

Laura Secord School receives heritage award

By Bonnie Bridge

A refurbished, 79-year-old Laura Secord School — retaining some of its former secret passages and stained-glass windows — will receive one of this year's Heritage Winnipeg preservation awards.

The awards will be handed out during a Feb. 18 open house at the school to celebrate the renovations.

"People want to see the changes — we've had so many phone calls asking 'When are you having your re-opening?'," said vice-principal Diane Laurin.

The Wolseley Avenue school was saved from the wrecker's hammer a few years ago when residents campaigned to have it repaired rather than replaced.

During major renovations over the 1989-90 school term, the entire student body — kindergarten to grade six — was bused to another school. When the students returned last September, the school's foundation had been strengthened, a new main office created, and new washrooms added to all three floors.

Staff and the school's current 480

students are inviting the public to drop in for the grand re-opening on Monday, Feb. 18. The open house, slated for 4:30 to 6:30 p.m., will start with guided tours followed by a 5 p.m. ribbon-cutting and the Heritage Winnipeg awards at about 5:30 p.m.

The other winners of the awards won't be announced until that time, said executive director George Siamandas.

"In 1985, the whole question of whether Laura Secord would be rebuilt or replaced with a new school was very much up in the air," said

Siamandas.

"At the time, the public schools finance board was not giving the same amount of money for renovating an old school as for building a new one. They were convinced, in fact, that putting new money into old buildings was throwing it down the drain."

Winnipeggers fought to preserve the school because of its solid architecture and decades of service to the community, he said.

"It has a very long tradition of involvement in the community, and the neighborhood valued its charac-

ter as the major institution in the West End.

"It was built by architect ^{Cal} J.B. Mitchell in 1912-1913, when people believed that education was simply the most important requirement for the growth of Winnipeg and its citizens. Laura Secord was built in an atmosphere of optimism, when Winnipeg still believed it would become the Chicago of the North."

The heritage award will be shared jointly by architect Robert Gregoire, the IKOY Partnership architectural firm, and the Winnipeg School Division.