

The Berkshire Eagle

Ceremony marks launch of \$1.5 million upgrade at Berkshire Country Day School

By Clarence Fanto
June 10, 2016

STOCKBRIDGE >> A \$1.5 million project described as a dramatic upgrade to the Berkshire Country Day School campus is about to get underway following a midday ceremony on the last day of the school year. The groundbreaking event marked the start of work on the Kim and James Taylor Music and Performance Room, and the Kevin Hirt Library and Learning Commons.



The library is named for former student Kevin Hirt, who succumbed to an aggressive pediatric cancer while attending BCD. Before his death 15 years ago, Kevin, who was 10, asked his parents to donate his college fund to support expansion of the school library.

About 200 members of the BCD community, including students, faculty and parents, attended the ceremony and picnic on Friday. The private school, founded 70 years ago in downtown Lenox, moved to its current site, the former Brook Farm off Route 183, about 50 years ago.

The project will transform Furey Hall, originally a cattle barn, into a state-of-the-art center for learning and innovation.

A two-year fundraising campaign raised \$2.89 million from more than 300 donors toward the \$3 million goal to finance the construction, and it reserves \$1.5 million to fortify the endowment, with \$600,000 of that amount designated to augment faculty salaries.

"The inspiration for everything we care about doing for the future of BCD begins with the concern for the students, the faculty and this treasured school," said Head of School Paul Lindenmaier.

"We belong to a wonderful community where everyone makes a difference in our children's lives," said parent and campaign co-chairwoman Hilary Dunne Ferrone, looking out at the sea of students and their families basking in sunlight on the lawn.

"Today marks the beginning of a new chapter," she added, "part of the continuum of good work that has been done by people throughout our school's 70 years because they believed in what our school does and in the citizens it produces."

Ferrone lauded "outstanding teachers, dedicated administrators, fellow parents and students themselves. This is how it's always been at Berkshire Country Day School. It's gratifying to know that what we begin building today will serve our school for years to come."

Kim Taylor and the parents of Kevin Hirt, Lynn Campana and Paul Hirt, then grabbed shovels for the ceremonial groundbreaking to the cheers of the assembled crowd.

"We've seen some amazing schools with vast endowments, monumental facilities, top-notch faculties, but nowhere will we hope to find the equal of BCD in heart, soul, and spirit," said James Taylor in a statement. "The Taylors will always be a BCD family." He is on an extensive North American tour prior to his Tanglewood concerts on July 3 and 4.

The Taylors served as honorary co-chairs of the fundraising campaign, "Fulfilling the Promise." Their 15 year-old twin sons, Rufus and Henry, who attended BCD for 11 years, completed ninth grade on Friday. In the fall, they will enter 10th grade at the prestigious Milton Academy near Boston, a boarding school their father had attended starting in 1961. "Kim and I are both the products of independent school educations, and finding BCD was the single most important thing that allowed us to move to the Berkshires and to raise our family here," Taylor stated. "The faculty, parents and students here form a community with a soul, an ethical, caring, cooperative family that have given our boys the best possible foundation from which to carry on."

The classroom and performance space will accommodate up to 100 guests for school and community events.

According to school officials, the open-space, multi-level library facility will enhance BCD's comprehensive and challenging curriculum. The library aims to foster a love of reading and provide tools that encourage innovation and creativity, connecting students to the wider world, they said.

The facilities will be built by Allegrone Construction of Pittsfield, which won a competitive bidding process. Completion of the project, designed by Flansburg Architects of Boston, is expected this winter.



After announcing the impending conclusion of the fundraising campaign last December before 250 guests, Lindenmaier said: "The school had the myth at one time that it was just a place for the elite and affluent. The members of the board and donors to this campaign represent a cross-section of everything we are."

Lindenmaier called the project the most dramatic upgrade at the school in 20 years. In the late 1990s, Allegrone constructed the Fitzpatrick Library and Peterson Hall, named after former Head of School Robert Peterson.

"This Learning Commons is going to transform how we think about teaching, learning and space at school," Lindenmaier told The Eagle. "There's going to be distance learning; we'll be engaged with the outside world in new and exciting ways." The projects will not involve taking on any new debt, he noted. The school's current budget is \$3.3 million and it achieved a surplus of about \$200,000 last year.

Current enrollment on the campus serving pre-K through ninth grade is about 150. The school's capacity is 250 students. Peak enrollment was about 200 in 2008. Tuition maxes out at \$25,700 to \$27,500 for Grades 7 through 9. About 29 percent of students received some needs-based financial aid this past year.