

HEADLINES

A Monthly Message from Chip Denton, Head of School

October 2019



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Dear Trinity Community,

This year, as we celebrate our 25th, we are telling the Trinity story. In the last *Headlines*, we talked about how the school got started. Now I'd like to focus on the first decade (1995-2005).

I remember Board meetings in 1996 and 1997 in the bonus room over the McAdamses' garage, when we were trying to decide **whether to buy land** off of Fearington Road, or go in with a local church to purchase property jointly, or try to develop the Hope Creek Church property on Erwin Road. None of these ideas got traction, and then one day John Sanders, a local realtor and a friend, called and said, "You should talk to the Branch family. They are selling their land to a developer in stages, but things are not moving as they'd hoped and they might sell you some of the land." **And so it was that Trinity School, in 1998, purchased the northernmost quarter of the old Branch land at the end of Pickett Road.**

Our first decade was marked by growth. We grew from 39 students to over 300. We added grades until we were K-8, and eventually TK-8. In 2001, when we moved into our first permanent building on Pickett Road, we doubled our classes (from one first grade section to two, and so on in every grade), and that year we increased our enrollment by 38%! Our facilities grew to match our enrollment: In 1999, we put up the first modulars on the new property where the Advancement and Business Offices are now, and we dedicated our new classroom building (now the Lower School Building) in 2001 and the Blue Gym a little later that year.

Back then, firsts came fast and furious: Our **first athletic event** was a cross-country meet coached by Hubert West (our first Athletic Director) out at Smith Middle School. Our **first plays** were put on at Trinity United Methodist Church in downtown Durham; our **first basketball games** were played at the gym at Hope Valley Baptist, where Trinity parent Lloyd Braswell was pastor. Our **first (and only) mascot** was chosen in 2000 by the students in what turned out to be quite a contentious process. Our first **full-time Athletic Director**, Sue Eckstein, launched a number of new teams in the early 2000s. **The first capital campaign** raised \$5 million to purchase land, put in lots of infrastructure, and build the Lower School Building. Our **first eighth graders** graduated in 2001, after a difficult decision by the Board to delay the start of the Upper School and launch a high school task force. Our first **accreditation** was granted in 2003.

And then there are **the stories—moving, funny, sad, inspiring:**

The Tale of Two Turn Lanes. These would be, first, the one we *almost* had to build on Erwin Road in our third year to stay in our rented space at Hope Creek Church (thank God we were saved by a new rule requiring a supermajority); and then the one we *did* build: Every time you stop at the light at Randolph and Erwin, remember the precious Trinity dollars that made your turns possible.

The Tree for John Holland. In 2000, Trinity parent and faculty spouse John Holland had to crash-land his Duke Life Flight helicopter on an emergency flight back from Winston-Salem. John was flying alone, and his was the first death in the Trinity family. The maple tree on the southeast corner of the LS building is John's tree.

Please turn over...

The Art Room that Ralph Built. To save money when building the Lower School Building, we had left several rooms on the second floor unfinished. One Christmas break, former Trinity Board member Ralph Mason and his daughter turned the unfinished room into our first art room. Susy Holloway's classroom is still very much the room that Ralph and Barbara built.

The Car That Exploded. I remember sitting in my office in the modulars (Cliff Pearce's office now) and hearing a commotion outside along the sidewalk. A woman had abandoned her Volvo because the seat warmer had caught the car on fire. The students watched the car burn from their classrooms (we were giving ERBs!), and we were all surprised by the noise of the tires exploding. The fire was so intense it melted the asphalt.

The Soccer Field Snakes. Between the two major capital campaigns that built the Lower School and South Buildings, we constructed what are now the baseball and soccer fields. The land at the back of the campus was undeveloped, and the guy who drove the bulldozer to grade the land unearthed dozens of snakes. Some of those creatures migrated from the back acres up to the front of school, much to the consternation of our Director of School Sarah Whiteside and our receptionist Tonya Mitchell, who were both deathly afraid of these reptiles.

Jack's Ladybugs. Jack Simonds was our first full-time Business Manager, and he was a COO of sorts—all manner of problems found their way to Jack, who addressed them with alacrity and confidence. One day some teachers complained that the school was infested with ladybugs and asked Jack to do something about it. So Jack put out a memo informing everyone to wear polka dot clothes, which would ward off the pesky little things. I still laugh about that whenever I see a ladybug on a front porch column.

A Hymn for Jean. Jean Spence, late wife of Trinity grandparent David Spence, had moved into their new house next to the school as she was battling cancer, and she was confined to her home, nearing the end of her life. One Thursday, after our weekly TK-8 Assembly, the entire school marched over to her house, stood outside her bedroom window, and sang one of her favorite hymns, "Fairest Lord Jesus." I can still see her in the window. It was a holy moment.

This first decade of the school established Trinity firmly at 4011 Pickett Road. We **codified the school's mission statement** and worked to **scale a small school into a mid-sized one** with the same mission and values. This year, many of the people who shaped the story of this first chapter are returning to the school to help us celebrate. We are grateful for every person who has helped to tell the story that is Trinity's.

Non Nobis.



Chip Denton
Head of School

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