

BEGINNINGS



THE VISION BECOMES A REALITY

Laura Groos was not alone, but she hadn't realized it yet. Her son David was enrolled in a West Vancouver public elementary school, but she very much wanted him to wear the colours of an independent school the following year. To do that, however, her son faced a long drive to Park Royal each morning followed by an even longer bus ride across the bridge to the West Side. The number of children commuting like this indicated to Laura that there must be other parents desiring a non-denominational independent school option on the North Shore for their children, but how could she be sure?

Mothers chatting in the pickup queue at schools, in the parking lots or at the local market are common sights at Collingwood and in West Vancouver, and it wasn't very different back in the summer of 1983. This grass-roots method of communication soon revealed a good number of parents who were seriously interested in creating a school that was an oasis of order, respect, happiness and learning. The conversations quickly turned from summertime musings to strategizing on an approach to making their vision a reality.

Beginning with their own personal contacts, this intrepid group spoke with local businessmen and lawmakers. They also approached David Mackenzie, a retired headmaster and friend of Laura's father, who became interested in their cause and in representing them as their new potential headmaster. This gave the group something solid to go forward: David Mackenzie came from one of British Columbia's most respected schools; plus, if there was a new school to be built, he made it clear he would be happy to lead it.



The historic first meeting at St. David's Church. Do you think this little one went on to graduate from Collingwood School?

The first meeting of interested parents was held on October 25th. About three dozen came to hear what Laura Groos and David Mackenzie had to say, including their very ambitious plan to open an independent school on the North Shore in September, 1984 – just over 10 months away! It was David Mackenzie's stature, prestige and charisma that swept the crowd away and they all left that room charged with a mission to make their dream happen.

From this first meeting an organization began to form. Thirteen parents, business people and local politicians stepped forward and formed the first Board of Governors in November, 1984. Their task was to define the kind of school they would create, the management structure, and to come up with a name for the school.

On November 15th, the Board drafted the School's philosophy. The School would strive for "academic excellence . . . offer first class instruction . . . sports, music, art and



Members of the first Parents' Council, Penny Geer, Sally Petitpierre, Merina Hilton, Mercedes Cogan, Sue Barker and Valerie Angell, set the bar for volunteerism and parent spirit at the School.

drama for all . . . and a genial, happy atmosphere, in which staff and students alike would operate with good manners and cheerfulness." With their philosophy struck, their will sturdy and the school just a rubber stamp away from reality, it was time to consider a name. Laura Groos suggested "Collingwood", which was Canada's first flower class corvette and was commanded by Laura's father, David Groos. The name Collingwood School was approved. Which left one "not so small" question to be answered: where would Collingwood School be housed?

Finding a site for the School was a daunting task. There were several school buildings in North Vancouver that were available and deemed suitable by the Board, but there was considerable resistance from the district's school board. It was only a few short months until the start of the school year, so many alternatives were considered for temporarily housing the School. An old warehouse and an old

“It’s a good thing that the founders of the school set about ordering all books and other supplies. Due to the constrained nature of the negotiations with the West Vancouver School Board, many School Board staffers were miffed about “losing” Glenmore Elementary to a new independent school. Unionized workers set about removing desks, chairs, tables and other equipment, stating that these items were not part of the original lease agreement. Everything else that was left behind—maps, erasers, lab equipment, corkboards, etc.—was gathered up and burned.”

Collingwood School, “The First Ten Years”

courthouse in North Vancouver were possibilities, as well as Hollyburn Country Club, Capilano College, and even a site in Ambleside, which was owned by the Squamish Nation, among others. The Board of Governors presented a formal proposal to lease Glenmore Elementary School from the West Vancouver School Board. While the founding parents waited with baited breath to hear if the proposal was accepted they continued to prepare for the start of the school year.



First Headmaster David Mackenzie, with a group of the first students at Collingwood. Their cheerful blue uniforms earned the nickname “smurfs” on local neighbourhood bus lines.



Founder Laura Groos cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremonies on September 9, 1984, the day before classes began. Inset: a hot air balloon, a metaphor for getting the new school “off the ground” rises above the crowd during the festivities.

Teachers were hired, curriculum was developed, fee structure decided, books and supplies were ordered, the tartan was designed and uniforms were ordered. It was a mere six weeks before Collingwood was to open its doors to students that the lease was approved and signed!

A special ceremony to officially open the School was held on September 9th, the day before the children arrived. The launching of a hot air balloon symbolized getting the School “off the ground.” About 300 attendees were there on that sunny afternoon to witness educational history.

Laura Groos began with the question “why can’t we have an independent school on the North Shore?” Along with a team of dedicated parents and the first Board of Governors they dared to answer that question. This determined group of pioneers are truly the first heroes of Collingwood School, bringing the school from a vision to a reality.

“One can only imagine the satisfaction participating school-board employees felt at ensuring that publicly funded corkboards did not fall into the hands of dangerously elitist 10 year olds.”

Collingwood School, “The First Ten Years”