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## Independent School, founder mark 30 years

BY RICK PLUMLEE  
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Jean Garvey always wanted to be part of a big family. "But my dear little mother gave me only one little brother," she told the gathering at the Independent School she founded 30 years ago.

She and her husband, Willard, had six children. A pretty good start for a big family.

But Thursday she addressed the rest of her family. And it's a very big one indeed.

Students, school faculty and staff, former students and teachers, parents and family filled the gymnasium to celebrate the school's anniversary by honoring the woman whose vision made it happen in 1980.

They presented her with bouquets of flowers and bouquets of love.

"Jean, you have taught me to look at the big picture, use kind words and look for the good in everybody," said Kim Packebush, the incoming chair of the school's board and who is in her 12th year of having a child attend Independent.

Corban Aspegren, the senior class president, pulled out one of Garvey's quotes to explain what he thought she has meant to the school:

"Individuality is a strength of each one of us."

Abby Sheppard, Garvey's granddaughter and a former Independent student, spoke through tears.

"Here's my Granny Jean," Sheppard said. "She is the golden thread that has carried us through and brought us all together.

" (Independent) is an extension of her love for all children, an extension of love in the shape of a school where we can be who we are."

From thin beginnings of only eight elementary students attending a school in a former nursing home at 937 S. Bluffview, Independent is now pre-kindergarten through high school with nearly 600 students.

From the tight confines on Bluffview, where Baskin-Robbins ice cream buckets lined up in the hall served as students' lockers, Independent now has five buildings at its campus on Douglas east of Rock Road.

The Garveys literally gave up their front yard in 1985 to build the school's new campus.

"This was a 20-acre hayfield," said Jean Garvey, whose husband died in 2002.

She still lives in the same house, right next to the school's soccer field and track.

At 88, Garvey doesn't get around as easily as she once did. But she still attends most of the school's fine-arts programs and rides over in a golf cart for the homecoming football game.

"School is where my heart is," she said.

In 1963, Garvey joined other parents in founding Wichita Collegiate School. Her children attended there as well as public schools.

But she wanted to do more, provide a private school that would meet the need for all students at a modest price.

She wanted a school that operated off sound business practices while being completely independent of any school system.

"That's what we have," Garvey said. "We can make our own decisions, thank goodness. We can teach the way we feel is best. We can use the textbooks we think are the very best.

"And we learn from each other every day."

Karen Norton spent the school's first year as a teacher, then became the head of Independent for the next 26 years before retiring in 2006.

"The first reason she founded the school was she saw so many kids who didn't like going to school, they weren't encouraged," Norton said. "She wanted a school that instead of saying, 'What is this picture? Tell me about this picture.'

"There's a world of difference for a little kid."

And to help make that school environment happen, Norton said, "She was a model of how to empower people."

When Willard Garvey moved a very large desk over to the school in 1994, Norton and Jean Garvey shared the desk.

"I sat on one side, she sat on the other," Norton said. "It was big enough for both of us."

But she said sharing the desk "became a symbol of how she and I were partners."

Teri Bloomer was also there at the beginning, teaching at Independent for 28 years before retiring in 2008.

"I never felt any kind of concern it wouldn't work," she said. "There was confidence in the air that it would all work out.

"I always admired her for starting a school and knowing exactly what she wanted it to be."

It was clear Thursday that Garvey still knew what she wanted.

"I'm glad now that I trusted myself, that I trusted myself to do this alone," she said. "And pretty soon I wasn't alone at all. I had to find some buddies. Parents came.

"So here we are. I have a very big family. We're all family."



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<<http://www.kansas.com/2010/09/03/v-print/1476215/independent-fetes-garvey.html#ixzz0yVKHcjz>>.