

## *The struggle to build GRHS*

Coming up to the opening of the new Grand Rapids Senior High School, in 1972, school officials held out hope that classes would begin on schedule in spite of a five-week construction workers strike during the summer. No such luck. Classes began a week late amid a din of hammering, sawing, drilling and trucking in of equipment and supplies. Sophomores started on a Tuesday, juniors the day following and seniors the day after that.

"Organized chaos," Ken Hickman called it in his "Shooting the Rapids" column. Supt. James Sauter said the opening was "better than expected." Principal James Keranen saw improvement. "Things were 300 percent better (the second day)," he said. "Student guides know the building much better now and are doing a fine job for us, and I am really well pleased the way things are going."

Keranen later noted that the hammering and drilling went on for the rest of the year, as workers continued to put finishing touches on the building at Hale Lake. But the delay was a small matter, considering it took six years, four bond votes and two lawsuits before construction actually began.

### **The story begins**

The story begins in 1965. The District 318 school board proposed a \$5 million bond issue "... for the acquisition and betterment of school houses, including classroom, swimming pool, auditorium and area vocational school construction." The plan called for building new senior high space onto the old junior-senior high building.

The proposal was defeated 1,914 to 1,156 on December 7, 1965. School officials figured voters objected to a high school expansion at the old site, as well as to the "extravagance" of a swimming pool and the overall cost.

The second bond vote came

June 1, 1967. The school board proposed an issue of \$4.7 million to construct a new senior high school and swimming pool and a major addition to the Bigfork school.

The plan called for a senior high that could accommodate up

to 1,300 students. It also called for putting junior high students into the old senior high and bringing in sixth graders to the adjoining junior high building to create a middle school, and closing the Central, Trout Lake and Wendigo elementary schools.



GRHS

**The 1973 class was the first to graduate from the new Grand Rapids Senior High, a project that took six years from the time it was on the drawing board until it was built.**

At Bigfork, the new space would house home economics, art and drafting, science, music classes and new shower and locker facilities.

The school board had a University of Minnesota field

study report in support of their plan. The *Herald-Review* supported the effort, too. Its editorial said, "There is no question that many facilities are overcrowded. Conditions will be worse before they get better." It also said that

# JUNIOR HIGH NO MORE

*Herald-Review*  
August 28, 1972

A newly organized Grand Rapids Middle School will open its doors for the first time on Tuesday, September 5, to approximately 1,560 students at the grade levels 6-7-8 and 9.

Grand Rapids Junior high is "no more." For the first time, sixth graders will be taken out of the traditional elementary setting and placed with the preadolescent group as a transition to the senior high. The sixth grade curriculum and program will remain quite a bit the same as it has in the past. Students will be segregated to some extent from the rest of the student body, but the entire school will be set up as a composite block so that total segregation is not possible nor desirable.

As students and teachers become more acquainted with the problems and possibilities of the educational process possible with this entire group of preadolescent children, changes in the school program will be insti-

tuted so that more individual help will be made possible for all of the students in many different areas.

Individual help is the key to what a middle school should be, according to administrators and teachers who will work toward this end in setting up their programs.

Changes in administration will have Robert Elkington as the principal of the entire Middle School, with Mike Lempe and Henry Johnson as assistant principals. Working with these administrators will be approximately 75 teachers and staff members. With the added room made available by moving out of the senior high, the grade 8 and 9 program will be centralized in what was formerly the junior high or north part of the large building complex. Sixth grade will be concentrated on the top floor of the former senior high south building, and the seventh grade will be on the bottom two floors of that south building. Offices will be maintained in both parts of the complex.



GRHS

Enrollment at Grand Rapids High School reached 1,300 in the Seventies.

the school board wants "... to keep pace with changes in education, which can give the children of our district an even better education than they have been receiving." While acknowledging that many are concerned about the cost, the *Review* editorialist warned that "it will be much greater if there's a delay."

## Citizens Advisory Group

The Citizens Advisory Committee promoting the issue got down to details. In an advertisement just before the vote, the committee listed some of the problems: Classes held in

shower rooms, libraries that must turn students away for lack of seats, class sizes in excess of minimum space requirements, schools lacking facilities for a full educational program, worn-out, costly-to-maintain buildings and rental of space from other institutions to provide minimum teaching programs.

Once again voters weren't convinced. The vote was 1,748 in favor to 1,933 against. Compared with the 1965 vote, opposition strength stayed about the same, while the favorable votes increased by about 600.

Afterwards, School Board Chairman Richard Anderson said he didn't think District 318 voters oppose adequate facilities, yet it appeared the district was "... content to stand still or even regress."

At the beginning of the 1967-68 school year, a preliminary count showed 1,220 students in junior high and 1,144 in senior high. "We're crowded," said Junior High Principal Donald Gornowich. The situation required some special measures. The junior and senior high went from a seven- to an eight-period day, and seniors were excused from study halls the first and last periods of the day and from study halls before or after the Noon hour.

Students also attended classes in other buildings. About 535 students attended physical education and health classes in the armory, while 788 junior high students went to the First Evangelical Lutheran Church for vocal music and other classes. In addition, trainable retarded students also took classes at the Lutheran church. Meanwhile, 25 Bigfork kindergarten students went to class at a church building there, and Balsam students used the Balsam Memorial Hall for physical education.

At about this time, District 318 received from the federal government the former radar base property near Murphy School. The gift included 22 acres and four buildings, but not any of the homes.

Supt. Thomas F. Stark said, however, that the gift didn't solve the district's space problems. He said they could use some of the facilities for repair work and storage. The concrete recreational building had been used by the school district for vocational courses, but that curriculum had been transferred by

then to Itasca State Junior College. Eventually, the barracks buildings were brought to the high school and put up in the space that today contains the middle school tennis courts. The barracks had their shortcoming as classrooms, especially in the winter when they proved difficult to heat.

#### A rerun

In the fall of 1967, the Citizens Advisory Committee recommended a rerun of the last bond proposal, to be voted on early the following year. The school board agreed and set the election

for January 23, 1968. Though it was the same plan, the price tag went from \$4.7 million to \$4.9 million. Increasing construction costs and higher interest rates accounted for the increase, advisers told the school board. Ellerbe and Assoc., Minneapolis, the architects, predicted a five percent increase in construction costs annually.

Just before the election, Galen L. Finnegan of Grand Rapids brought a legal challenge to the election procedure. The school board had decided to use only 15 precincts for the bond election



DICK CAIN

**First school in the state to join the International Baccalaureate program was Grand Rapids High School.**

instead of the full 53. Finnegan claimed the change was illegal and designed to disenfranchise district voters. The board said its lawyer found no legal obstacles in the measure, which was actually designed to save election costs.

Judge Gordon L. McRae heard the challenge in Grand Rapids district court eight days before the election. The school district

meanwhile, asked for dismissal. Judge McRae dismissed Finnegan's motion for a temporary injunction, stating the reduction in precincts did not do the plaintiff irreparable injury.

Of all the bond campaigns, this one appears to have generated the most heat, because of the flurry of letters to the editor and the volume of advertisements that ran. Rep. Art Frick of Grand

Rapids wrote in favor of the issue, focusing mainly on the value of a swimming pool for teaching swimming and saving lives. Mrs. Shirley Rasmussen wrote of the crowded conditions and of classes in hallways and locker rooms. She scolded "concerned citizens" opposed to the issue for lacking true concern.

Edward Dimatteo said the plan was too expensive, that because

of a declining birth rate in the county the district didn't need any additional classroom space and that scheduling the election in the winter made it difficult for out-county voters to get to the polls, constituting a slap in their faces.

### Heated campaign

The Citizens Advisory Committee and the Concerned Citizens group, headed by

### GRHS IN THE SIXTIES

*History of Grand Rapids High School 1895-1991.*

*Tomahawk Yearbook Staff*

From crew cuts to long hair, from the Cold War to Viet Nam, from Elvis to Acid Rock, from Hootenannies to Woodstock—never had our nation seen such a change of values, of systems, of ways of life than in the 60's. Called the decade of turmoil, the decade of independence, our nation experienced more of everything than we had ever before. Civil Rights became a reality, albeit a bloody one; consciousness was altered; establishment questioned. The baby boomers who had been born into a world of promise now faced one which included assassinations of President Kennedy, his brother Bobby, and Martin Luther King. When the

decade began, no one expected the chaos that was to come.

The 60's was a time of the "Twist," Khrushchev, the lunar landing, the first Super Bowl, mini skirts, Roger Maris' 61 home runs, and drugs. It also featured a Grand Rapids population of 7,298, Mississippi Melody Showboat, the IRA Arena, the closing of the Radar Base which had opened in 1956, and the Grand Rapids Diamond Jubilee.

State Governors were Elmer Anderson, Karl Rolvaag and Harold Levander. A new car was around \$3,500; a hamburger was 45 cents; flip hair styles were in for girls in the early 60's, long straight hair later; bell bottoms dragged the pavement; and earth shoes, bold colored shirts, and wide ties and belts graced the fashion scene.

And, as the nation and world changed, so did GRHS. The

"look" in the *Tomahawk* from 1960 to 1969 is drastically different. But the students remained essentially the same.

The 60's was also a time of change for GRHS. Dr. Thomas Stark replaced the retiring M. L. Malmquist as superintendent in 1966, the IRA Arena was built, and graduating classes went from 220 in 1960 to nearly 330 by 1969. Girls' track began in 1965, and by 1969 plans were begun for a new high school to alleviate crowding and split scheduling.

"Sophomore initiation and slave days" were implemented in the early 60's to welcome new sophomores and give the school a more cohesive feeling. Dances held at the armory and city hall were weekend events; and sporting events, the drive-in, and the pizza shop were hang-outs.

Several new clubs were organized: Latin Club, AFS,

Letterman's, Candy Strippers. The yearbook also had a new look, four color endsheets and several four-color pages sprinkled the book throughout the decade.

In sports, the football team won several Iron Range Championships, and the basketball team in 1962 won the District 28 tournament for the first time in 36 years. The wrestling team took second place in the state tournament, and several GRHS wrestlers won state championships. In 1965, the *Tomahawk* staff produced a 45 R.P.M. record highlighting the year. Mud vacations, the week off during spring break, were coming to an end, but Grand Rapids still has the state's largest (in area) school district.

Even in the decade of change, GRHS and Grand Rapids still managed to maintain the spirit of progress and education.



Finnegan, traded comments in pre-election ads. On the eve of the election, the *Herald-Review* once again urged a "yes" vote. It also noted that "It has been an interesting, often heated campaign. Old-timers claim you must go back quite a few years for comparable election excitement."

When the votes were counted, the bond issue was soundly defeated: 3,512 "no" and 2,567 "yes." Supt. Stark said afterwards, "Either we must develop a piecemeal program which will be popular enough to pass, yet be more costly, or delay any action until people have had enough time to discover the

truth of the matter."

When Fall came, enrollments were up again in the junior and senior high schools. Classes were started an hour earlier, at 7:30 a.m., and the school district had two streets near the junior-senior high blocked to protect children passing to other buildings for classes.

The next bond vote was set for November 5, 1968. This time the school board decided to offer a piecemeal plan. The basic proposal was for \$3,950,000 for building a new senior high school and an addition to the Bigfork school. There were two additional parts, to be voted on separately. The first proposed \$900,000 for additional facilities at the high school (eight classrooms and a large instruction space that could serve as a small auditorium), plus two more classrooms at Bigfork. The remaining part called for a \$300,000 swimming pool in Grand Rapids.

The board said it had scaled down its request in response to the failure of previous plans.

There were advertisements and letters concerning the proposal, but the campaign was low-key compared to the previous one.

By election time, 12 persons filed for three school board seats.

Two incumbents—Richard Anderson and Mrs. Wesley Kuoksa—filed, as did Bernie Ahlm, Mrs. Caryl Arnold, Mrs. Robert Balderson, Delores Felt, Floyd Hennagir, Mrs. Frank Holecek, Herbert B. Johnson, Jr., Buddy Lawrence Manella, W. A. Powers and E. C. Steffy.

It was also a presidential election year: Humphrey-Muskie vs. Nixon-Agnew. For Congressman, John Blatnik was opposed by James Hennen.

### **The largest vote**

The general election helped draw the largest vote of the campaign. This time it passed, 4,053 to 3,377, i.e. the base plan for a new high school and a Bigfork addition passed. The other two parts did not. The additional spaces at the high school and Bigfork failed 3,480 to 3,294, while the swimming pool proposal fell 3,870 to 2,836. All Grand Rapids precincts supported the base plan; strongest opposition came from Cohasset, Bigfork, Blackberry, Effie and Splithand.

Elected to the schoolboard were E. C. Steffy, Cohasset, a county juvenile officer, W. A. Powers, and incumbent Richard Anderson.

In September of the following year, the school district ran into



GRHS

**It isn't all work at the school.**

another legal challenge, this one concerning the high school site. The school district bought from the City of Grand Rapids part of a larger gift of land to the city from McVeigh Dunn American Legion Post No. 60, Grand Rapids.

The Legion gift, which was named American Legion Memorial Park, included a parcel on which the Legion had developed a ballfield, plus another 125 acres the post had been given by Oliver Mining Company. Cost of the school dis-

trict land was \$150,000.

The challenge began with a petition to the Grand Rapids village council from 15 members of the Post protesting the sale. They said the sale violated the deed from the Legion which restricted use to recreational,

educational or other public purpose.

As the district began site work, a temporary injunction was sought and a hearing set in Grand Rapids district court for January 8, 1970. Bringing the action were G. J. Dufner, a member of the village council, Buddy Lawrence Manella, Lee J. Cole, Cy Wilson, Mrs. Helen Fish, Norman B. Marquardt, Mrs. Herman Ziebell and Gordon Brown. Attorney General Douglas Head had ruled earlier that construction of the school on the former Legion property was compatible with the terms of the deed.

In 1970, Judge Warren A. Saetre dismissed the action. He agreed that construction of the school was compatible with the terms of the deed.

All the delays meant higher costs and less building, school officials said. Principal James Keranen, in an interview for *Grand Rapids Companion*, noted that the original building plan was reduced by one swimming pool, a performing arts auditorium and eight educational areas. The per-foot cost, from the time the plan was proposed, he said, nearly doubled.

#### "Open shell"

Finishing up construction as

#### GRHS IN THE SEVENTIES *History of Grand Rapids High School 1895-1991.*

##### *Tomahawk Yearbook Staff*

The 70's began with many endings—most notably, the Viet Nam War and the first resignation of a President, Richard Nixon. But there had been Kent State, Watergate, a gas shortage/energy crunch. Prices had risen considerably and inflation was rampant.

The fashion scene was a carry-over from the late sixties; and young people wore even more military type clothing, fringes, beads and other items left from the "hippie" days. The nation was still split between establishment and anti-establishment, and the war was still an open wound, even for those who returned from active duty.

As the decade progressed, time healed, but many of the evils which had begun in the 60's still persisted. Drugs were perhaps the most devastating because they had permeated the very

fabric of our entire society.

If the decade began with endings, it ended with new beginnings. Many people decided to reshape their lives and their environment (which Earth Day in 1970 had begun). Yet, there was an element of self-love, and the age of "me" had begun. For others, there was a rebirth of religion, spirituality.

In music, disco made a quick flash on the market, as did extremely outrageous and wild stage shows and costuming.

For GRHS, the decade began magnanimously. Classes were at an all-time high with graduating classes over 350. The new high school overlooking Hale Lake was opened in 1972. Dr. Jim Sauter was superintendent, and Mr. Jim Keranen was GRHS principal.

The school was opened with very few interior walls, only four foot movable partitions adaptable for combining classrooms. The classes were scheduled on mods, with bells ringing on the

mod. The school was also an open school, with no passes, no study halls, only individual study times.

The 1972 hockey team recorded a first as they were the first GRHS hockey team to enter the state tournament, eventually finishing second. It was, in fact, a banner decade for hockey, baseball, and wrestling. The hockey team went to state 1974-79, winning it in '75 and '76, and the baseball team won the state in 1975. Girls' sports were also introduced and reintroduced at GRHS with tennis, basketball, volleyball, track, and golf.

Teaching experience and a full course of industrial arts, including auto body, were added to the curriculum. Debate continued its excellence, as did the Drama Club.

Much class discussion was either about the environment or human rights, and college and vocational school were a high priority for most seniors in this highly technical age.

school resumed proved challenging. But so did the school's "open shell" design, which ultimately meant even more construction work. The "open shell" idea was a new one. Only two other schools in the United States had tried it by that time. The design allowed for some areas to be enclosed by conventional walls: band room, typing, arts and crafts, bookstore, dark-room, administrative offices and lecture halls. Another section that was the equivalent of 23 conventional classrooms was left open. Teachers made their classroom space with movable five-



GRHS

**The High School has a broad-based, comprehensive program of vocational offerings.**

foot partitions, rolling chalkboards and audio-visual screens, all in accordance with the day's teaching function.

Teachers experienced a variety of problems with wall flexibility. An established "room," for example, sometimes disappeared. Noise, however was the main problem. The movable barriers did not block the sound from adjoining rooms. Sound baffles were tried, but they didn't solve the problem either. "It was a zoo" one teacher said. "You could hear everything next door and things were really disruptive when the class next door adjourned and you still had your class going."

Before long the concept was scrapped. "Noise killed it," said Principal Keranen. "Had we had the space we originally planned for, I don't think that it would have been the problem it was."

The planners anticipating possible problems, hedged against the possibility of the "open shell" failing. Electrical wiring and mechanical work was planned to facilitate change to conventional walls, which is what was done.

Growing enrollments complicated matters, Keranen said. Core facilities could comfortably accommodate 900. But during



GRHS

**"Open shell" design at the new high school proved a challenge.**

the Seventies, the high school enrollment reached 1,300. Graduating classes, at 400-plus, were the largest ever. "It got so crowded," Keranen said "that we couldn't have all the students in the building. It was a real problem. We had halls full of students instead of in study rooms, and we had many out-

side in the parking lot, too. There just wasn't any place for them to go."

In 1981, construction of the Myles Reif Performing Arts Center, a school district-Blandin Foundation project, was completed and helped alleviate some of the space problem. Keranen said the Center provided the

school with an outstanding musical facility and five additional classrooms. The new classroom space was not large, he noted, but it was still a "blessing."

### Learning too

"Bricks and mortar" concerns were considerable in the recent history of Grand Rapids schools, as evidenced by the seven-year

struggle to build the senior high school. But school officials note that curriculum and learning were still their main concern.

Principal Keranen said the schools have kept pace with advances in technology—in the use, for example, of calculators and computers. He also noted that the senior high school established an International

Baccalaureate (IB) program and continued to expand its vocational offerings. Grand Rapids Senior High School was the first high school in Minnesota to join the IB program, which is aimed at what the district considered "... America's most neglected minority, bright students." It's a two-year liberal arts program, based on international stan-

dards, that prepares students for acceptance at participating colleges and universities all over the world. IB courses are credited at about 400 institutions and can satisfy up to one year of college course requirements.

The two-year IB program includes the main disciplines of language arts, social science, experimental science and mathe-

### GRHS IN THE EIGHTIES

#### *History of Grand Rapids High School 1895-1991.*

#### *Tomahawk Yearbook Staff*

The 80's began on the sensational. The hostages in Iran were released; Mt. St. Helen's erupted; and President Reagan replaced Jimmy Carter and then beat Minnesota's own Walter Mondale for his second term. We also boycotted the Moscow Olympics and the Soviets, in turn, boycotted ours. This decade featured much of what happened in the 60's, but there seemed to be more restraints. The nation had made mistakes in the past and was not about to do the same. Human rights was still a very important issue, and communism, including the Berlin Wall, began to crumble.

Music videos, as well as movie videos, became to this generation what the drive-in movie and

television had been to earlier generations. Our first woman graduates were seen in military academies, and women began to make giant strides in every major area. An earthquake in San Francisco not only shook the U.S., it killed 67 people, stopped the World Series for a while, and allowed people to put sports in perspective. AIDS began to frighten the nation.

On the home front, northern Minnesota's first governor, Rudy Perpich, was in office for two terms, and Grand Rapids featured major expansion in business and Blandin Paper Company. The Twins won the World Series in 1987, and the North Stars reached the Stanley Cup finals in 1991. Third World countries faced severe food problems, and civil strife rocked many others. The U.S. invaded Panama and Grenada, and in the fall of 1990 and into 1991 liberat-

ed Kuwait.

The 80's and early 90's saw two tremendous additions to GRHS, the Myles Reif Performing Arts Center and the new Tech Center Addition. With these two, plus the swimming pool which had been added to the Middle School in the 70's, our educational complex was becoming more well-rounded. The need for this decade was computers; and business classes, as well as regular computer classes, became more prevalent. Because technology changed so quickly, however, much of this becomes obsolete very quickly, and more costs are added to school budgets.

The hockey team began the decade by winning the state championship; while the baseball team won the state in 1984; and gymnastics team won the state in 1990. All sports did well, and individual out-of-school

pursuits became more important as students worked more and found more time for recreational hobbies. The yearbook continued to have four-color covers and eight pages of color, and in 1987 it began to print all seniors' photographs in color. The Teepee Talk school newspaper was revitalized as the Rapids Reporter, and the GRHS band began to win competitions and travel throughout the country.

Dress became more traditional, as did hair styles; and students, in general, became more conservative. The International Baccalaureate program provided an international curriculum by which students could earn university credit. This program is based out of Geneva, Switzerland. GRHS today is still the well balanced educational system its forefathers and alumni envisioned it to be.



matics, and incorporates multicultural studies in the hope of promoting international understanding.

The curriculum follows international standards, and tests are designed and scored by evaluators in Geneva, Switzerland.

Grand Rapids was accepted into the program in 1983 and

received financial assistance for it from the Blandin Foundation.

Although the IB program is aimed at the college-bound student, Principal Keranen points out that it has had a "domino effect" on the rest of the curriculum, i.e., it has "... benefitted all students by upgrading the entire curriculum."

"Besides that," he added, "We have something I'm also really proud of here, and that's a broad-based, comprehensive program of vocational offerings." He said in recent years the school has greatly expanded these offerings, which include machine shop, welding, auto mechanics, printing, business

courses, home construction, forestry and environmental education, to name a few.

He said, "We also have a 200-acre school forest, where we conduct experiments in planting and reseedling and do the cutting of the trees."

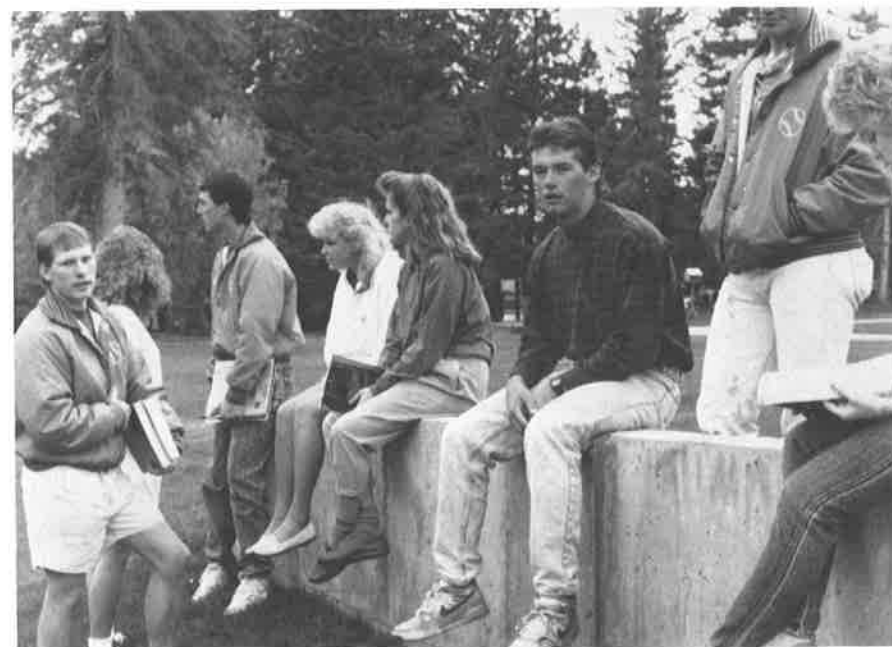
## *The 'graying' of ICC students*

In the mid-Sixties, Itasca Community College (ICC) became an integral part of the story of Grand Rapids. The college began much earlier (in 1922) on the third floor of Coleraine High School, and it was there that many Grand Rapids graduates began their higher education. But with the school's control transferred from the Coleraine school district to the Minnesota State Junior College System, a new site was chosen: The North Central Experiment Station grounds just outside the Grand Rapids city limits.

Students gathered in the Spring of 1967 for the first classes on the new campus, which now had a new name, too. No longer was it Itasca Junior College, but Itasca State Junior

College. More name changes were ahead; so were many more changes of greater significance. Student enrollment grew; the composition of the student body changed; and the campus physical plant received a major facelift.

When the first students arrived at the new campus, they numbered about 500. They were 18- and 19-year-olds just out of high school, single and mostly males. These were the traditional college students. Enrollment has soared as high as 1,500; it was about 1,400 in 1991. The students, on the average, were older; a significant number of them were married; and a large proportion were women. At one point in the Eighties more than half of the student body fell into



ICC

**Itasca Community College still attracts recently graduated high school students but in the 1970's and 1980's more and more of the students were older and married.**