

## BRANCIFORTE SCHOOL CELEBRATES CENTENNIAL

### MILE MARKER

By Jessica A. York

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**SANTACRUZ**>> Imagine standing here 200 years ago, local historian Ross Gibson said as he directed more than 150 people gathered on the grassy lawn in front of the Branciforte Small Schools campus Tuesday afternoon.

“You would be going to school with the Ohlones. They would be teaching you how to learn, and to learn from the land,” Gibson. “You got a little sample of that today.”

An audience ranging from kindergarten students to senior citizens came out to the former Branciforte Grammar School on North Branciforte Avenue for the school site’s centennial celebration.

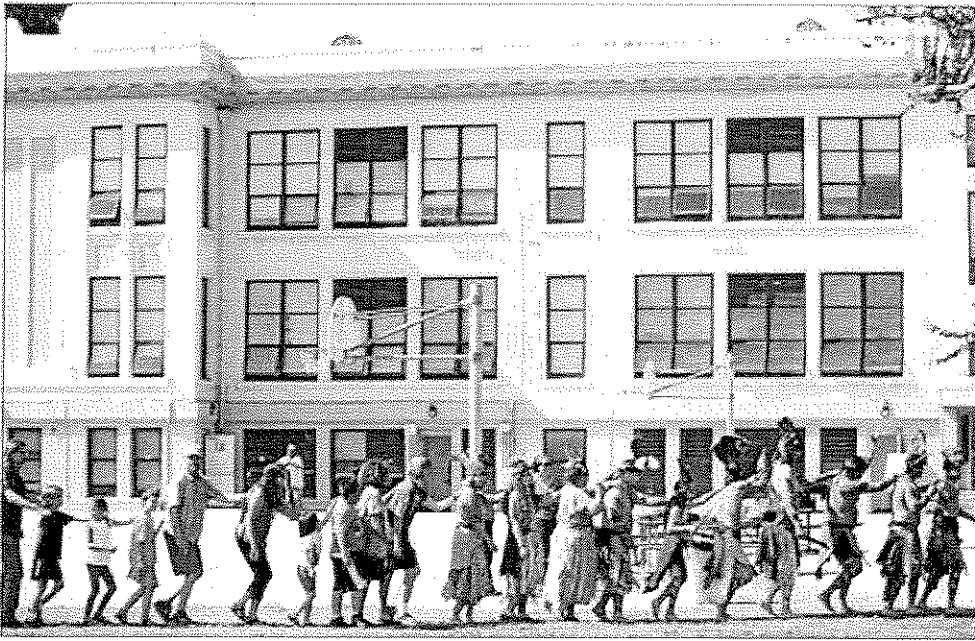
The campus has housed small schools Alternative Family Education, Ark Independent Studies, Costanoa High School and Monarch Community School, under the auspices of Branciforte Small Schools, since 2004. At the time the school was converted, Humaya Singers and Dancers of the Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe attended a welcoming celebration and blessing on the land, a performance they repeated for Tuesday’s event.

Tribe members, painted on face, legs and chests with black and white designs and wearing feather headdresses, furs, hides and grass skirts, performed several traditional dances on school playing fields ringed by onlookers. Earlier, students, faculty and community members mingled in the shade and at picnic tables over a barbecue lunch.

After, the dancers led the entire crowd, one hand on each person’s left shoulder, in a snaking clockwise march to the front of the building. Daisy Whittle-Daggett, 5, opted to take her mother’s hand when she could not reach high enough. The Monarch Community School kindergarten student confidently said with a giggle that she had fun at the celebration. Her mother, Lanie Whittle-Daggett agreed.

“I think it’s very special that they included the Native American heritage and honored that,” Whittle-Daggett said.

From the school’s front steps, Santa Cruz Mayor Don Lane declared Tuesday Branciforte School Centennial Day.



Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe members lead Branciforte Small Schools students, teachers, parents and community members in a dance around the school originally known as Branciforte Grammar School.

PHOTOS BY DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL



Jason Farias of Lancaster and a member of the Costanoan Rumsen Carmel Tribe dances in the Branciforte School yard Thursday.

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“It’s such a joy to see the diversity that is happening right here. It’s so great to see that going on in our community,” Lane said. “There seems to be such a great resurgence, especially on the Eastside of Santa

Cruz, in recognizing the tremendous history this land has, both from the Ohlone peoples, on through the development of the town of Branciforte and on to becoming a vibrant part of Santa Cruz.”

The school building, which replaced a former one-room schoolhouse built in 1860 on Soquel Avenue, originally was built as a 15-classroom school for \$74,000 on 4.3 acres of land, according to school history. The school was designed by architect William Weeks, who also was involved with designing Santa Cruz High School, the Boardwalk Casino, the Laurel School — now the Community Center, and the Palomar Hotel.

Betty Imlay, a five-year volunteer with Monarch Community School, serving students kindergarten through fifth grade, said the centennial was just one more way the schools stand out from its peers in the community.

“Out of the whole system, it’s the best school, because the kids get such individualized attention,” Imlay said.