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Photo provided

Volunteers from Mosaic recently freshened up and replaced landscaping at the historic one-room school in Duette. The company also donated a new flag for the site.

Manatee County historic site may earn spot on National Registry of Historic Places

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DUETTE

It's been two years since Florida's last one-room school closed.

But supporters of the Duette School have been busy, working to preserve the historic 19-acre site.

Recently, the State Historical Registry approved submitting the Duette School for consideration to the National Registry of Historic Places.

If the application is successful, Duette School would join about two dozen other Manatee County buildings or archeological sites on the National Registry, said Cathy Slusser, chief historian for the Manatee County Clerk of

Circuit Court's Office.

Built in 1930 as a "strawberry school," Duette offered farm children a way to learn reading, writing and arithmetic, while allowing them to help their families during harvest season.

When the school completed its final year in 2016, after 76 years, it had 11 students.

"The construction of the Duette School was pivotal to the survival of local public education in the area even as schools were consolidated, the turpentine industry declined and the Great Depression set in. It also served an important community purpose as the gathering place for a number of social events.

SEE SCHOOL, 4A

Bradenton Herald 6/18/18

SCHOOL

Starting in 1967, the school served as a one-teacher school for grades 1-4. When it officially closed in 2016, it was the last one-teacher public school in the state," Sarah Revell, communications director for the Florida Department of State, said in an email.

The Duette School also has a connection with famed Tuskegee Institute, Revell said.

"Booker T. Washington, the renowned black educator who ran Tuskegee, recognized the need for quality educational facilities for black school children that was denied to them through a combination of racial discrimination and poverty. He approached Sears magnate Julius Rosenwald to rectify this problem. The Rosenwald formed the Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1917, and

and the school building program became the hallmark program of this organization. The Fund not only provided money for construction, but it also provided architect-designed blueprints that were drawn up in consultation with experts in the education field," Revell said in an email.

"Originally, the program was run through Tuskegee Institute, but in 1919, the Rosenwald Fund took direct control. They hired Samuel L. Smith and Fletcher Dresslar from the George Peabody Institute for Teachers in Nashville to direct the building program. By the 1920s, the Rosenwald Fund encouraged the use of the plans for any rural school, black or white. This led to the publishing of *Community School Plans*, which was

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Sarah Revell, communications director for the Florida Department of State

1931. The plans were drawn by Smith and Dresslar. The Duette School is a surviving example of a Rosenwald Plan 4-A Four Teacher Community School adapted for a white rural school," Revell said.

A group of citizens from Duette wanted to ensure the landmark, located at 40755 State Road 62, would survive and formed the Duette Community Association, said activist

Betty Glassburn.

Working with Cathy Slusser, the group pulled together a National Register application and submitted to the Manatee County Commission and the state, Glassburn said.

"The state requires a lot of information and is very rigid in its standards," Slusser said of the application.

Duette has a very good chance of gaining recognition on the National

Registry, she said.

"The recognition is important because it means no federal funds can be used to harm the building," Slusser said.

In addition, the designation would give the Duette School more clout in securing government grants for historic preservation, Slusser said.

Duette community leaders are planning a celebration in September, when they hope a place on the National Register will be a reality, Glassburn said.

The Duette Community Association is going to start having the building open from 8 a.m.-noon the second Saturday of each month for the public, Glassburn said.

A school museum has been created in the old

library and a community museum is being created in other areas of the building.

Earlier this month, Mosaic provided material and landscaping for the building.

"Their volunteers, who are employees of the Mosaic Company, spent about six hours removing old dead plants and establishing new plants. The Manatee County Extension Service Master Gardener Program has taken on the project of refurbishing the butterfly garden," Glassburn said.

Donna L. King, who served as principal of the Duette School for 23 years until was closed, said she is delighted by efforts to save school. "I am so happy. Hopefully, it will help with preservation," King said.

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