

1933 — 2008

Clark offers lesson in longevity



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Clark College students, faculty members and employees gather around the main campus chime tower Wednesday to celebrate the school's 75th birthday. New nighttime lighting of the tower also was introduced.

College's growth over 75 years astounds those who remember its early days

By **HOWARD BUCK**
Columbian staff writer

Clark College students, faculty members and employees kicked off a new school day Wednesday morning with a song.

Not just any tune: A spirited version of "Happy Birthday," to celebrate Clark's 75th anniversary, dating to the school's first day of class in October 1933.

"That's it. Get back to

work!" exhorted Bob Knight, Clark president, as a couple hundred well-wishers scattered from the chime tower, the centerpiece of the Vancouver main campus.

The tower was set to repeat the birthday music during a full day of festivities.

Taking in the fog-cloaked gathering from a nearby resting spot were a few young Clark students.

"Seventy-five years, that's

a long time," said Sean Emery, 19, of Vancouver. "That means this place was founded back in the '20s or '30s sometime. Jesu-loo, that's a long time!"

"I can't relate, really," said another student barely one-fourth of Clark's age. But the young man did picture a rosy future for the college: "Probably another 75 years of job security for some teachers," he quipped, wishing to remain nameless.

His classmate, Elizabeth Clampett, 19, of Portland, had quite the contemporary reason to hang out.



ON THE WEB

For a video of the celebration and more from Bill Farr, see:
www.columbian.com

For more on Clark's anniversary, see:
www.clark.edu/clark75

"I'm so early, to get a parking spot," she explained.

Campus parking was never an issue for Clark's oldest living local student, Bill Farr, 96 years young and a Hazel Dell resident. He had only an

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Vintage Vancouver

Local resident Bill Farr, 96, who attended Clark in the early days in 1937-38, is a living encyclopedia of city life here in the 1920s and 30s. **Just a few highlights:**

■ During a military parade at the Vancouver Barracks, famed Gen. John J. Pershing plucked Farr's older brother, Dave, from the crowd for a ride on his horse.

■ A prized job for young boys in the 1920s was to turn over thousands of drying bricks, produced daily by the Hidden family operation. Farr earned a dime for a couple hours' work, then used it to see the matinee movies at the USA Theater — silent pictures with Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford and the like.

■ Farr also delivered the afternoon edition of *The Columbian*, along with two Portland newspapers that arrived by streetcar. His route covered the present Carter Park and Hough neighborhoods.

■ In his youth, downtown "ended" at about 10th and Main streets, Farr said. Beyond Officers Row, north to Fourth Plain Boulevard, was simply fir forest owned by the U.S. Army, with trenches dug to teach fighting technique.

■ Farr's father, an Army captain, was involved in the job of crating up and shipping back to Russia Valeri Chkalov's ANT-25 airplane. Chkalov and his crew completed the historic first nonstop, transpolar flight in June 1937, landing at Vancouver's Pearson Field.



Bill Farr, 96, attended Clark College from 1937 to 38.

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■ Farr left Vancouver High School and signed with the Merchant Marine at age 15. He spent three years on the sea, mostly traveling to and from China, Japan, the Philippines and Singapore.

■ It was his employer, the Hidden family, that eased Farr into Clark. He doesn't remember paying any tuition at all.

■ Farr arrived at Clark at age 25, proud owner of a Model A, "which made me king of the campus," he said. Many outings involved a drive over the Columbia River to Hayden Island, where students might swim or take in a big band appearing at the popular Jantzen Beach amusement park.

■ Farr relocated with all Clark students to a new campus at the Salvation Army building, near Vancouver Barracks. There was a basketball court, and he joined Clark's team — but it never found an opponent, he said.



STEVEN LANE/The Columbian

Students, faculty and employees sing "Happy Birthday" at Clark College on Wednesday. Founded in October 1933, Clark now has more than 12,500 students and is among Washington's largest community colleges.

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eight-block walk in the 1930s.

At a special breakfast Wednesday in the historic Hidden House — that's where Clark's founding dean, Lewis Canell, and five other adults elected to launch classes the following day, Oct. 2, 1933, thanks largely to one student's advance payment of a full year's tuition — Farr treated Knight and a few other Clark insiders to vivid memories of his college days

and life in vintage Vancouver.

"I came for fun," said Farr, who arrived at Clark Junior College in 1937, at age 25, to join two dozen other students.

"It was a nice, friendly little college. Everyone knew each other," Farr said. He wasn't the most ambitious student, he concedes, but still found a sense of purpose as America clawed out of the Great Depression.

"The best thing, I thought, was, 'I'm learning something, and I'm going to amount to more than just a hard worker, just a laborer. That eventually, this is going to amount to some-

thing.'

"What, I didn't know for sure," said Farr, who then spent 25 years as a firefighter.

Fast forward to 2008 years: Students pour into Clark College by the thousands — more than 12,500 students are enrolled this quarter — most with better-shaped plans, but identical goals of self-improvement.

"Amazing. It's almost an impossibility to think it could grow that much in this short a time, and to have so many students," said Farr, who remembers the current campus site as a thick forest of fir trees. "Where they

come from, I have no idea."

Later on Wednesday, Clark leaders dished out birthday cake to students, staff members and visitors.

They also gathered to dedicate a new meeting room in the remodeled Gaiser Hall as the Ellis F. Dunn Community Room, to honor longtime Clark administrator and one-time interim president Ellis Dunn.

As dusk fell, action returned to the chime tower. Congratulatory messages and speeches accompanied the introduction of newly enhanced nighttime lighting of the tower.