

Web site leads to Bynum Kids reunion

Many called depot's DeSoto area home in the '40s, '50s and '60s

by Miranda Myrick, PAO

A Web site launched in August 2009 led to a reunion here of people who lived part or all of their childhood on the property of Anniston Army Depot or in a neighborhood adjacent to the main gate.

Bynumkids.com is hosted by Gary Canant of California. He's one of 150-plus people who met May 1 at the depot's DeSoto Pastime Center to reminisce about life as a Bynum Kid.

Bynum Kids are the sons and daughters of the people who worked at Anniston Ordnance Depot in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Many employees of AOD during this timeframe were able to raise their families on the installation in housing built by the federal government. DeSoto Manor was home to about 350 families.

In 1941, The War Department (now the Department of Defense) constructed Anniston Ordnance Depot, an ammunition storage depot with a workforce that grew in number from four to 4,339 in a year. AOD wasn't assigned a combat vehicle maintenance mission until the 1950s. The depot was renamed Anniston Army Depot in 1962.

DeSoto Manor, which was torn down in the 1960s, is now the site of the Career Academy, the AAFES Shoppette, the Equal Employment Opportunity Office and Civilian Personnel Advisory Center, the Child Development Center and the Directorate of Contracting.

Two other neighborhoods had Bynum Kids living in them. Terrace Homes was located on the property behind the depot's softball field (currently the site of Center for Military History and the Anniston Defense Munitions Center headquarters building). Alan Homes, the subdivision (facing AOD Federal Credit Union on Victory Drive, is still standing.

"We couldn't wait to get out of this place, and only when we moved off did we realize how lucky we were to live here," said Ann Posey Smith.

Canant said bynumkids.com



Joan Ellison Simmons (left) and Erma Joy Shaddix Adams describe their housing at DeSoto Manor.



More than 150 people gather May 1 for the reunion of the Bynum Kids.

had more than 50,000 hits before May. The Web site contains photos and stories about life in Bynum long ago when a child could ride his bicycle on the installation to deliver the local newspaper and when boys and girls stayed outdoors all day to play.

The stories shared at the reunion were of happy days spent swimming at Jones Knob fishing lakes, watching a picture show at the theater (what is now the Physical Fitness Center), praying in school (Bynum Elementary School), spending lunch money on candy at Carr's Store, and making a pallet in the field to look up at the stars.

Bynum, as the Kids remember it, is gone forever. Today, the Bynum community outside the depot's gates has its own post office, a Rexall pharmacy, a gas station and a few small businesses.

With the help of the Web site and a recently released book written by Bynum Kid and local attorney Wilford Lane, the once-was Bynum won't soon be forgotten. *Bynum: Retracing Steps* was released in December 2009 and tells the tales of his childhood. Before the reunion, Lane sold and signed copies of his 136-page hardcover book.



Cynthia Arnold and Gordon Kelley catch up with each other before a late lunch is served at DeSoto Pastime Center.



Gary Canant and Ronny Wheeler discuss the program for the day's reunion.



Mike Polk holds out an old class photo while Keith Higginbotham looks on.

Elaine and Donald Johnson look at old photographs. Reunion planners had many other items on display, like a model playground and viewfinder toys.



Photos by Miranda Myrick