

Mark's Blog – "Time is Time"

When my wife and I graduated from Annandale (Virginia) High School in 1973 nearly all the students looked like us. Much of Annandale was built as a part of the post-WW II housing boom and the families who settled there came to the area for military service or, like my father, to work for the federal government. Those families were largely white, middle class and Christian. Out of a graduating class of roughly 500 students I believe we had two African-American classmates and maybe that many Asian-Americans.

Times have changed.

Today Annandale's students hail from over 90 countries and speak more than 50 languages. The high school's variety of ESOL class offerings have been the subject of many print and video stories. The town itself now has the nickname of "Koreatown," a nod to the concentration of Korean restaurants, professional services and other businesses.

Last week my wife and I took a trip down memory lane and visited some of our old haunts in Annandale. It was a Saturday and the school was closed, but we walked around the building remembering people and events. As we stood outside the new entrance and peered in I was struck by 6 clocks that were hanging above the interior doors. The plaques below them read "Sydney" "Beijing" "Riyadh" "Annandale" "Chicago" and "Los Angeles." Each was set to the current time in that place.

On the one hand the display is a nod to the variety of heritages claimed by the students, but I took a different meaning from it. Instead of diversity and variety I saw an affirmation of universality. Time is time around the globe. Times may have changed, but time doesn't. Though larger forces may try to pry people apart and compartmentalize them there are fundamental truths about our lives that are immutable. 60 seconds in a minute. 60 minutes in an hour. 24 hours in a day. Time is time. And learning is learning. The first thing that all those students are reminded of as they walk through the door is that, despite the differences in language and culture, the goal is the same. And it's time to get started.