

# Duette Festival highlights, lauds all 'cracker' past



# School with an enrollment of 20 holds a special place in community

By JAMES A. JONES JR.

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**DUETTE** — Student population is growing at the one-teacher Duette Elementary School, the last of its kind in Florida.

To keep the trend from reversing, a foundation is hosting its third annual fundraiser, which harkens back to Florida's roots: the Duette Cracker Fest.

This year's festival is set for 10:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Saturday and is sponsored by Duette Education Foundation Inc.

Since Dec. 19, 2009, the foundation has contracted with Manatee County School District to operate the school.

The school operates on a shoestring with an enrollment of 20 compared with a previous low of nine students.

The determination to keep the school open burns hottest in the heart of Donna King, who serves as executive director of the foundation, and is also the school's former principal



Students at Duette Elementary School wait on the school steps for parents at the end of the day. The school is the last of its kind in the state. JAMES A. JONES JR./Bradenton Herald File

and teacher. Even a battle against cancer couldn't keep her down, although day-to-day teaching duties have been turned over to Cassie Fahy.

This week, King was doing much of the legwork to organize the festival, personally buying the gator tail and frog legs and looking for bargains on soda.

"The North River Ki-

wanis will do all our cooking," King said. In addition to fried gator and frog legs, there will also be pulled pork sandwiches and hamburgers.

Activities include cracker cows, cracker food, cracker folks, cracker activities, cracker music and bullwhip cracking. Live entertainment throughout the day includes:

- The Florida Boys (country/Florida folk/bluegrass)
- Noon-12:40 p.m., folksinger/songwriter Sugar Ransom
- 12:45-1:25 p.m., Florida folk and bluegrass musician J.D. Lewis
- 1 p.m., gospel singer Sara Spencer, a Duet-

DUETTE TO 9A



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