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Verona Area School District

## Sugar Creek staff excavates a time capsule from school's first year

Kimberly Wethal Unified Newspaper Group

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Vitaly Zelenkov pries the “1956” stone off of the side of the school to potentially discover a time capsule during the excavation of a time capsule from 1957 on Monday, Oct. 19, at the old Sugar Creek Elementary School at 420 Church Ave. Verona Area School District officially vacated the building in May – while students stopped going in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic – and the property will be turned over to the City of Verona in November and the elementary school building will be torn down for

For a moment, as Vidaly Zelenkov removed the “1956” brick off of the old Sugar Creek Elementary School building, it almost felt like Geraldo Rivera’s excavation of Al Capone’s vaults.

But unlike Rivera’s famously empty 1986 excursion in front of 30 million people, Verona Area School District current and former staff eventually found what they were looking for: a 63 year old time capsule.

On the chilly afternoon of Monday, Oct. 16, Zelenkov, the school’s maintenance worker, used a crowbar to pry off the “1956” stone off of the front of the former school building, which had been vacated by the district in May.

Alicia Zweifel, a former Sugar Creek teacher, had recalled putting something in a time capsule with classmates while in the third grade in May 1957 but she wasn’t sure it was buried behind that stone. So even though the COVID-19 pandemic ended the school’s final year in that building two months early, superintendent Dean Gorrell gave principal Todd Brunner permission to look for the time capsule.

As Zelenkov pried the stone around while trying to loosen it, he could feel the time capsule was embedded inside it, but he kept the knowledge to himself, he later told the Press. Then, as he pulled the stone out and set it on the concrete, the capsule remained hidden.

Brunner knelt down on the concrete to locate the capsule as New Century School teacher Larry Gundlach recorded his reaction on an iPad. But all he could see was a collection of concrete rocks that had sat behind the stone.

Zelenkov then ended the prank, turning over the “1956” stone to reveal a metal box that had been bolted inside. Inside the materials, dated May 25, 1957, included classroom lists for the district’s grades 3-8 sat folded inside the box, along with a declaration that had been read out loud over 60 years ago by a state Department of Public Instruction employee and a copy of the May 25, 1957, edition of the Wisconsin State Journal.

Brunner read the declaration that had been spoken so many decades ago aloud to Zweifel, along with Gundlach, former custodian Ed Atkinson and district public information officer Raechelle Belli.

“May this structure serve the youth of this generation and the generations yet to come, in the high and holy purpose of public education,” Brunner read from the declaration. “May this education involve the acquisition of rich and useful knowledge, and development of virtual and general goodness, which are so essential to character and self-satisfying and productive life.”

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