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## JANE ANN MORRISON: Two visits -- a school, a party for Brittney -- provide lesson in optimism

My Tuesday started at the Robert Forbuss Elementary School and ended at a party for Brittney Bergeron -- a day of optimism, something we in the news biz rarely encounter.

I wasn't dealing with \$1 billion state budget deficits or knife-wielding newlywed Francis Allen. (Her attorney says the GOP assemblywoman will be exonerated. Can't wait to see what explanation emerges to explain how her new husband might have stabbed himself with a steak knife.)

Instead of dealing with the state's woes or someone else's personal woes, I was hanging with kids, and with someone with a kid's enthusiasm -- Bob Forbuss.

Forbuss is a tall, lean man, a sophisticated 60-year-old, born and raised in Las Vegas, a former teacher who started a successful ambulance company. He doesn't look like someone with mob muscle, but when he calls and says he wants to show you something on the southwest edge of town, the tendency is to go. I was about the 75th person to yield to his request.

Forbuss is one of those people who has had a new school named after him. I'm not always wild about naming schools after living people because some of our schools now carry the names of people who shouldn't be held up as role models.

But naming a school after the living has pluses.

Some adopt the school as their own and help in any way they can. Others start off strong and then lose interest. I doubt that will happen with Forbuss. Since the year-round school first opened in August 2007, he's been there every week he's in town.

He also has become a one-man tour service. He's taken University Chancellor Jim Rogers through, a reminder that the K-12 system shouldn't be hurt at the expense of funding higher education. Harrah's executive Jan Jones got a tour during which she was reminded that these are the children of many of her company's employees.

"It's not fair to assume all schools are failing," Forbuss said after we watched first-, second- and third-grade students click on the correct answers for reading, vocabulary and math in computer learning rooms.

On one wall was a display of how third-graders answered the question: "What Would I Do If I Had A Billion Dollars." One would buy a mansion ... and a barbershop. Another would buy food, clothes, furniture ... and shoes. One promised to keep the same dogs.

Forbuss wants to provide enhancements for this school nestled in a blue-collar neighborhood where the homes are new but packed tightly together. He dips into his own pockets, and he encourages his friends to help.

"I want to give these kids every opportunity," he said.

A few hours later, people who worked diligently to make sure Brittney Bergeron had every opportunity gathered at Cozymel's to celebrate the anticipation of her bright future, compared with the first dismal

10 years of her life.

Five years ago, Brittney's life changed when two murderous Utah teenagers broke into her trailer in Mesquite, hoping to punish Tamara Schmidt for a meth deal gone wrong by harming her two children.

Brittney, just 10, did her best to try to save her 3-year-old half sister, Kristyanna Cowan. But the knife wounds killed the toddler and severed Brittney's spinal cord.

At her party, she popped wheelies with her wheelchair and giggled with her friends and the foster parents in the process of adopting her, Judy and Bill Himel.

The next cause for celebration will occur whenever the adoption papers are signed this summer and Brittney Bergeron becomes Brittney Himel.

This party was a reminder of how a team of people fought to help her: attorneys who helped her through complex legal issues, a court-appointed special advocate, her maternal grandparents, all gathered to celebrate this teenager's future opportunities.

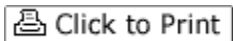
The 700 students at Robert Forbuss Elementary have a team of teachers and administrators offering them opportunities. And a man who will use his clout to make sure his namesake school gets a few extras.

Sometimes we need reminders that life isn't all gloom and doom, that our woes are manageable. May you have a day like that soon ... and may you savor that opportunity.

Jane Ann Morrison's column appears Monday, Thursday and Saturday. E-mail her at [Jane@reviewjournal.com](mailto:Jane@reviewjournal.com) or call (702) 383-0275.

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