showed up to pay respects to their former teacher.

The ceremony included music and poetry and Oglesby was also remembered as someone who valued and appreciated art, both in her classroom and her life.

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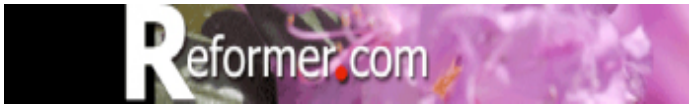
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"Claire was endlessly curious," said Mary Hayward, who shared the two-room school with Oglesby for 18 years. "Her death leaves a huge hole in the fabric of our community and a rich and abiding store of memories."

Howard Weiss-Tisman can be reached at hwtisman@reformer.com or 802-254-2311, ext. 279.

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