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Maharishi Academy Cuts 1st Enrollment School to open with 75 students, not 200

By Sam Bonacci, Monadnock Ledger-Transcript Staff

ANTRIM—The Maharishi Academy of Total Knowledge has scaled back the number of students it will educate in its first year from 200 to 75.

"This year we expect to start with about 75 students," said John Boncheff, director of the school, on Friday. "The main thing is we are continuing to move forward and we will start this year. And that is the important thing."

The Maharishi Academy will open for the 2008-2009 school year on schedule this coming fall, he said. To date, 28 students have applied to the school.

The school will be located on the site of the closed Hawthorne College. The all-boys boarding school will incorporate Transcendental Meditation into the students' studies.

Initial plans had placed the total number of students at the school at 200. The school will continue to grow in phases, said Boncheff.

"Our next phase is we want to move to 200 for the next year and by that time all our construction for housing 200 students will be done," he said.

The school will still eventually house 400 students, said Boncheff, "but we figure that is going to take several years to get to.

The lower initial enrollment, according to Boncheff, is the result of a realization that

construction to house large numbers of students would take longer. The initial plan for the campus would have required the school to go to the state for permits for alter wetlands and terrain.

"We knew that we were not going to be able to get it done in time to open in September," said Boncheff.

Construction will be minimal for the first school year, he said, with only two buildings needing to be built. Four or five additional buildings, including the gymnasium, will be renovated and used for the school. The school has already secured a \$1-million loan.

"We have several buildings... that are still in existence from the Hawthorne days," said Boncheff. He later added, "In order to open, we merely need to bring the existing buildings up to code."

Antrim will benefit from the opening of the academy, said Boncheff.

"The town of Antrim has been very supportive and we really thank them for that," he said. "We expect to have 50 new jobs, there will be an increased tax base, and we still plan on opening our athletic field for the town's use in the off hours."

The estimate of new jobs is down from an initial estimate of 110 jobs for a school with 200 students.

The school would also bring some tourism to the area, Boncheff said, with people coming to visit boarding students. The students who have applied so far are from California, New York, Virginia and Massachusetts. There will also be international students, with some coming from Asia, Boncheff said.

"Antrim is going to become a destination. Parents are going to come to visit their child," said Boncheff.

Antrim Administrator Bill Prokop agreed that there could be benefits to the town.

"They could be creating some jobs for local people," Prokop said. "To me that's the number-one thing. Done right, it's good for everybody."

The academy still needs to go before the Planning Board for a major site plan review, said Town Planner Bradley Houseworth. Boncheff said that representatives of the academy would appear before the Planning Board in May or June. Houseworth was unsure of how much time the review would take, saying it would depend on the initial scope of the project.

"This is an anomaly, a unique situation. It is going to be interesting to see how long the process takes," said Houseworth. "It's definitely new ground for Antrim in terms of planning. We've never had to deal with anything of this size and scope. It's definitely an exciting project."

The tuition and fees for the 2008-2009 school year will total \$38,250. The tuition for the 2008 to 2009 school year will cost \$25,000. Room

and board will cost \$9,750, and \$3,500 will be required for expenses such as uniforms and books. Students who have not already done so will also need to take classes in Transcendental Meditation and an optional advanced Sidhi program, at a cost of \$2,500 and \$5,000.

"We are also engaged right now in a large fund raising campaign for scholarships and we feel confident that we will have financial aid available in September," said Boncheff.

What remains to be seen is how the academy will compete with well-established preparatory schools in the area. On price point alone, the school will be going head to head with Phillips Exeter Academy and St. Paul's.

"There are many famous boarding schools in NH, all of which provide good instruction and have excellent faculty, but they do not have the technology to develop the knower, the container of knowledge into which all this knowledge pours. And so what sets us apart from other schools is that we actually make the student more intelligent," said Boncheff.

Transcendental Meditation allows the student to develop his full potential and use 100 percent of his thinking capacity, said Boncheff. The techniques for the school have already been put in place to a great degree of success in schools in Iowa and England, he said.

"If this was just another boarding school, it would make no sense to create a new one," said Boncheff. "The motivation for this has come out of the tremendous success of our schools elsewhere... even though this part school is new, it's based on a proven technology."