

COMMUNITY

Teacher of the Month

Chris Hadfield School principal will be missed

By Stephanie Hounsell
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's hard to say goodbye. For the past seven years, since the opening of Chris Hadfield Public School, principal Rick Nodwell has been at the helm, leading amazing adventures in learning.

Those adventures have included visits from astronaut Chris Hadfield, live video links and even a 700-student conga line.

But Friday was Nodwell's last day at the school, forcing parents, students and the principal himself to say a bittersweet farewell.

"It's somewhat like a grieving process, where you have to get your brain around saying goodbye," he said last week.

Nodwell is taking the principal's position at the new school on Yates Drive, which is anticipated to open in September.

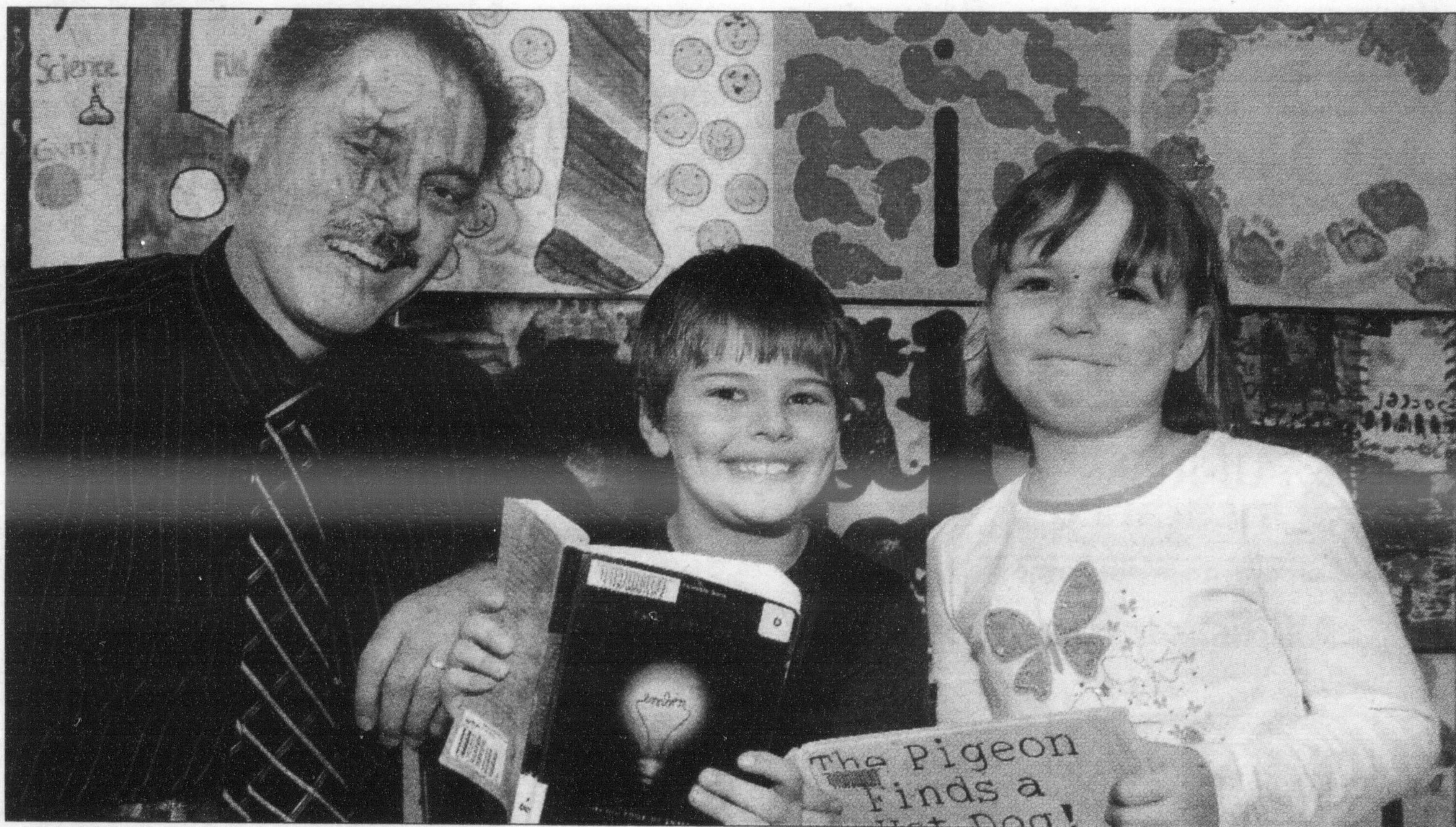
Diane Schallenberg, whose son and daughter — eight-year-old Eric and six-year-old Heidi — attend Chris Hadfield School, recently told the *Champion* of the significant impact Nodwell has had on her kids and the school as a whole.

"I would really like to showcase what a wonderful principal he was and to say thank you for making my children's experience at school a wonderful one," she wrote in a letter nominating Nodwell for Teacher of the Month. "They love him so much and are very sad to see him leave."

For the first time, the *Champion* has awarded the Teacher of the Month honour to a principal. And the reasons are plentiful.

Schallenberg wrote that Nodwell creates "an atmosphere of love and respect for both his staff and students" and said knowing he would be her children's principal was one of their deciding factors in moving to Main Street Village five years ago.

The school opened its doors in 2003 amid much pomp and ceremony, considering the school's accomplished namesake.



BELOVED PRINCIPAL: Chris Hadfield Public School Grade 3 student Eric Schallenberg and his sister, Grade 1 student Heidi Schallenberg, show outgoing principal Rick Nodwell their favourite books. The two nominated Nodwell for Teacher of the Month.

Visualizing what he wanted the school to be was easy, Nodwell said.

"I wanted to try to create something as top-notch as the person whose name is over the door."

And he believes that's happened. Seeing polite students who welcome visitors, open doors for each other and speak with pride of their school are proof of that, he said.

The school's connection to its namesake and the Canadian Space Agency has afforded students opportunities they certainly wouldn't have had otherwise. Last October, the school held a birthday party for Hadfield, the guest of honour.

How often does a student get to personally ask an astronaut questions?

Nodwell hasn't had an easy ride though, particularly with the numerous growth-related challenges, including a quickly-growing neighbourhood and boundary modifications that saw students from other schools re-directed to Chris Hadfield until new schools could be opened.

At one point the school had 1,208 students, making it Milton's then largest elementary school.

But Nodwell said he always tried to remain positive, celebrating the growth instead of bemoaning it. In fact, the school

held a celebration in honour of the 1,200th student.

Nodwell commended staff and parents for their patience during the school's growing pains. He said he's looking forward to what lies ahead and views opening a new school as a great opportunity, despite the incredible amount of work involved.

But he'll no doubt miss all he's leaving behind.

"I'm exceedingly proud of the kids for being the kind of kids I want to help mould," he said.

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