

Web site created to unite alumni of children's school

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Christine Haven was 8 when a judge placed her in the Bonny Oaks School along with her sister and two brothers. The four siblings remained at the children's home for seven years. Yet, far from being resentful, Ms. Haven said, "I can't speak for other alumni as to their feelings on being in a children's home, but for myself, I have always wanted to thank that judge."

So, two months ago, in an effort to "thank the judge and government of Hamilton County for giving normalcy to our young lives," Ms. Haven created a new Web site, www.bonnyoaks.com. It is dedicated to reuniting alumni of the former children's home and re-establishing friendships that have been separated by time and miles.

"It is the intention of the Web site to give the former children of the Bonny Oaks School a site to help visit their past and renew old friendships," she said. "No matter how or why we arrived at the children's home, we were there and thus shared a common bond. Yet, I caution each new registrant that although we shared a common bond from childhood, our lives today dictate that we utilize common sense in connecting with old friends and that we have respect for each other and each other's family."

Bonny Oaks was a part of Hamilton County's history from 1896-1985. It was located on the plantation property of the late Col. Jarrett Dent, the address now known as 5114 Bonny Oaks Drive. The 35-acre campus included a dairy farm that served not only as a source of income, but offered work experience to residents.

Many of its buildings are gone,

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those remaining accommodating new businesses. The superintendent's home is now known as The Dent House. The former office building now houses the offices of the state and county agricultural services. The school chapel is the home of Chattanooga Church.

Kenneth Clay, Bonny Oaks' executive director from 1981-84, is now director of property management and purchasing for Family and Children's Services. He and his wife began work at Bonny Oaks as houseparents in 1973.

"I think the Web site is an absolutely wonderful thing. Christine is to be commended for her work on that. I told her that anything I can do to help assist her to further the site, I'll be glad to do," said Mr. Clay.

Visitors to the colorful, user-friendly Web site will find information divided into six sections. The homepage offers an introduction and pictures of Bonny Oaks buildings, some no longer existent, others as they appear now.

The Alumni Registry provides a form for former students to register and become part of the Web site by submitting an e-mail address.

Photo Albums is a retrospective of photos submitted by former

residents.

They show buildings and children through the decades.

At Staff/Sponsors/Friends, guests may read messages sent from former staff, residents and friends as well as submit their own message.

The fifth section, The Acorns, contains scanned images of The Acorns news bulletin, which Ms. Haven said former Superintendent Malcolm Adamson printed in the basement of the office building.

Of most interest to alumni will be the sixth section, Registry Results. This alphabetical listing of alumni who have registered, along with an e-mail link to their names, includes a message from that person and pictures of their families today. Among them is a photo of Ms. Haven, who now resides in Arlington, Texas, with her three children and five grandchildren.

"Hopefully, this will be the busiest section of all as it is the original purpose of the Web site," said Ms. Haven. "We expect the Web site to become a very active means of communication between old friends as more alumni hear about the site."

For more information, Ms. Haven may be reached on the Internet at texasbonny@dellnet.com.