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## **Antrim School to expand in phases Vision for academy unchanged, but pace of growth tempered** By David P. Greisman, Sentinel Staff

ANTRIM — There will be fewer students, fewer staffers and fewer buildings than initially hoped for, but the officials behind a proposed \$37 million college preparatory boarding school say its fall opening will still go on as planned.

The Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge, situated on the former Hawthorne College site in Antrim, would open with 50 to 75 male students, school officials said.

That's far less than numbers given late last year, when school officials estimated that 200 students would be enrolled in classes during the first school year and that the academy would then grow toward a total student body of 400.

The school, named after the late 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.

The Maharishi Vedic School, which teaches meditation techniques and alternative health courses, has owned the Old North Branch Road property for more than a decade. It was used as that school'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.

Starting a boarding school requires construction, which will also occur in phases, spread over three to four years, according to academy Director John T. Boncheff.

"We're learning that everything takes a little longer than we had hoped," Boncheff said. "We had to really make some strategic decisions. Sometimes you don't make them until you're knee-deep into it. Some things pop up. What we had to do is decide how many buildings we were going to start with."

The initial campus layout consisted of 20 new buildings, including dormitories, a dining hall and an exhibition hall.

"We were going to disturb wetlands," Boncheff said. "We've had to redesign that. When we looked at the amount of work we had to do, we

realized we weren't going to get it done in time for this year."

The first wave of construction will now begin around spring. With a lower number of students expected for this fall, the plan is for two buildings containing classrooms and dormitories to be completed during the first school year, Boncheff said.

Any construction work must first receive approval from Antrim's planning board. Boncheff said he expects to go before town officials by late March.

"Their plans now are 'let's get started,' which we totally support," said Antrim Town Administrator William A. Prokop. "It would create new jobs and new opportunities, and also increase assessed value for property to be taxed. Everybody wins."

In the meantime, though, students will learn and live in former Hawthorne College buildings that will be refurbished, such as Peabody and Scarborough halls and the gymnasium.

The academy has received a \$1 million loan to help pay for work, equipment and supplies for the gymnasium, the two halls, the tennis courts and new baseball and soccer fields, Boncheff said. The school will also be financed through private sources and will be eligible for government grants and loans, he said.

Construction would begin on another two buildings in spring 2009, Boncheff said.

As it is, when prospective students come with their parents to a planned March 29 open house, they will see what was once Hawthorne College but hear about what will become the Maharishi Academy.

Academy officials have set the tuition for 2008-09 at \$25,000. Room and board will be \$9,750, and another \$3,500 will go toward expenses such as books, uniforms, telephone and Internet

use and athletic equipment. Tuition and fees at the Antrim school will total \$38,250.

In addition, students who have not already learned the Transcendental Meditation technique or undergone the accompanying Sidhi program will pay one-time fees, respectively, of \$2,500 and \$5,000.

Financial aid will probably go to 30 to 40 percent of the students, ranging from 20 to 80 or 90 percent of the cost of attending, Boncheff said.

By comparison, tuition and fees for boarding students at Phillips Exeter Academy for the 2007-08 school year totaled approximately \$39,000.

Forty-three percent of students at the Exeter preparatory school received financial aid, with the average award for a boarding student being \$29,754. And beginning this fall, students whose family income is \$75,000 or less can attend the academy for free.

The estimated total cost for St. Paul's students in 2007-08 was \$42,975. About one-third of the student body received help with tuition, with financial aid grants ranging from \$1,200 to \$39,300. Students whose family income is \$65,000 or less attend the Concord school for free.

Nevertheless, Boncheff doesn't see the Maharishi Academy as being in competition with Phillips Exeter or St. Paul's.

"By any standards we are unique. If we were just going to be another boarding school, it wouldn't really make economic sense," Boncheff said. "It's going to be those people who respond to this idea that you can have all knowledge in one brain, that you can have an enlightened student."

The Maharishi Academy has received about 28 applications so far, many of them children of

current Transcendental Meditation practitioners, Boncheff said. Applications are also expected to come from both international students who will live on campus and local students who will commute to and from school, he said.

Priority applications will be accepted through June 1, with a final application due date of Aug. 1. Acceptance letters will begin to go out around May 1, Boncheff said. The staff, which will include about 15 teachers, should be in place by June 1, he said.

"A lot of people understand that we've had 25 years of experience with our school in Iowa and our school in England," Boncheff said. "What we're going to teach and how we're going to teach has already been developed quite successfully. We feel comfortable that we will have all our educational resources ready to go within a couple of months.

"There are definitely some challenges opening a new school," he said. "Next year is going to be easy."

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