

# Teacher's legacy is being reborn at Victoria High School track

Lawrie Wallace's vision of first school cinder track in B.C. paid off, but it's time for a reno

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The Victoria High School cinder track under construction, about 1950. It was completed in 1951, but six decades of use have taken their toll. Photograph By Victoria High School Archives

In the late 1940s, a young Victoria High School mathematics teacher, counsellor and basketball coach had a vision of building the first school cinder track and stadium in British Columbia.

His name was Lawrence James Wallace and he became better known as Lawrie Wallace, nicknamed B.C.'s

“Mr. Centennial” for his dynamic leadership in four provincial centennials (1958, 1966, 1967 and 1971).

Wallace, who taught at Vic High for eight years, was appointed deputy provincial secretary in 1959 and was deputy minister to the premier from 1969 to 1977, serving both W.A.C. Bennett and Dave Barrett. In 1977, he was appointed B.C. Agent General for the United Kingdom and Europe, a post he held until 1980, when he returned to serve as deputy minister to premier Bill Bennett.



Douglas Wallis, Lawrie Wallace and Claude Campbell (Vic High vice-principal, 1934-40) at a 1976 reunion.  
Photograph By Times Colonist

Along the way, Wallace received the Order of Canada in 1971, the Order of British Columbia in 1990 and honorary degrees from the University of British Columbia and Royal Roads Military College (now Royal Roads University). He was also the founder of the Victoria High School Alumni Association.

Wallace was born April 24, 1913, in William Head and died on Jan. 12, 2006.

After serving with the Royal Canadian Navy in the Second World War, Wallace began his teaching career at Vic High in September of 1946 and soon after developed the idea and passion to build a track and stadium at the school.

The projected cost of the track was \$6,600 and the Victoria Gyro Club pitched in with \$4,600 while the Victoria School Board donated \$1,000 and the school's student council raised the remaining \$1,000.

Memorial Stadium, dedicated to Victoria High School students who lost their lives fighting for Canada in the Second World War, was a far different financial matter. The price tag was an enormous \$20,000, and Wallace and the entire Vic High staff and student body worked together to raise the money through a series of amateur shows (\$400) MC'd by student Ray Orchard with an admission fee of 10 cents, house-to-house canvass (\$8,000), open-air show (\$1,000), tag day (\$1,000), something called the "Schmoe Tax" (\$150) and Vic High Circus (\$2,800). The project also received a donation of \$2,200 from the Domino Fund. There were midways and bazaars with the goal of every student raising at least \$2.50.

The fundraising began in the spring of 1948 and the Vic High 1949 Camosun annual proudly announced: "Today, approximately one year later, we can proudly say — 'Mission completed.'"

Memorial Stadium was finished in 1949 and the track in 1951.



A track meet at Victoria High School, about 1952. Photograph By Victoria High School Archives

Today, the track and stadium have been ravaged by more than six decades of use and are in poor condition.

Victoria High School, under the leadership of Principal Randi Falls, has decided to raise \$6 million needed to renovate and upgrade the facilities, and the Alumni Association has pledged its support in memory of Wallace and those who made the supreme sacrifice in the Second World War.

The proposed upgrade is expected to be done in four stages, with the initial phase to cost \$1.5 million for lights and artificial turf. Community and sports groups in the city, which will share access to the facilities, have expressed support for the project and have signified a willingness to help in the fundraising efforts.

Initially, the project was planned for five phases. But planners thought it made more sense to combine the artificial turf and lighting in the initial phase. The second phase would be a fieldhouse, followed by an eight-lane track and finally the stadium renovation.

A fundraising drive is expected to be launched within the next few months and the city of Victoria has pledged to match the first \$250,000 raised by the school. Nearly \$200,000 has been collected so far, bringing the first-phase target close to the one-third mark. About \$40,000 of that came from last year's Victoria Day weekend, when the school celebrated the 100th anniversary of its current building with a number of events.

Once the stadium upgrade is completed, the Memorial Stadium plaque currently in the school's main hallway, honouring the Victoria High School students and staff who died while serving their country in the Second World War, will be put back in its rightful place.



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