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Boarding school may move to college campus

By Michael Pon, *The Villager*

An unusual boarding school is coming to Antrim. Located on the old Nathaniel Hawthorne College campus, the Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge, High School for Leadership, hopes to open its doors next September.

The boys' college prep school will have facilities to house 400 students and will create more than 100 full-time year-round jobs and expand the town's tax base. The Academy also intends to open its new facilities to residents when the students are not using them. There will be tennis courts, an ice rink, playing fields, a gymnasium and an auditorium large enough to seat the student body.

"We want to pay our taxes," said Dr. John Boncheff, director of the Academy. "Certain buildings we build will be tax exempt, but others will not, so we will be creating a tax boost for the town. Classrooms will be tax exempt, but administrative buildings and dormitories are a gray area, but I expect some of them will be taxable. The town will have ultimate responsibility for fire and police protection, so it is only fair we pay taxes. We are still exploring all the ways we can work with the town on this. They've been very helpful so far, and we are very pleased about that."

"This is bringing back a school where there was once a college and is a good thing for the town. As far as water and sewer, the infrastructure should be there," said business administrator Bill Prokop, who

recalls that there were well over a thousand students on the campus when the college was open. "We are looking forward to seeing their site plan review. This would all be very positive for the town—a gymnasium, a skating rink, a performing arts building. All those things would be great."

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"It would be great to see more commerce," said selectman Michael Genest. "It would be great to see the school get up to its full capacity of 400 students, because that would also help the town, providing teaching jobs and other work at the facility."

"We are already registered and approved by the state as a school and non-profit organization," said Dr. Boncheff. "But the final approval comes with the Fire Marshall for building and safety codes."



Students at the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment in Fairfield, Iowa practice Transcendental Meditation.

The project still needs to pass planning board approval, but with the site having previously handled a similar facility, it doesn't appear that the Academy will have much trouble with getting the plans passed.

"The engineers are doing the final work on our site plan, and in early January or February we'll be bringing it before the planning board," said Dr. Boncheff. "We are going to be very careful not to build on any wetlands."

On Saturday, the Academy hosted the first meeting of its board members. Antrim selectmen and other town officials met with the board members and were given an introduction to the facility's plans and practices by Dr. Boncheff. Among the board members were many notables, such as an associate director at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, a physician at Mt. Auburn Hospital, a director from St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School, and others from various organizations and schools.

The Maharishi Vedic Education Development Corporation bought the Hawthorne campus more than ten years ago. Until a couple of years ago the facility was the Corporation's national headquarters. They recently changed to a more regional setup, with centers around the country, leaving this facility open for a different use.

"We are an international organization, teaching Transcendental Meditation in 108 countries," said Dr. Boncheff. "So we know we will also get some students from some other countries. We think a fair percentage will be from families whose parents attended the Transcendental Meditation Schools."

According to the Academy, the campus will be free of tobacco, alcohol, drugs, and bullying. The diet for the boarders will be purely vegetarian, but the students will be able to eat as much as they wish to.

Although the Academy will have no religious affiliation, the central theme of campus life will revolve around the practice of Transcendental Meditation. The Transcendental Meditation technique is based on the ancient Vedic tradition of enlightenment in India, which has been handed down

by Vedic masters from generation to generation for thousands of years.

The practice began in the United States with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi of India, who began teaching it in this country in 1959. Since then two million Americans and six million people worldwide have taken up the practice. Students will meditate in the mornings for 20 to 30 minutes before classes and will do so at the end of the school day as well. The rest of the school day will be devoted to academics.

"Our organization really focuses on the whole development of the individual," Dr. Boncheff explained. "The first thing is the teaching of Transcendental Meditation. There is a saying in psychology that we only use five to ten percent of our mind, which means ninety percent is there, but untapped. What Transcendental Meditation does is allow you to experience that other 80 or 90 percent, and begin to bring it back into daily life and activity."

The goal of the Academy is embodied in its name, The Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge.

"We don't even know who we are. Socrates' first injunction is to 'know thyself.' From there you can gain as much knowledge as you can," Dr. Boncheff pointed out. "Total Knowledge also refers to that deep place within us where there is a field of inner peace. When we are open to that field, then we are at home with ourselves and nature. From there we can know the maximum we are capable of."

The Corporation has a similar high school in Fairfield, Iowa, but it is not a boarding school. It is called the Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment. The Maharishi University of Management, which opened in 1974, is also located in Fairfield. It is accredited up to the Ph.D. level.

"The word 'Maharishi' means a seer of truth. This is what we want every graduate of our Academy to be," said Dr. Boncheff. "If you give the students the ability to use more of their mind, combined with a top-level college preparatory curriculum, then we feel we have the absolute best in education."

To find out more about the Academy, go to www.maharishiacademy.net.