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Pages 11, 12

## NORTH BRANCH CAMPUS TO TEACH AGAIN

MAHARISHI ACADEMY OF TOTAL KNOWLEDGE: HIGH SCHOOL FOR LEADERSHIP TO OPEN FALL 2008

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On a bright day in late October, as I drove over a turbulent North Branch River roiling with autumn leaves—alizarin crimson, raw umber, and cadmium yellow—I got to thinking of all the many times my car rumbled that bridge on my way to teach English at Hawthorne College from 1964 to 1968. I paused and looked down at the eddies around large rocks in the stream where between classes I used to float flies and even once in a while caught little bright-orange bellied native brook trout.

But this trip I was going to visit the Director of the Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge, Dr. John Boncheff.

It was pleasant to be revisiting the campus again, but I had another reason for nostalgia. After leaving Hawthorne, and while working on a doctorate at Boston University in 1969, I taught at what was then New Hampshire College in Manchester, now Southern New Hampshire University. Some of my students had heard of Transcendental Meditation because its founder, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, had influenced the Beatles, and the students said they were about to be “initiated” into TM for what seemed to me to be an expensive fee. Concerned for the students’ welfare, I phoned the TM office in Boston and expressed my skepticism, at which I was invited to the Cambridge office to be initiated for no charge. Still doubtful, I accepted, drove down to Cambridge, and learned Transcendental Meditation. What I discovered was that TM can be an effective way to reduce stress,

focus one’s mind, and get a good night’s sleep, all of which I badly needed.

Dr. Boncheff met me outside Scarborough Hall, a large east-facing dormitory at the western edge of the campus. Dark haired and affably serious, he led me through a first-floor hallway, past a kitchen emitting spicy aromas of Indian cooking, to a small simply and comfortably furnished room on the walls of which were several photographs of the serenely bearded and robed Maharishi. We were joined by Dan Wasielewski, an imposingly tall man, who greeted me warmly. Both men wore suits and ties. Boncheff is the Academy Director, and Wasielewski is in charge of buildings and finance.

For three years before coming to Antrim, Boncheff was a member of the Philosophy faculty at Plymouth State College, and since 1970 he has taught TM in countries around the world, including India, Russia, and Estonia, as well as the United States. He completed a Ph.D. at

Maharishi European Research University in Switzerland where he wrote a dissertation on the ancient Hindu system of logic, Nyaya.

Boncheff said that when the Academy opens in the fall of 2008 he hopes to have between one and two hundred male students enrolled in grades 9 through 12, living in several newly constructed dormitories. Wasielewski explained that all the dormitories will adhere to Vedic Architecture, the building principles of which, to quote their website: “are in harmony with Natural Law— these principles are in line with Nature’s own timeless laws of structuring or building which maintain every particle in creation in perfect harmony with everything else. Thus, Maharishi Sthapatya Veda design is the world’s most ancient and complete system of architecture and planning. It takes into account the influences of sun, moon, stars and planets with reference to north and south poles and the equator. Homes, offices and communities designed and built according to Maharishi Sthapatya Veda design therefore connect individual life with Cosmic Life, individual intelligence with Cosmic Intelligence, optimizing both the close and distant positive environmental influences on the individual.” All this is a little beyond me, but I do

know that all their new buildings will face the eastern sunrise.

Boncheff emphasized the Academy’s benefits to the town of Antrim, including one hundred new staff and faculty jobs, sports and recreation facilities, an increased tax base, and local spending by families and other visitors. Here is the way the Academy website describes the new school:

**HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MAHARISHI ACADEMY OF TOTAL KNOWLEDGE:**

Stress-free, supportive learning environment—students learn the Transcendental Meditation® program.

Cutting-edge knowledge in every field of learning with state-of-the-art electronic displays.

Consciousness-Based<sup>SM</sup> education promotes optimal learning and balanced brain development where no student will fail.

Total Knowledge curriculum will be unsurpassed—all disciplines are connected back to the student to make learning easy and meaningful.

Beautiful rural wooded 400-acre new campus in New Hampshire.

Boarding School for Boys grades 9-12.

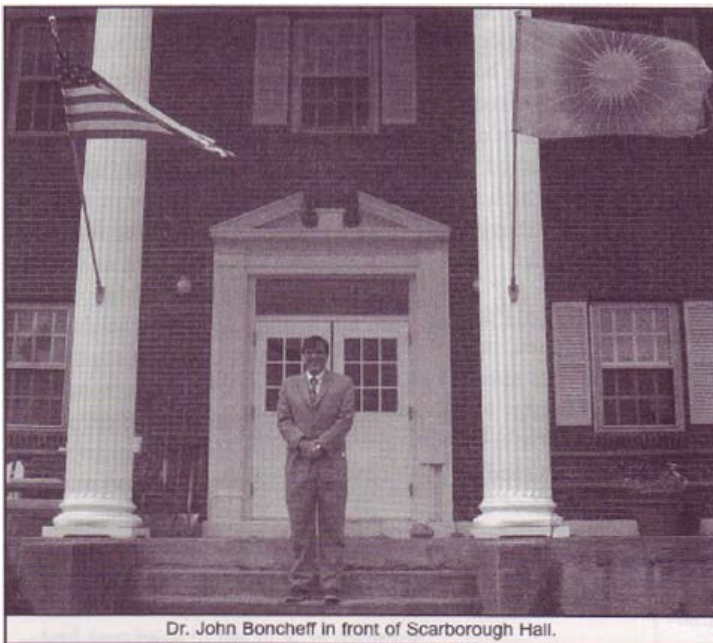
Campus will be virtually smoke-, alcohol-, bullying-, drug-free.

Organic, vegetarian meals with emphasis on fresh foods.

Majestic new campus with healthy buildings and “green campus,” built in accordance with ancient Vedic building principles.

I asked Dr. Boncheff whether TM has been introduced in other US schools, and he mentioned the kindergarten through twelfth grade Maharishi School of the Age of Enlightenment and the Maharishi University of Management, both accredited in Fairfield, Iowa.

In early November I returned to the North Branch campus with members of Antrim town government, including Town Administrator Bill Prokop, Selectmen Ben Pratt and Mike Genest, Planning Board member Bob Edwards, and Grant Administrator Dianne Chauncey. We had been invited to meet the Academy administration and members of the Board of Directors, and to



participate in an information session about the Academy's plans for its curriculum, new buildings, students and faculty recruitment, financial arrangements, and educational theory. We were favorably impressed with the Board members, which included businessmen and educators from New England, New York, and the Midwest, as well as with Dr. Boncheff's thorough presentation and responses to our questions.

It appears that the Maharishi Academy may offer considerable benefits to its students and the Town of Antrim. It is, however, a large undertaking. When I voiced some skepticism about the scope and timing of their plans to Dr. Boncheff, he acknowledged the ambitiousness of the project but emphasized that other TM education programs had proved very successful, even without the benefit of so beautiful a four hundred acre campus. He said that there are over two million TM meditators in the

US, and many more around the world, most of whom are sufficiently convinced of TM's efficacy that they might be eager to have their secondary school children participate in the Academy. And he asserted that while the building program, enrolling students, and recruiting faculty present enormous challenges, because of their excellent staff, highly qualified and committed Board, and support from the international TM organization, they will succeed.

After meeting the staff and board members, and hearing Dr. Boncheff's presentation, I drove away hoping for their success. As I approached the bridge over the North Branch River, two graceful fawns startled into my headlights. ❄️