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After 40 years, St. Peter's is still special place,
alumni say

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St. Peter's School in Geneva has changed considerably since Peggy Gurbal attended. "It has grown," said Gurbal, part of the school's first graduating class of 27 students in 1961.

"The whole area has grown, but this is still a wonderful place to be," she said.

So wonderful Gurbal sent her four children to the same Catholic school in Geneva that she first attended in 1959.

When Gurbal enrolled, **St. Peter's** had 142 students. After 40 years in Catholic education, the elementary school is as strong as ever.

Today's enrollment stands at 390 and rising.

And Sunday marked the perfect time for parishioners, alumni and teachers to count their school's blessings and celebrate its 40th anniversary.

The gala event in the church's multipurpose room included a giant cake decorated with 40 birthday candles. The crowd circled together to sing "Happy Birthday" to the school.

Display tables were set up to showcase old class photos, scrapbooks and diplomas.

At least 75 alumni signed the guest book, and some alumni came from Wisconsin and as far as Colorado.

Sister Virginia Marie Derk, the school's first principal, traveled from Kankakee to attend the event.

"The wholehearted welcome I received is just very natural," she said. "So many of the old students have happy families and lives."

The Catholic school experience is much different than a public school education, Derk stressed.

"Everybody achieves academic excellence, but our background is with religious values," she said.

The **St. Peter's** tradition has been part of Peg Farrell's family for the school's duration. Farrell sent 10 of her children to the Catholic school.

"I just think it's an old home to me with a very good education," Peg Farrell said. "Seeing some of the nuns that used to teach here and having everyone else together is excellent."

During Sunday Mass, the Rev. Joseph Jarmoluk preached about the school's history of 40 years of Catholic education.

So what makes the **St. Peter's** experience so special to Jarmoluk?

"The difference is that we have an ability to pass on Jesus Christ that other schools do not," he said.