

The FALCON

ARBORBROOK CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Volume 4, Issue 1

ARBORBROOK HOSTS 'REFRESHING' CHILDLight CONFERENCE

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." ~ Matt. 11:28

After nearly two years of Covid shutdowns, fear, and isolation, when it came time for Arborbrook teachers and staff to pick a theme for the 2021 ChildLight Conference the school would be hosting on campus, one word stood out above all others: *Refresh*.

For many Charlotte Mason schools in the Southeast region, the ChildLight conference is a highlight of their academic year, but in 2021, teachers and staff were especially in need of a time to revitalize their spirits through connection and sharing with other schools.

Head of School Andy Zawacki says one of the primary reasons he and the rest of the staff chose "Refresh" as the theme for the two-day event was because they sensed such a spirit of weariness in the education community. "Things had been bad around the nation. They've been bad for a lot of our sister schools, trying to figure out what you had to do and what you didn't have to do. Teachers were tired."

Thus, Arborbrook saw that as the perfect opportunity to gear this year's event toward refreshing the individual through worship, meditation on Scripture, and sharing best practices with other Charlotte Mason teachers and administrators. "We wanted [our guests] to have experiences with the Charlotte Mason principles that bring our schools together. We also wanted them to be refreshed in friendship with peers and in gathering ideas from other schools. Also, there's refreshment in knowing that you have somebody in the trenches with you."



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Hosting the event during the pandemic presented logistical challenges. However, Arborbrook staff leaned into Charlotte Mason philosophies of learning by engaging with nature and hosting nearly all the workshops outside. And there was no shortage of academic food for thought.

Among the sessions offered, Arborbrook Language Arts teacher Deirdre Mumpower presented neuroscience research that supports the practical Charlotte Mason philosophy that moving bodies lead to engaged minds. Rob and Cindy Shearer of the Francis Schaeffer Study Center in Tennessee taught a workshop on integrating a biblical worldview across academic disciplines. Melanie Walker-Malone, head teacher at Red Mountain Community School in Birmingham led a session on how modern educational emphasis on hurrying deprives students of the opportunity to experience unhurried joy in learning. And Arborbrook Nature Studies teacher Carina Brossy shared her expertise in creating school gardens and using them to support critical thinking and social skill development.

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"And that's just a few examples of everything there was to choose from," Zawacki said. The array of options were designed to mirror Charlotte Mason's philosophy of setting an educational feast before students so they can take what they want. "We wanted a feast for the teachers to be able to engage in, and they were feasting, and then bringing it back to their cohort of teachers and sharing," explained Zawacki. "So a lot of them would divvy them up and say, 'I'll go to this one, you go to that one, and then we'll share notes afterwards'."

The glowing feedback Arborbrook received from the other Charlotte Mason schools in attendance must have been refreshing for our hardworking staff and teachers as well.

One teacher, Jennifer Winslett from Crossroads Christian in Fayette County, Georgia, summed up nearly all the responses when she called the conference not only "well-organized and carefully planned," but also "warm, genuine, and helpful."

"We loved the outdoor sessions and have dubbed this conference 'Teacher Camp,'" Winslett said, adding, "I can't think of a better way to honor our Mason principles than the way the conference played out: spiritually authentic, outdoors, full of life affirming ideas, excellence with academics, honoring of children, uplifting relationships. We were blessed. Thank you for persevering with excellence." ■

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NEW BUILDING PLANS MOVING AHEAD

The pandemic may have slowed Arborbrook's building plans, but that doesn't mean progress isn't happening.

Ulunda Baker sits on Arborbrook's board of directors and chairs the facilities committee. She provided an update on the school's plans to construct two new facilities—one for the upper school (7th through 12 grade), and one for lower school (Kindergarten through 6th grade).

Baker says she and the rest of the board are working on two parallel components. The first involves completing the purchase of an acre of land from Central Baptist Church and making a rezoning request with the town of Wesley Chapel to allow Arborbrook to develop as its own entity, apart from the church. "From there," Baker says, "we will continue with our general contractor getting our building plans approved."

The second component concerns the actual designs for the buildings and making sure the original plans still meet Arborbrook's growing needs.

"We want to make sure those plans still reflect where we are as a campus now as far as enrollment," Baker says, "and that the configuration of some of those spaces still make sense with what we've done operationally in the last couple of years." She expects review sessions will kick off in mid-November. Then she's hopeful that the school will be able to break ground sometime around August of 2022, with at least one of the new buildings officially opening in January of 2023, and both completed by 2025.



There are also plans to expand building three, where junior high is currently housed, with additional classrooms, as well as enlarging the lunch porch. That, says Baker, is a project Central Baptist will carry out in partnership with Arborbrook as the building will continue to be owned by the church. The committee's timeline for completing that project is by the end of 2022.

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NEW ATHLETIC DIRECTOR BRINGS INNOVATION, EXPANSION TO FALCON SPORTS

Since arriving at Arborbrook this past summer, Athletic Director Stephen Widenhouse has taken on the task of streamlining the school's athletic processes and widening the scope of Falcon programs.

Widenhouse already knows a lot about beating odds. As a baby, he underwent a heart transplant, becoming just the second infant at Carolinas Medical Center to survive the procedure. From there, his lifelong love of baseball and basketball led him to a degree in sports management from Pfeiffer University, along with jobs coaching high school baseball at Albemarle and South Stanly high schools and working with two college athletic departments. He's currently completing a master's degree in sports management from Liberty University.

In the few months since taking on the sports director position, Widenhouse hasn't been shy about putting his education and experience to work for Arborbrook students.

One of his first orders of business was updating the school's ticketing options through the platform Ticket Spicket.

"More and more people are going to credit cards and buying things online. So just looking around, the cash

system wasn't exactly the most efficient option," Widenhouse laughs. He says the new app has made it much easier for families and fans to come cheer on their favorite Falcons. "It's super easy. You just download the app and you can see the events, pay with your credit card, and then just show your online ticket on your smartphone."

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He also used Ticket Spicket to create a season pass program for basketball that offers access to every middle school, JV, and Varsity game. "If you're going to come to a good number of games, it definitely saves you money in the long run," he explains, "so it's been neat to see how many people are taking advantage of that."

Widenhouse has also turned his attention to developing new programs for Arborbrook athletes to test their mettle, including introducing a cheerleading program for the first time since 2015.

"We recruited 12 girls and that's really the perfect number for the first year because it's a brand new program," Widenhouse says. He has plenty of praise for new head cheer coach Shantell Taylor who previously coached at the University of West



Florida, as well as headed up Varsity and JV cheer at Pace Academy, a private school in Atlanta, Georgia. "She's got a lot of experience, and everyone loves her personality," Widenhouse says. "So she's definitely been a huge asset. We also hired a second coach, Meadow Maddalone to enhance the cheer program."

Now the cheer program is planning an exhibition with other schools, along with a mini camp that Widenhouse believes may draw more girls to the sport next year. "They're really on a roll right now," he explains.

Widenhouse has aggressive plans for adding more programs soon. For example, he says so many students are expressing an interest in tennis, he's hoping to add the sport next year, with softball and baseball possibly coming shortly after that.

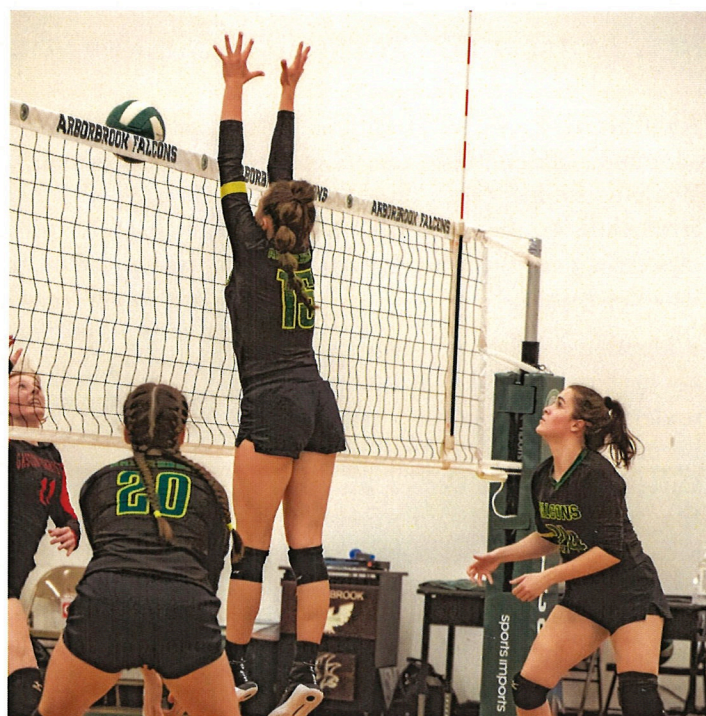


Of course, more sports requires more community support, and Widenhouse has made that a priority as well.

“The goal with our sponsorships is to partner with local businesses around Arborbrook, whether it's in Waxhaw, or Monroe, or Matthews, because it helps both parties. So it's been great to see the ball starting to roll with that.” He expects contributions from local businesses will enable enhancements in the gym, like adding a weight room, a training room, and a new score table. He'd also like to raise more money to help send Arborbrook teams to athletic camps.

That, he says, is the kind of support that inspires creativity and team spirit in the kids, something that was on full display this year with girls' varsity volleyball. Despite being a much smaller school than average, Arborbrook's team went 17-3 this year, ending their run ranking 45th out of nearly 300 teams in the state. The season culminated in an epic senior night that happened to coincide with the last game of the year.

“The girls put up lights and decorations and got the word out on social media themselves. So it was a completely packed crowd. And man, it got loud!” Widenhouse remembers, laughing. “The team that we played started to get a little frustrated by it. But, you know, that's the home court advantage! And then, of course, they finished it off with a win and kids running onto the court. Everything went perfect. It was awesome.”



Widenhouse believes that's the kind of spirit Arborbrook can develop around every team. “This is a school with such a good culture,” he says. “And that's the most important thing when it comes to developing programs. We have strong leadership at Arborbrook. I mean, this is just a really good place to be. It's exciting to be a part of it.” ■

ARBORBROOK 2022 EVENTS

Feb 28 - March 3

**Love Boldly
Service Week**

April 7

**Grandparents and
Special Friends Day**

April 7-9

**Spring Theater
Production**

May 21

Graduation



INSERT

AESOP MEETS THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN THE FALL PLAY

For centuries storytellers from Aesop to Beatrix Potter have used cute and cuddly animals to teach timeless truths to audiences great and small. And no truth is more timeless than that which comes from the Word of God. That's why this year's Lower School play retells the story of the Good Samaritan through a cast of colorful creatures.

Drama director Tammie Butt discovered the musical, *The Bird and the Bug*, through the Academy of Arts Ministries, a South Carolina theater organization whose mission is to "make the Bible come alive" through drama.

After viewing a production of the show, Butt immediately realized it would be a great fit for Arborbrook. "When I saw *The Bird and the Bug*, I thought, 'Man, the parents are going to benefit as much as the kids from this story,'" she says. Among the elements she expects adults will enjoy are subtle pop-culture references that are especially relevant to issues families are wrestling with today.

Characters use the web (here, an actual spider's web) to avoid communicating face to face. The story also deals with

the hot topic of media manipulation in the form of competing reporters (a blue jay and a centipede), each of whom insist they're the sole trustworthy news source.

But the musical's lessons go deeper than current events to the ideological debates of our era. For instance, one song, titled "Love is a Beautiful Thing,"

**"THE WORLD IS GOING TO TELL YOU TO
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puts forth the pervasive modern ideas that truth is relative and love means affirming everything about another person. They're errors the script soundly refutes.

"The song is presenting a point of view that's very popular today, but it's wrong," Butt explains. "It's also subtle because the Lord *does* love us and accept us. But his agenda for us is change. He wants to transform us into the image of Christ."

For that reason, Butt sat down with the kids in the cast and talked through the lyrics of that particular number.

"I really wanted to make sure that they understood that, yes, love is a beautiful thing," she says. "And God does love us the way we are. But he does not want you to find 'your truth' in your own way. There's *one* truth. So I thought it was a really great opportunity to teach to Arborbrook students, even the youngest ones, that the world is

going to tell you to 'find your truth.' And while that's that sounds good, it's not what God wants."

Seventh grader Micah Loy is playing two characters in the show—"Chancellor Bill," a politician and a Pharisee-type character. He says that even weeks from curtain rise, he already finds the themes of the show inspiring. "Since we've been in rehearsals, I've been thinking about the story and how one person can make a difference in the world," he explains. "Even if you're just a kid, you can still make a difference."



His castmate and classmate Taylor Knight agrees. "It's really interesting because my character Carrigan the bird suddenly starts to stand up for what's right and that changes the direction of everything." That's just what Butt was hoping for.

"I'm not here just to sell tickets to the show, though I hope that we do, and I'm sure we will," she says. "But the most important part of this for me is that I get the opportunity to speak into these kids' lives at a moment when the world around them is constantly talking about the issue of identity. 'Who am I? What do I identify as?' I want to help plant the seed that answers those questions. They were identified by their Creator, and *he* gets to decide who they are. His plans for them are good, and every single one of them is precious to him, and he has a plan for every single one of them. That's the most important part for me." ■

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NEW BUILDING PLANS MOVING AHEAD *(Continued from page 2)*

The ultimate goal, Baker explains, is to have facilities that match Arborbrook's excellence in other areas.

"Some of our programs are best in class," she says, "so we need to start getting our facilities to that level as well." Baker shares that the two-part aim of the new buildings is to better meet the needs of Arborbrook's current families while also preparing for future growth.

A huge part of achieving excellence with the new buildings, Baker believes, will come from the design, which will bear little resemblance to the institutional, often-uninspiring appearance schools often take these days.

"When I think about our Charlotte Mason educational philosophy and the principles it embodies, it leads me to think of natural tones—greens, and browns, and tans," she says. She also pictures natural lighting with open, meaningful spaces that aren't crammed or cluttered. "I think that our focus of elevating a love for art, a love for literature, and nature and the Bible should be reflected in the buildings."

Baker says that the biggest wish she wants to express to parents and the wider Arborbrook community is to keep praying for God's timing and direction as the building plans move forward. And she wants to encourage families to ask how He might be directing them to partner with the school in realizing shared dreams for the future. ■

