

TRIO AIMS TO RESTORE OLD CANNON

By Matthew Aguilar
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A 138-year-old howitzer cannon resting in the courtyard at El Paso Eastwood High School is much more than just a display, students and teachers say. It's a historical landmark, part of the school's identity that deserves to be saved.

"My mom went to Eastwood and it was here when she was here," student Royce Carvalho said. "You look in the yearbooks and half of the pictures are posed around it. It's a permanent reminder of history and it's here at Eastwood."

The cannon, believed to be one of several taken from the Union Army at the Battle of Valverde in 1862, has fallen on hard times since the Pioneer Association of El Paso County loaned it to Eastwood in 1967.

The wood on the carriage has rotted, the pink paint is sickly and cracking and the wheel spokes are falling away from the rims.

Perhaps worst of all, there is graffiti scrawled on the cannon's right side.

"One day I just looked at it and thought 'This is sad,'" said Sam Walker, one of three Eastwood teachers intent on restoring the cannon. "It's an important symbol, it goes right along with the Trooper mascot 'Sarge.' You can change the color and add wings, but for 30 years, that cannon has been here."

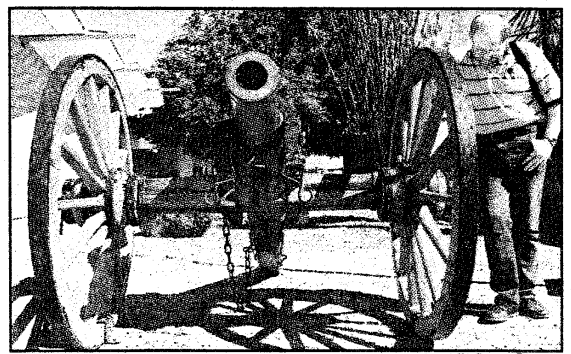
Walker, a geology teacher, said the cannon was built in 1846 by N.P. Ames Foundry in Springfield, Mass. He and the other teachers decided to extend its life with a face lift.

With money raised from donations, fund-raising events and trinket sales, the trio hopes to turn the eyesore into the impressive weapon it once was. Once restored, they plan to give the cannon a new resting place put of the weather in the school's front foyer.

Walker said it probably will take a year to rejuvenate the cannon.

"The wheels are in the worst shape. The spokes are poking out from the rim and hub and weakening the whole cannon carriage," he said. "The metal itself is real good, but the wood is the problem."

"Walker said he isn't sure who will do the restoration work, but he and students hope to find an El Paso professional to take on the job.



Victor Calzada / El Paso Times

Sam Walker is one of three Eastwood teachers hoping to renovate a howitzer.

"Our first priority is getting it restored right rather than have someone do irreparable damage," Student Council President Adam Reynolds said. "We'd like to get it done professionally, but it's always a matter of funding."

According to research by Nancy Hamilton, secretary-treasurer of the El Paso Pioneer Association, the howitzer was stained by the blood of Union Capt. Alexander McRae, who died as he fell on it at the Battle of Valverde, south of Socorro, N.M.

Eastwood High is on McRae, the El Paso street named for the fallen captain.

"Capt. McRae actually died with his blood on the cannon," Reynolds said. "It really is a symbol of Eastwood."

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