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New life for old Antrim school?

By David P. Greisman, Sentinel Staff

ANTRIM — A proposed \$39 million college preparatory boarding school could bring 400 students and more than 100 jobs to a former Antrim college campus.

The Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge, which is expected to go before Antrim officials early next year for a site plan review, would open on the former Hawthorne College site in September or October 2008, according to school officials.

The school, named after spiritual leader Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, would teach a technique called Transcendental Meditation. Proponents of Transcendental Meditation say it expands the mind's capabilities beyond the fraction of the brain that people currently use.

School officials hope the technique, when combined with a regular course of instruction, will allow the Maharishi Academy to join Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter and St. Paul's School in Concord among New Hampshire's elite college preparatory schools.



Photo: Steve Hooper / Sentinel Staff

Dan Wasielewski, director of facilities development for the Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge, explains plans for the new school. It would be housed on the site of the former Hawthorne College in Antrim.

Many of the students will probably come from around New England, while others may be part of practicing Transcendental Meditation families in the United States and other countries, said Maharishi Academy Director John T. Boncheff.

“Our public high schools are all free, and yet you see so many people paying for home schooling or prep schools,” Boncheff said. “Our entire educational system is based on fulfilling the potential of the person. Nothing happens until the student learns.”

“As a student is using more and more of their mental ability, the desire to learn increases,” he said. “The goal then is not only to give a first-class prep-school education, but to allow the student to use their full potential and also to be less stressed and less anxious.”

Along with Transcendental Meditation, school officials say a philosophy of architecture known as *Sthapatya Veda* will assist students’ education.

Under *Sthapatya Veda*, for example, buildings will be oriented to the east because the rising sun will bring health and vitality to those inside, according to the school’s Web site.

Of the buildings at the former Hawthorne College, which opened as Nathaniel Hawthorne College in 1962 and closed 26 years later, the Maharishi Academy will retain Scarborough Hall, Peabody Hall, the gymnasium and one other building, said Dan Wasielewski, the school’s director of facilities development.

The Maharishi Vedic School has owned the Old North Branch Road property for more than a decade. It was used as the organization’s national headquarters until recently, when the group went to a more regional structure, officials said.

A September 2006 proposal to build a medical college never got off the ground.

“This (idea) seems to have a lot more steam and seems to be going forward,” said Antrim town planner Bradley Houseworth. “I think they’ve finally narrowed down exactly what they want to do with the property there.”

Wasielewski said another 20 buildings will be constructed, including dormitories, a dining hall and an exhibition hall. Many will be modular buildings so construction can be completed sooner, and they will only take up 85 to 90 of the school’s 457 acres of land, he said.

“We’re doing it for efficiency’s sake, to minimize the impact we have on the environment and also to conserve resources,” Wasielewski said.

With a refurbished gymnasium and a new auditorium and tennis courts, the school would also provide a recreational outlet for Antrim residents, especially in the summer months when school is not in session, he said.

“We’re working with the town of Antrim, and we seem to be getting a lot of explicit support from them,” Wasielewski said. “The fact that we’re going to restore the campus somewhat to its original glory excites the town.

“We hope to help revitalize the economics of the area,” he said. “There’ll be this symbiotic relationship that will benefit the both of us.”