

# JRE holds special birthday celebration

By Jackie Giroux  
Reporter

This past Friday began like any other day for Jackman Road Elementary School volunteer Claude Cawood – he arrived at the school at 7 a.m. and planned on being there until 11 a.m. to help students with their reading. But the morning turned into something very special for him – something he said he never imagined happening.

“I was reading with a student and they called me to come down by the office,” Mr. Cawood said. “There was a big banner in the lobby. The kids filled the hallways and over 700 sang Happy Birthday to him,” said JRE Principal Sherry Farnan. The students and staff were celebrating Mr. Cawood’s birthday – his 95th!

“He gave an impromptu speech, it was amazing,” Mrs. Farnan said. “He talked about



JRE students and staff filled the hallways to sing Happy Birthday to volunteer Claude Cawood for his 95th birthday. Students then each gave him handmade birthday cards. Mr. Cawood spends every morning, five days a week helping the students with reading, spelling or math.

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how important education was and that nobody can take that away from you and to work hard.”

Mr. Cawood was also presented with handmade birthday cards by the students. “I had over 600 birthday cards. They

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put them all in a huge box so I could get them home and they rolled up the signs for me to take home – I save all of that,” he said.

To round out the special event, the staff hosted a pot-luck lunch for Mr. Cawood and gave him some gift cards to his favorite restaurants.

His birthday celebration did not end on Friday, but continued on the weekend. “I went to my granddaughter’s and spent

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the entire day with them. My great-grandsons were there, that made my day,” he said.

Mr. Cawood said he has been a volunteer at JRE for nine years. “I started in 2002 and then my wife got dementia and I took care of her until she passed away and then I went back to volunteering,” he said.

His wife and their three children, two daughters and a son, were avid readers. Through them he said he saw the importance of reading. “I wanted to assist youngsters into doing better and to let them know they are just as important as anyone else in the community, he said.

He volunteers with the Jackman Road students five days a week. “I think they retain more by reading aloud. I think it’s a lot better for them, they aren’t just reading words. I tell them that if you can read, you can do anything in school.”

In addition to reading with the students he said, “I help with whatever they need. We practice just like in sports. We practice spelling and we practice math before tests.”

“He reads with small groups or individual students – it depends on the kids and their needs. For some it’s a reward. They love to read with him,” Mrs. Farnan added. “He’s here every day. We’re blessed.”

Mr. Cawood has not always been a Bedford resident. He spent a big share of his life in Monroe except for the time he was in the service. “I spent six years in the military,” he said.

“I worked with the CYO in Monroe for 50 years. I did maintenance for Monroe Public Schools for 24 years,” he said. I didn’t like being retired so when they built the new YMCA in Monroe I was superintendent of buildings and grounds for 11 years. Then I worked for HUD in Monroe at the high rise for 11 years.”

He said he moved to Bedford after his granddaughter and great-grandsons moved to the area so the boys could attend Bedford Schools. “All three went to Jackman Road Elementary. I was helping with reading when they were attending school there.

“People should be proud of the education system here. My three great-grandsons have gone farther in their vocations than I ever thought they would,” he said.

At 95 years young, one might find it amazing that Mr. Cawood spends five days a week – every week – volunteering and making a difference in many of the JRE student’s lives, but there is something more that he does.

“About three years ago they asked me to be an instructor for the Navy,” he said. “I teach Naval History at UT at the ROTC building once a month – one weekend a month. I love it. I like to keep busy.”