

# School addressed the issue with students

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Daignault said a great deal of discussion and consultation went into the decision-making process, including a staff survey, meetings with board superintendents, research on practices and the input from the school's equity committee.

"Not everyone was in full agreement during our discussions, but I think most people respected how we arrived at the decision," he said.

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Daignault acknowledged that an awkward moment came during the senior football team's exhibition game against cross-town rival Christ the King on Sept. 8 when the crowd

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- Paul Daignault, Principal

of several hundred people at Kiwanis Field began chanting "GEORGETOWN," instead of the time-honoured "REBELS."

"Having grown up here, when I'm out with my peers and the discussions get going, a lot of people say they're not happy about (the name Rebels)," said teacher and volleyball coach Kyle Stewart.

"We know many people have positive memories and associations with the word, so we don't want to overlook that, but we want

to make sure moving forward that it's a positive environment for all."

Stewart noted that some GDHS teams that compete in tournaments in the U.S. haven't used the Rebel name for years due to concerns about how it might be received.

When word arose earlier this year among the school's alumni that a name change was being considered, an online petition at change.org asking for the school to remain "The Rebels" amassed 824 signatures.

School alum Dennis Martel, who was responsible for designing the team's original logo, said while he understands times have changed, there was never any racist or prejudicial intent when choosing the name, but rather a result of popular culture at the time.

GDHS did not have a nickname from the time of its founding in 1887 until the Rebels were established in 1962.

Martel was concerned that the move to discontinue the name Rebel is an overreaction and that the memories of students from past decades "are being casually trampled upon."

"Romantics at heart, we were James Dean in Rebel without a Cause. We were Duane Eddy's Rebel Rousers. We were Johnny Yuma, the Rebel, fighting oppressors everywhere. In 1962, we listened to the Crystals sing Gene Pitney's He's a Rebel. Clearly rebellion was in the air and I guess we just picked up on it."

Daignault addressed the issue with students at assemblies during the opening week of classes and estimates he spent 15 minutes on a presentation articulating reasons for discontinuing the use of Rebel.

He added there has been no move as yet to replace the Rebels with another name, although "we feel that organically something will have to replace it," and that the task force that led to the decision is still intact. No change can be made without consulting with the shareholders' group.

"At first I was a little taken aback just because I didn't have all the knowledge behind it," said Grade 12 student Gemma Patey, deputy prime minister of GDHS's student council, whose parents attended the school and played on Rebels' sports teams.

"But Mr. Daignault did a presentation for all the grades and he explained the context behind the

name, which I wasn't fully aware of, and the connotations toward the Confederate flag and how it was directly linked back in the day. So I think it was progressive and we really need to stray away from those old ties and move in a forward direction."

GDHS's powerhouse swim team has won nine consecutive Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations overall points championships and their closest competitor for several years has been Riverside Secondary School of Windsor, also known as the Rebels.

"The issue has never come up here," said Riverside principal Tony Omar, whose school's colours are black and gold. There has never been an association with the Confederate flag.

"We're a very traditional school and our motto is, 'Rebels are leaders,' and it just kind of flows nicely."

With files from Graeme Frisquie

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