

# BLAIR

BULLETIN



*celebrating*  
**175**  
*years*





From the School that has brought you epic experiences since 1848, learn more about the journey many are calling “transformative” and “personally empowering” ....



Created by Blair alum **Dan McClung '99** and Pureplay Entertainment, Blair's latest admission video gets to the heart of our School's mission: building meaningful relationships between students and faculty. Watch the video honored with five AVA digital awards that viewers have called “gorgeous” and “awe-inspiring” here: [www.blair.edu/epic-video](http://www.blair.edu/epic-video).



**“This was incredible!!  
Best school EVER!!”**



**“Gets to the heart of  
the Blair experience.”**



**“Great message; great  
school; amazing kids.”**



**“Gorgeous, captivating,  
awe-inspiring.”**



**“Mind-blowing!  
Definitely the place for  
our kids to grow in!”**



**“Riveting! Blair is the  
future and the now!”**



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## A Day in the Life of Blair

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## AS BLAIR CELEBRATES ITS 175TH ANNIVERSARY,

we take a look back at the many ways the School has evolved while also staying true to and honoring our traditions and core values. Decades of students have participated in the time-honored tradition of passing under the Arch before convocation and following commencement, but long gone are the days when parents used to drive through it to drop students off at class, before a pedestrian campus was built. It seemed only fitting to feature this iconic campus landmark beloved by so many generations of Bucs on the cover of this special issue of the *Blair Bulletin* as we look back at School history and celebrate our 175th anniversary.

Over these next pages, we hope you'll enjoy this look back at what life at Blair was like in the early years, at the turn of the 20th century, in the years

following World War II, and during the rebellious and tumultuous 1970s. Our cover story then turns to the late 1990s as the millennium approached, and, finally, we hope you enjoy a firsthand account of campus life today from a Blair senior who will graduate in May.

We are grateful to the alumni, parents, current and former Blair faculty and staff who took the time to contribute to this issue, sharing their reflections on Blair since the sesquicentennial in 1998 and looking ahead to the School's bicentennial in 2048. Thanks to their efforts, as well as the deep dive our Timken Library staffers took into the School's archives, we hope this commemorative issue captures where we have been and where we are going in advance of our demisemiseptcentennial celebrations on campus over Alumni Weekend, June 9 to 11.

—The *Blair Bulletin* editorial team

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**Volume XCVI, No. 2**  
**Winter-Spring 2023**

**PUBLISHED:**  
January, April,  
June & October

**PUBLICATION NUMBER:**  
USPS 057-760

**PUBLISHER:**  
Blair Academy  
Blairstown, New Jersey 07825



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### **DESIGN BY:**

Snively Associates, Ltd., State College, Pennsylvania

### **PRINTING BY:**

J.S. McCarthy Printers  
This magazine is printed on recycled paper.

## SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

What do you think about the stories in this issue of the *Blair Bulletin*? Let us know—your letter may be published in the next issue. Please send your comments to [bulletin@blair.edu](mailto:bulletin@blair.edu).



# Q&A

## COLLECTIVELY LEADING THE WAY FOR THE LAST 34 YEARS



*Blair's 15th Head of School and current Trustee, T. Chandler Hardwick III.*

What do you regard as the most impactful innovation on Blair life at the beginning of the 1990s?

**I**n 1990, Blair was entering the last decade of the 20th century, one that would also mark the School's 150th birthday, and I was beginning my tenure as Head of School. Though Blair had enjoyed a stable period during the 1980s, there seemed to be a number of areas of school life that were poised

**“**Boarding schools are places where students live, sleep and eat without parental oversight; they need to be student-centered, and faculty aware, sensitive and accountable for their students' well-being.**”**

for change and progress to continue the School's success. However, most importantly, we sought to address the individual well-being of our students and to do that, we had to know them as much as possible. With that singular goal before us, the full faculty would meet six times a year to discuss each student at Blair.

There were certainly other candidates for opportunistic change. I would include the following: strengthening our admission program and the college matriculation list; increasing athletic opportunities,



especially for young women; reworking the school calendar to enhance the learning environment; freeing up the daily schedule to allow for more academic flexibility; refocusing the advisor-advisee system to allow for maximum student choice; and developing ways to increase and promote faculty feedback, autonomy and creativity in their work. This list is actually only a part of a larger institutional review—always a healthy part of new leadership—but none of these issues, vital as they may have been at the time, had the impact on the Blair philosophy that the singular change we adopted brought about.

The key for Blair at this moment in our history concerned defining ourselves unequivocally as a student-centered community. Generally speaking, schools fall into one of two categories: student-centered or faculty-centered. Private day schools and public education, with exceptions, tend naturally toward faculty-centered cultures; since students are mostly known through classroom interaction, a faculty-centered culture makes sense. However, boarding schools, places where students live, sleep and eat without daily parental oversight, need to be student-centered. There are many stories and accounts of boarding schools being difficult, lonely and hard for the students, and, thus, the challenge is to create a culture that seeks to minimize that sort of experience and instead promote faculty awareness, sensitivity and accountability for their students' well-being. To that end, the meetings to discuss each student were the key to the growth in our awareness.

The first year of my headship at Blair, the School had about 340 students; the next year it was about 320. In that circumstance, the faculty could meet and talk about each student in a fairly manageable way, a series over two days of meetings per grade. And the discussions about each student varied, some being quite short (and invariably positive) while others were longer and more complicated. Regardless, we went through the student body by class—sometimes seniors first, sometimes freshmen—with every student's name announced aloud and a discussion ensued.

A fairly typical discussion, run by the monitor for the class, might go something like this:

*A faculty member raises a hand, and reports that the student whose name was raised says that they seemed to be adjusting to Blair pretty well. How so? Well, they have made*

*friends in the dorm, and I see them having lunch with a group of friends every day. Very good about keeping the room clean and studying quietly with their roommate, and they seem a good match. Monitor: They play soccer, right? The coach speaks up. Yes, and is making progress. Determined attitude in practice, but not particularly talented, may not make varsity in later years. Monitor: Any idea what they plan to do next season? Advisor: We have that on our agenda for our regular meeting, along with getting some extra help for biology; the course that seems to be the hardest subject for them. Biology teacher speaks: Actually not doing badly, middle of the pack, but is a bit reticent in class. English teacher: Not in English. Can't shut them up! Fun to teach. History teacher: Same here. Monitor: Okay, good. Anything else before we move on? No concerns? Okay.*

So, what was the result and ultimate purpose of these meetings? Hearing every student named, the faculty—whether they taught the student or not—gains greater awareness not only of that student, but also of student life generally as various patterns, themes and issues tended to be greater than any one student. The faculty also gained a sense of how we, as the adult body responsible for these students, worked together to understand their issues, address their problems, and develop not only strategies but also cultural norms on how we deal with our various roles and duties as faculty members. In short, in addition to learning about our students, we were learning about ourselves as a professional community of educators.

In the 2022-2023 school year, Blair faculty continue to meet for the student review meetings. The School is now over 470 students large, so the meetings must take longer than they used to, and, invariably, even as was always true, such a significant group effort is demanding and increasingly so. Nonetheless, there is not only a sense of purposeful accomplishment when the meeting concludes, but a greater faculty connectedness also is gained: a stronger connection with our work, our purpose and one another. And, through that connected spirit, Blair has its student-centered identity confirmed again and again.



**T. Chandler Hardwick III**  
15th Head of School





*Blair's 16th Head of School, Chris M. Fortunato.*

In your view, how do Blair's state-of-the-art facilities and innovative curricular and co-curricular offerings make the Blair experience extraordinary for our students?

**THE** essence of a great school lies in its commitment to the future and to the empowerment of its students (and adults) to discover, write and share their stories. Great schools are always looking ahead to next chapters in the journeys of their people and the

institution. I am deeply grateful and proud during my nearly eight years as Head of School to have led our great school, Blair Academy, through an exciting time of transformation in its campus, programs and culture. As my friend **John C. Bogle '47** often reminded me, we are called to leave places better than we found them and to diligently and lovingly position the institutions we care for to possess the foundation, strength, inspiration and will to write more and greater next chapters.

The programs, projects and initiatives I had the privilege of bringing to and leading at Blair were designed to amplify the very best of what the School has always stood for—deep and knowing relationships among teachers and students and a commitment to excellence. They were also aimed at

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building an entrepreneurial culture that enhanced our ability to thoughtfully experiment with new ideas, curricula and pedagogies in the interest of creating a superior learning experience for our students that is truly engaging. Student engagement is the key to learning excellence; for students to truly engage, they must find meaning, purpose, intrinsic motivation, relevance and joy in the classroom and beyond. Their work needs to matter and be connected to the world in energizing and substantial ways.

It was such a pleasure for me to partner with faculty and staff to launch initiatives that helped to even more fully realize Blair's potential on this front. The annual Day of Service, Blair LEADS, The Blair Leadership Stories Project, the Alumni Roundtable Series, leadership/communication seminars,



the Integrated Science Research (ISR) program, the Sigety Faculty Summer Institute, an expanded robotics program, a reimagined health-and-wellness curriculum and more highlighted a vibrant period of time. That only continues to expand under Peter G. Curran’s leadership as we challenge ourselves to raise the bar around curriculum and pedagogy. The brave willingness to walk the talk when it comes to being truly forward-thinking in teaching and learning was and is something I admire about the amazing Blair community.

That forward-thinking philosophy and practice and that willingness to look ahead to the many next chapters guided the commitment to enhancing our campus through eight building projects during my tenure—the construction of Lakeside and Kathryn Halls, the renovation of Weber Hall as the home of the mathematics department, the expansion of the Bogle Science Center, the construction of the J. Li Golf Training Center, the winter sports complex (aka the Blair Bubble), Steckel & Miller House and the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration (CECIC). Each of these facilities has been critical in building on Blair’s commitment articulated in the *All In 2018-2025 Strategic Plan* to create the conditions for our community to do its best work as learners and leaders.

My vision for the CECIC, which ultimately became a collective vision that we together brought to fruition, reflected my belief in the power of interdisciplinary work, flexible community learning and work spaces, and the integration of technology and the arts in all we do. To witness that space become the new home of the Society of Skeptics (with longtime program director Dr. Martin Miller, Hon. ‘81’s, blessing), the space in which Blair’s exceptional student review meetings took place, where robotics classes, human rights seminars, video and audio production, LEADS sections, architecture, and much more came to life was and is a great gift. The CECIC, in many ways, is a powerful and beautiful physical manifestation of Blair’s commitment to next chapters in the School’s evolution.

As we pushed ourselves to continually become a better Blair, we broke fundraising and admission records, opened new doors and opportunities for our community, and cemented a spirit and practice of growth and change that I’m proud to witness continue under Peter’s leadership. I’m humbled and proud to have played my part in supporting Blair’s commitment to its next chapter. It’s a commitment that lives on, ever, always.



**Chris M. Fortunato**  
16th Head of School







*Blair's 17th Head of School, Peter G. Curran.*

## As Blair celebrates 175 years, what is on your mind as you look toward Blair's bicentennial?

**AS** we mark this historic milestone, our commitment to Blair's student-centered philosophy and offering our students exceptional educational opportunities are at the center of everything we do. The goal of knowing students well and ensuring that our faculty members possessed "with-it-ness" were key tenets of Chan's vision when he became Head in 1989, and they remain at the core of our mission today. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that the boarding school experience is a valuable one; the

opportunity for in-person interaction and connection across all elements of campus life makes a considerable difference in shaping who our students become during their formative adolescent years.

At Blair, students aren't just encouraged to be intellectually curious and to follow their passions; they develop skills that are critical in our ever-changing world: building the confidence to speak publicly, to advocate for themselves, and to communicate with adults and peers of all different backgrounds and opinions. Our students leave Blair as experienced communicators, global citizens and team players—they are armed with an understanding of cultural humility, morality, self-awareness, and the ability to step outside their comfort zones, show

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vulnerability and take smart risks. Because these skills are so vital to professional success and personal fulfillment, I believe boarding school, and particularly Blair, will become only an increasingly compelling option for families over the next 25 years.

Some estimate that, when our ninth graders graduate from college in eight years, 75 percent of the jobs they will consider as they enter the workforce don't even exist yet. Navigating that uncertain world successfully will require not only being well-educated in the traditional sense, but also possessing grit, resilience, self-awareness and the ability to adapt. Blair's innovative curriculum already puts students a step ahead, and I am confident that the advanced courses designed by our faculty will catapult our students to great achievement over the next



*An artistic rendering of the future Center for Health and Well-Being created by HQW Architects.*

quarter-century. We look forward to seeing the directions our advanced curriculum, as well as our J-term, Integrated Science Research and other unique programs, will take in the years ahead; already, it is rewarding to see students make new discoveries and solve problems in the world beyond Blair.

It is the people at Blair who make all the difference. Our teachers, advisors, monitors, coaches and dorm staff serve as mentors and sounding boards long after students have left campus, and Blair friends stand up for one another at

weddings, as godparents, and special aunts and uncles to the next generation of Bucs. In fact, that is something that has become increasingly apparent during my tenure as Head of School: Blair far exceeds a four-year experience, not just for our students, but also for our parents and families. Once you become a member of our community, you belong for life.

As much as we have embraced technology to support and supplement learning in and outside the classroom, we are also ever mindful of finding balance. That's why we are





purposeful about asking our students to put down their phones, make eye contact as they walk across campus, be present and engage with others in the community. Again, this opportunity for in-person connection with people from many different corners of the globe is a core aspect of what makes the boarding school experience so transformative and its impact so lasting.

The health and wellness of our community is also a top priority, and that's why we have increased education and programmatic offerings and begun planning a new building

**“The health and wellness of our community is also a top priority, and that's why we have increased education and programmatic offerings and begun planning a new building project: a Center for Health and Well-Being connected to Hardwick Hall.”**

project: a Center for Health and Well-Being connected to Hardwick Hall. The new facility, which will allow our health services and counseling teams to occupy the same space for the first time in School history, will include areas where students can access health resources, study and socialize. Looking further ahead, a longer-term goal is to build a new dining facility that can fit our entire community in one sitting. There will be more to follow on both of these projects in the months and years to come.

As we reflect upon this anniversary year that taught so many of us to say “demisemiseptcentennial” and consider our history and future, I want to end this note by expressing my sincere gratitude. Blair is thriving today because of your generosity and support. I couldn't be prouder to lead our School forward during this pivotal time as we continue to build on the strong foundation created by the Blair Board of Trustees and the Heads of School who came before me.

Thanks to the work of Jim Kelley, who, sadly, passed away shortly after the new year, as well as Chan Hardwick and Chris Fortunato, we enter the next chapter of Blair history with excitement, confidence, and commitment to our core values and mission as we look to secure our future for the next 175 years. I look forward to commemorating the occasion with many of you at our 175th celebrations over Alumni Weekend in June.

**Peter G. Curran**

*17th Head of School*

# A Day in the Life of Blair



## 1848

by Timken Library Director Ann Williams

### 1848

**SCHOOL FOUNDING—APRIL 6:**  
The citizens of Blairstown appoint a committee to oversee the erection of a new coeducational school.



**1850, BOARDING BEGINS:** The first dormitory is built with funds from railroad tycoon John I. Blair, who remained the School's principal benefactor for a half-century.

### 1862

**MAIL ARRIVES AT BLAIR:** Daily mail service is established at Blair. Students are required to write home at regular intervals.



“ This institution is located on an eminence amid the beautiful hills and valleys of Blirstown, commanding a fine and wide extended view of the Blue Ridge and surrounding country. The pure mountain air, the healthfulness of the climate, and the convenient remove from corrupting influences of city life, afford peculiar facilities for moral, intellectual and physical culture. ”

—1861 catalog written by Simmons S. Stevens, principal of Blair, 1861-1873

**What was a favorite dining hall meal?** There was no dining hall in 1848. In fact, there was only one building (now called Old Academy), built among a wild field of brambles and trees just above the main street of town. The local parochial school kids brought their lunch in a pail or ran home to eat with their family and returned to finish school if they were not needed on the farm. Boarding students of the Academy could eat lunch at their boarding home in town or bring a lunch pail. Dinner was eaten with boarding families, and these arrangements were overseen by parents and ministers to ensure that a proper Christian home would give the pupils a safe and welcoming home away from home. Favorite meals included fresh rabbit or squirrel, beef soup with potatoes and fresh fish from the river. There was abundant game in the woods and brambly fields surrounding the Academy. If you had the skill and patience to snare, catch or shoot your quarry, it was much appreciated to bring this home for supper. Hunting knives were not permitted

at school, but it was a simple matter to run home and retrieve your hunting kit once students were dismissed for the day. Mr. Blair posted signs to show where no one was permitted to trespass or hunt. A favorite dessert was rice with—pick two (but NEVER three)—butter, sugar or milk. It was a real treat!

**What did students wear?** Students wore their best white shirts and trousers to school with boots to protect against the mud and cold as fall turned to winter. It was a chore to keep those boots properly polished when it was warm and muddy in the fields, and you dared not come to church on Sunday with scuffed or dirty boots! The girls wore long dresses and lace-up boots as well. Boys changed into work clothes after lessons to do chores, hunt, fish and roam the fields before supper. The boarding girls would walk after lessons and carry small armloads of the firewood, cut and split by the boys for the stove, so it would be ready for the next morning when the weather was cold.

**TUITION REACHES AN ALL-TIME HIGH:** The cost to attend Blair is \$150 for boarders and \$25-\$30 for day students annually.

1867

**BLAIR HALL FIRE:** A devastating fire breaks out in December. Blair Hall burns to the ground.

1862



1869, INSLEY (BLAIR) HALL IS BUILT: Blair Hall is rebuilt after the fire.

**How did students begin their day?** Students sang hymns and started each morning with opening prayers and Bible passages. The dividers between the sides of the school building were pushed open, and both the local students and the Academy students would listen and sing together. “Glory, Laud and Honor” was popular and an easy tune to carry without hurting anyone’s ears!

Then, Dr. Condict [the principal] would close off the divider before beginning Academy lessons and recitations on one side of the building. If there had been any discipline issues, he would lecture, and students waited with bated breath to hear what would become of a student who was being noisy in his classroom. They were not permitted to speculate, and it reminded them not to be the ones on the hot seat! Parents were never pleased to receive disciplinary news from the School.

**How did students communicate with their families?** Students were instructed to write home three times a week and send out those letters with the mail stage when it came to town. Parents often wrote back, sometimes urging students not to let up on their studies, especially as the weather got warmer and there was more temptation to ride after school. Diaries in the archives indicate that students saved these communications in a box, along with money parents sometimes sent to allow their children to buy something necessary at the General Store. Treats from home were not permitted unless they were fresh fruit.



Early students play hockey on a frozen Blair Lake.  
*Photo courtesy of Blair business manager F. Ernest Rea, who worked at Blair from 1923 to 1986.*

**SCHOOL CLOSURE:** The School closes for two years while the Board of Trustees searches for a new principal.

**1873-75**



**1884, GYMNASIUMS:** The first gymnasium is built at Blair and burns down soon after. A new gymnasium is built and dedicated in January 1886.





1884

**DIPLOMAS DISTRIBUTED:** Blair begins awarding diplomas to graduates of the School.

**Where on campus did students spend their free time?** Students had opening devotions every morning and closing devotions every evening, as well as one hour of study each morning and night, so free time was a bit limited. But among the most popular spots on campus outside of class was the horse barn, where students loved to ride to the stream and draw water from pails in the river and dump them in the barrel by the schoolhouse so there would be a supply of water during the day. Downtown was also a popular destination, and many students enjoyed going to the General Store, where they could buy food in cans—including canned fruit, which was a special treat during the winter when everyone was tired of eating potatoes—although it could be difficult to open with a knife as the first can opener wasn't patented until 1858.

**What teachers had the biggest impact?** Dr. Condict was a serious man who impressed upon students their Christian duty at all times. Pupils worked hard in copy books because he was exacting when it came to arithmetic and neatness. He had a keen sense for science and encouraged everyone to work diligently and to use their curiosity to learn.

**What spot on campus was favored by students?** Skating on the pond near the Academy in the winter was a favorite activity and favorite campus spot. Those partaking would build a bonfire on shore, and everyone would come out to the lake once

the ice was thick enough to bear their weight. The girls skated around the lake in their long coats and muffs to keep warm, while the boys buzzed back and forth, racing and showing off. It was a beautiful spot even in warmer weather, but higher temperatures attracted the flies that could be quite aggravating.

**Did any events occurring in the outside world affect campus life?** Sickness could affect campus life and students were always taught to dress properly for the weather to avoid getting sick. Since Dr. Condict was a medical doctor, he kept close tabs on how everyone was feeling and looked out for any sign of fever.

**What was Blair's greatest strength at that time?** The Academy teachers brought a new standard of educational excellence to the area. Parents were pleased to send their children to a school where they could prepare for entry to college or business so that they might follow in their forebearers' footsteps, some young men going on to study to become ministers themselves. The local students also benefited from a high-quality education and about 25 or so of them came to school most days when they were not needed on the farm. The Academy side had a much more consistent number of pupils, and students were expected to enroll for both terms, May through September and November through March, following the Academy's opening in November 1848. ■



**1889**

**LOCKE (GIRLS') HALL:**  
Construction of a girls' dormitory begins and is completed the following year.

**WATER TOWER:** Blairstown is one of the first towns in the area to create a municipal water system, pumping water from a well in Blair Meadow (now covered by Blair Lake) to the tower on the hill.

**1890**





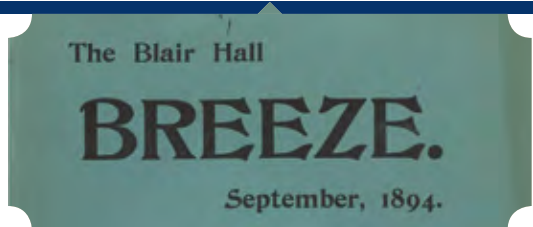
# 1898

by Ann Williams

**1898 was a pivotal year for** Blair Presbyterian Academy, which was mostly referred to simply as Blair Hall. It was the last year in which W.S. Eversole acted as the School principal and saw the dawn of the first day that Dr. Sharpe took the reins of the School. Dr. Eversole had some difficulty finalizing the books to wrap up the 1897-1898 school year, and it took until July 7 for the deck to be cleared for Dr. John C. Sharpe to take over.

Dr. Sharpe moved in to find unkempt fields surrounding the few school buildings on-site: Blair Hall (also called Boys' Hall—now named Insley Hall), which contained a few small, dim recitation rooms (classrooms) and most of the boys' dorms; Girls' Hall (now known as Locke Hall), which housed the facilities for about 60 girls; the Cottage (which stood near where Clinton Hall is today), where the chemistry and physics labs were located; and Stone

1894



**THE BLAIR BREEZE IS BORN:** Students issue the first edition of *The Blair Breeze*, a monthly literary magazine. In 1918, *The Breeze* became a weekly newspaper.



1899

**JOHN I. BLAIR'S PASSING—DECEMBER 3:** At the age of 97, John I. Blair passes away.

Hall (now known as Ivy Hall), which had been serving as the laundry facility and also housed extra dorm rooms for overflow boy students and male staff who lived on campus. The Park Street area was Vass Farm, a local working farm that was not part of the School at that time. A large barn (perhaps near the Bowl) and a gymnasium (where the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration stands today) were also part of campus, but Dr. Sharpe did not mention them in his first impressions of what he was undertaking.

As Dr. Sharpe ate his first breakfast in the dining room, he realized the aged space was too small to accommodate all of the students and teachers for meals. The laundry was already in the process of moving to Paulina to make use of the water power, and he quickly envisioned how to create much more classroom space to begin his first year and start bringing to life the larger, more academic school of his vision. Dr. Sharpe drew up pencil plans of these changes, something he enjoyed doing as a way to turn his ideas into reality. Despite the fact that he had only his good business suit to wear and most of the workers were not on-site, Dr. Sharpe, along with the one worker present, rolled up their sleeves and began demolition on the dining room for the needed expansion. The whole room got new wood flooring and was enlarged to allow everyone to sit at meals together. Dr. Sharpe did not stop there; other workers returned to campus and turned Stone Hall (soon to be called Ivy) into seven classrooms and an office for Dr. Sharpe. The dingy little recitation rooms in Blair Hall were refashioned into boys' dorm rooms, and soon all the boys could fit into what would

shortly transform into Insley Hall. The chemistry and physics labs were moved out of the Cottage and into Recitation Hall (the top floor of present-day Ivy), along with the new classroom space. The doors to the new classrooms and labs were not yet hung when the opening day of school arrived, but the teachers and students who showed up for the first day of school in September 1898 did not let that dissuade them from getting up and running.

Returning students were greatly surprised to see the lawn neatly mowed and so many positive changes to campus. Dr. Sharpe was puzzled and frustrated when so many students did not show up for the first day of school, and he feared that all his hard work might not be completely appreciated. He came to learn that the tuition structure offered a big discount for students who started school three weeks late into the first term (possibly a holdover from the days when farmers' children were still needed on the farm, but the School enticed them to enroll when they could). He rewrote the tuition prices to make the cost of daily fees (to enter late) equal to the cost of attending the entire first term, and he never saw that late influx of students again! A returning student remarked that the campus ran with military precision, but that the sense of community had grown so that the students enjoyed "a fuller sense of companionship with our classmates and fellow students."

Dr. Sharpe had worked this sort of magic at his prior post, expanding Shady Side Academy from a school for 16 boys into a place of learning for 225 youngsters. With the growing reputation of 50-year-old Blair Presbyterial Academy, Dr. Sharpe envisioned much more than the 100 students (a mix of boarding and day



**1903**

**PEDDIE DAY IS BORN** : New Jersey's oldest prep school football rivalry and Blair's unique celebration of school spirit begins with a football game during which Blair defeats Peddie 17 to 6.





An early drawing of Blair Presbyterian Academy.

“ The School Dr. Sharpe built over the next 29 years, which would become Blair Academy in 1904, left a magical mark on many. Without his leadership, it may never have come to fruition.

—Timken Library Director Ann Williams

students) that had typically been attracted to come to Blirstown. In just two short months in the summer of 1898, he had already turned Blair Presbyterian Academy in a new direction with an emphasis on high-level academics achieved with a close-knit community. In addition to the impressive property transformation, he had studied the academic records of each student so he already knew their classroom history before they ever met in person. He turned his office into the campus post office for students. Instead of finding their mail by digging through a pile in the common room of both dorms, students found that Dr. Sharpe had created a sorting system, and he personally handed each student their mail as they approached his desk one by one for a quick hello and some

personal contact with the new principal each noon. Dr. Sharpe was not a “warm and fuzzy” personality, but he was a visionary educator dedicated to improving the lot of each student in his care, pushing each student to excellence and raising the bar for the whole campus experience.

Dr. Sharpe may have regretted ruining one of his business suits when he couldn’t restrain his enthusiasm for starting improvements immediately, but the School he built over the next 29 years left a magical mark on many. He was already envisioning his School, Blair Academy (the name change he enacted with approval from the Board in 1904), from the time he first stepped on campus. Without his leadership, it may have never come to fruition. ■



**CAMPUS IMPROVEMENTS:**  
The Arch is built by Italian stonemasons before the start of the school year in September.

1914

1904

**THE SCHOOL GROWS:** Thanks largely to the efforts of Dr. John C. Sharpe, the size of Blair’s campus increases to 300 acres.



# 1948

by Adele Starrs with *Dave Wakefield '48*

A “**six-year man,**” *Dave Wakefield '48* came to Blair in the fall of 1942, during a turbulent time in America’s history. Though Blair lay far removed from the field of battle, the shadow of World War II lingered at the School. Many students corresponded with friends, neighbors and relatives serving overseas and prepared for service themselves, taking courses on campus in first aid and Morse code. Dave, who came to Blair following his older brother,

*Bob Wakefield '46*, thought often of their father serving in the Army, and he soon noticed familiar faces leaving the hilltop, recalling that some faculty members went into service and were replaced, sometimes by their wives. Along with his teachers and fellow classmates, Dave would eventually mourn the loss of 55 servicemen from Blair who gave their lives over the Pacific and on the fields of Europe during World War II.



## 1915

**TRANSFORMATION TO A BOYS' SCHOOL:** In his memoirs, Headmaster John C. Sharpe noted that “changes in public opinion...were taking place,” causing coeducation to fall out of favor in the early 20th century.



“ Strong faculty lie at the heart of the School’s success and their mission to educate the whole person as well as lasting friendships that remain always. ”

—Honorary Trustee *Dave Wakefield '48*

Despite the hardships imposed by the war, looking back Dave remembers his boarding school experience fondly. In the late 1940s, Blair was approaching its 100th anniversary. Steadily expanding from a small schoolhouse, the School had grown to encompass 310 acres and boasted 12 modern buildings, plus a gymnasium and athletic fields. The annual 1948 tuition of \$1,350 covered room and board for each of the School’s 300 all-male students who, Dave recalls, walked the stone paths each day smartly dressed in coats and ties.

In his free time, “I liked shooting the breeze on Blair Lake, on sports fields and smoking rooms,” Dave remembers. Popular at the time, smoking lounges at Blair filled at the end of the day with clusters of boys joking with one another and spilling onto couches, relaxing with cigarettes. Their parents had granted permission to smoke at the School, and the student newspaper,

*The Blair Breeze*, published the names of permitted smokers at the beginning of each year along with a list of rules—prohibiting, for instance, the use of cigarettes before breakfast.

Like Dave, other students enjoyed socializing with friends most in their free time. According to one survey, students ranked “bull sessions” and “blackjack games” with classmates as the Blair rituals they missed the most when away from campus. Judging from the comments in the School’s *ACTA* yearbook, many boys also devoted generous time to thinking about potential dates. “Proms were a welcome break since there were no girls anywhere near the school,” Dave recollects.

Occasional dances of all kinds punctuated the daily rhythm of classes, activities, studying and weekend athletics at Blair in the 1940s. A welcome sight, the train often marked the arrival of campus guests. Thirty-two girls from Centenary Junior

1915

**ACTA YEARBOOK:** The first *ACTA* yearbook is published.



**FLU PANDEMIC:** The influenza virus that sweeps the nation beginning in March strikes Blair in the fall, sickening 50 students and claiming the life of one.

1918



Students socialize outside West Hall.

College in Hackettstown traveled to Blair for the first dance of 1948, and to the strains of Frank Sinatra and Frankie Lane on phonograph, these ladies grabbed glasses of punch and chatted the night away with the young men of Blair.

Dave made the honor roll by 1944 and looked forward to his favorite class, English, which took place at midday. Citing a feeling to which many current students can relate, he remembers, “I always had trouble with eight o’clock classes!”



**1922**

**CLINTON FIRE:** A fire breaks out in Clinton Hall resulting in near complete destruction. The building is rebuilt within a year.

**BLAIR PAVES THE WAY:** All of Blair’s all-dirt roads are paved to connect the scattered buildings on the hilltop.

**1930**

**1922**



**GOLF COURSE:** Blair Academy opens its nine-hole golf course on October 4.



While Dave happily burrowed into *Hamlet* and *Return of the Native* in English, algebra loomed large in the minds of his peers. In 1948, his fellow seniors dedicated the *ACTA* to legendary math teacher Jesse Gage, noting that “Anyone who has attended Blair since 1912 will remember Mr. Gage and his much feared ‘A2.’ Although intermediate Algebra is known as the most difficult course at Blair, no one after passing it ever denied that now he ‘certainly knew his math.’”

Dave was active and deeply involved in School life. He spent afternoons absorbed in student organizations, serving on *The Blair Breeze*, International Society (which later evolved into today’s Society of Skeptics) and singing in the School choir for all of his years at Blair. “The choir was led by a wonderful teacher who traveled from Princeton every week,” he remembers. Though archery had been introduced as a new fall sport, Dave preferred to focus his athletic energy on football and baseball, as well as track and cross country. Some of his favorite memories concern shenanigans that occurred during spirited athletic competition between Blair and rival schools. Before one game against the Peddie School, “A group of us living in East Hall managed to slip out at night to paint ‘BEAT PEDDIE’ in large letters on the water tower,” he says, smiling. “The next day we were very popular with the students but not with the administration.”

In the years after he left Blair, Dave went on to graduate from the College of William and Mary with a degree in

economics and a commission as an officer in the U.S. Army. Earning his MBA from New York University a few years later, he established a banking career with J.P. Morgan that would span four decades. Dave raised a beautiful family with his wife, Lee, who, thanks to Dave’s continued engagement with his classmates, has also been one of Blair’s biggest supporters. As a Trustee and later as an Honorary Trustee and recipient of the 2008 Citation of Merit, Dave continues to be one of Blair’s best ambassadors, having served as chairman of the *Ever, Always* Campaign and volunteering for countless projects benefiting the School that meant so much to him.

Now 92 years old, Dave recalls that through all that time, it has been the people at Blair who resonate in his memory most. “Companionship of fellow students made up for any negatives [of Blair in the 1940s],” Dave says. “I still recall that four Blair teachers during my time had been hired in 1912 and were influential in my studies. Strong faculty like that lie at the heart of the School’s success and their mission to educate the whole person as well as lasting friendships that remain always. I remember my senior roommate, *Wilfred ‘Bud’ Potter ’48*, as well. During an after-hours water pistol fight, he hid in the closet to stay dry and laughed about it for the next three days. Bud and I have remained in touch for more than 70 years.”

That legacy—of meeting people at Blair who shape and impact us for a lifetime—is something that Bucs of every age can appreciate. ■

**BLUE & WHITE KEY:** Blue & White Key is formed as a social service and charitable organization.

**1948**

**1932**

**TUITION & ENROLLMENT INCREASE:** Annual tuition of \$1,350 covers room and board for Blair’s 300 male students.



**1970**

**PASSENGER RAILWAY CLOSES:** Local railroad service discontinues, reinforcing automobiles as the primary means for students to access campus.



*by Suzy (Martin) Logan '99*

**In 1973, the senior class** of 111 Blair students found themselves at a profound intersection of boarding school life: Over the course of their time on the hilltop, they embraced many of the old traditions of living and learning at a prep school. They dressed formally for classes, including on Saturdays, and adhered to a very regimented daily schedule. Every meal was a sit-down gathering in the dining hall, and

Chapel was a weekly obligation that very much focused on the School's Presbyterian roots. Male students were required to wear ties, at least during freshmen and sophomore years; T-shirts were strictly prohibited, except on Sundays; and freshmen had to abide by the rite of passage of not passing through the Arch until after Blair beat the Peddie Falcons in November or until the first school break, although some varsity



## 1970

**STUDENT UNION FOR BLACK AWARENESS:** Forms at Blair for students of color. In 1973, a similar group, named the Afro-Latin Caucus (*pictured on page 23*) was established (*from left to right, Caucus and Class of 1973 members Marty Hunter, Thomas McLean and Brian Holmes in Thomas' yearbook photo*). Today, the Black and Latinx Student Union (BALSU) continues to build on the work of these earlier groups.



**1970, RETURN TO COEDUCATION:** In September, Blair welcomes the first full-time female students to campus in more than five decades, as the School returns to its coeducational roots.



“Despite the fact that this was a rebellious and tumultuous time at boarding schools across the country, and Blair was no different, our community was a wide and vast valley of talented and beautiful people.”

—Thomas McLean '73

athletes got a pass on that antiquated rule. There was no School Meeting at the time, and students learned about upcoming events and activities from Assistant Headmaster **Fernando Marcial '39**, who would take the mic in the dining hall following dinner and make announcements to the community.

But times were also changing and Blair's student body and faculty were becoming increasingly diverse, infusing a new energy and vitality into the rituals usually associated with boarding-school institutions. It helped that the School's Chaplain, the Rev. Peter Amerman, was young and very much in touch with the changing times. "We were at Blair at the tail end of an older era and at the cusp of a newer time," said **Andy Heinze '73**, who joined classmates **Bonnie (Hagemeister) Nault '73** and **Thomas McLean '73** on a Zoom to reminisce about their Blair days. "It wasn't old-school liturgy. Mr. Amerman was part of a new wave of Protestantism; he played music and made everything fun."

Blair was fortunate to have a convergence of new ideas and new people, thanks to increasing scholarship aid and



Members of the Afro-Latin Caucus hold a meeting.

partnerships with national organizations such as Upward Bound. "Despite the fact that this was a rebellious and tumultuous time at boarding schools across the country, and Blair was no different, our community was a wide and vast valley of talented and beautiful people," Tommy said.

Given that Blair had just returned to its coeducational roots in September 1970, there were fewer than 25 female students in 1973's graduating class. Bonnie recalls coach Jan (Mitten) Hutchinson and day student advisor Lois Underwood as

## 1971

**STUDENT "STRIKE":** Students hold a so-called "strike" with demands on several issues, including a request to have a larger voice in disciplinary matters. The resulting Rules and Discipline Committee, comprising students and faculty, continues to handle discipline issues at Blair today.



1975, FIRST FEMALE ON BOG: **Deirdre M. Garrett '73** is appointed the first female member of Blair's Board of Governors.



1976, FIRST FEMALE ON BOT: Blair appoints the first female to the Board of Trustees, **Martie Furey P'71 '77**.



1978

**SOCIETY OF SKEPTICS:** Blair's Society of Skeptics program is established as a forum for students and faculty to discuss and debate important global issues; it has grown to become one of the premier high school lecture series in the United States.



pivotal influences on female students, serving as mentors as girls went from day students to boarders for the first time during the Class of 1973's junior year. "That certainly changed the dynamic on campus," said Thomas with a laugh.

Calling her time at Blair "eye opening," Bonnie recalls being amazed at the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and all different backgrounds, races and religions as a day student, something her public school in Sparta, New Jersey, certainly didn't offer. Thomas agreed, noting that he belonged to an Afro-Latin Caucus Club that met for the first time their senior year. "The group was gregarious and fun, but also strategic in terms of discussing the politics and issues of the day, as well as our plans for after Blair," Thomas recalled.

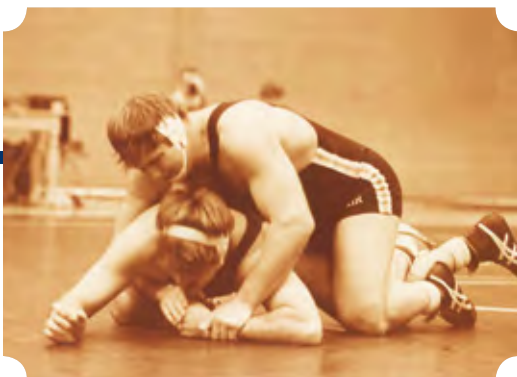
A student who hailed from Matawan, New Jersey, Andy quickly found that, at Blair, there were fewer barriers to getting to know classmates than existed where he grew up. "As a kid, it was hard to be friends with people from a different part of town, even if you went to school together, because they went back to their own neighborhoods," he explained. "At Blair, you didn't retreat into your own little worlds like this, which allowed us to build all kinds of friendships across every line of difference."

Andy, who, as the class valedictorian shared with his classmates his deep care for the people he met at Blair, recalls that, while Headmaster James Howard could be quite strict in their early days—and could freeze you in place with his icy stare if you broke the rules—underneath that steely exterior, he was warm and kind. As time went on, Mr. Howard, too,

changed with the times and other faculty offset his more traditional style, including Ferd Marcial. Students related to and had fun with other faculty members, such as Laurence Joline, Paul White and *Nevett Bartow '52*. Mr. White, whom the classmates remember as "an elegant and refined man," taught everyone an important lesson with his immaculate style.

Of course, the 1970s were a time of rebellion and pushing the envelope as students discussed controversial topics like the draft and the Vietnam War. Parties on the golf course often led to disciplinary action, a situation complicated by the fact that the legal drinking age in New Jersey was set at 18 on New Year's Day 1973; this sparked much discussion in *The Blair Breeze* about whether older Blair students should be allowed to drink with faculty in their homes in a supervised setting.

Academics were challenging, and Bonnie vividly recalls English teacher Mr. Underwood's stack of books on his desk and incredulously wondering if it would be possible to read them all in one semester. As freshmen, students were required to attend study hall in Clinton Hall, and Thomas recalls sliding down the front hill after the grounds crew had left for the day on icy patches on his way back to Bunnell House. As rigorous as courses were, students enjoyed getting to know their teachers inside and outside of class in a way that wouldn't be possible outside of a residential facility. "There was always a dog in class, and faculty welcomed us into their homes and as part of their families," Andy said. "Blair changed my entire world. As a scholarship student who arrived with no idea what a private school was like, I can't really describe how enormous Blair's impact was."



1981

**BLAIR WRESTLING TRADITION:**  
Blair wrestling wins the first of 33 consecutive national prep titles.

**ADVISOR SELECTION:** A new system is introduced that allows students to choose their own advisor, a process that teaches them to carefully consider and weigh their needs and options.

1990

“I got a top-notch education at Blair,” Bonnie added. “It was so much better than I could have gotten at my public high school and gave me a different perspective on learning. I have such a fondness for my time at Blair and keep in touch with a small group of classmates regularly about what’s going on in work and life.”

The School’s athletic program was strong and growing, and female faculty like Coach Hutchinson were instrumental in building the girls’ teams. The wrestling and basketball teams were extremely strong, as were the cross country and football teams—the latter won the state championship in 1973. Thomas was a top basketball, track, cross country and soccer athlete, and the School recognized his accomplishments when he was inducted into the inaugural Blair Athletic Hall of Fame class in 2016. He recalls running on the old outdoor track, which was made out of cinders—and would make quite a mess after returning to your dorm room after practice—as well as on the dated wooden indoor track that gave everyone shin splints. When the Class of 1973 returns to campus for milestone reunions, alums are wowed by the expansion of Blair’s facilities and agree that the Blair of today is hard to compare to the old days, when Freeman and Mason dorms were new additions to campus.

But what stood out about Blair then—and now—is the strong sense of close-knit community. “I went to Bucknell and excelled on the playing field and in the clubs and everything else,” Tommy said. “But I don’t have the same affinity or connectedness with Bucknell. [Former Athletic Director] James Pender was so understanding, and he knew students loved certain sports; we had a wonderful rapport. At Blair, I could walk into the gym and play basketball with anyone...no matter how good you were; faculty made sure you remained humble and helped each other out. In fact, Blair is the only school I attended where the basketball team had to roll up the mats for the wrestling team because they were national champions!”

When asked what advice they’d give today’s Blair students, the consensus was unanimous: Take advantage of everything Blair has to offer and don’t miss an opportunity to build a network with Blair alums. “When we were students, the founder of NFL Films, *Ed Sabol ’36*, came to the campus dining hall to talk about his company, and it was an incredible opportunity to meet someone who changed the face of sports,” Thomas said. “Blair offers so many more opportunities to do that today. Don’t miss out on a moment because your time at Blair goes by in a flash.” ■

**1991**

**GLOBAL CONNECTION:** The Blair International Awareness Club (BIAC) is founded to bring together the School’s international students and their classmates from the United States.



**1995**

**“YOU’VE GOT MAIL”:** Blair faculty and students first use email to communicate.





**1998**  
*by Suzy (Martin) Logan '99\**

**If you entered Blair's front gate** in 1998, you would have gazed up the hill to see a large patch of grass in front of the Head of School's office where classes in the 1990s sat for commencement before the admission parking lot was added and the festivities were moved to Sharpe House lawn. As you came around the turn by East and Davies Halls, you could look to the right and see a parking lot that took the place of tennis courts

that had been demolished a few years earlier in the spot where Kathryn and Lakeside Halls reside today. A little farther into campus, the construction on the Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts had just concluded the year before, and Blair students now attended School Meeting in DuBois Theatre instead of Memorial Hall (today Timken Library), where generations of Bucs had come together for community gatherings and theatrical

*\*With hilarious and amazing memories recollected by a cast of characters from the classes of 1998 and 1999*



**1997**

**SUPPORTING FAITH:** Students form the Christian Fellowship, a group providing a supportive environment for examining questions of faith.

**ARMSTRONG-HIPKINS CENTER FOR THE ARTS:** Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts opens, paving the way for a renaissance in the School's performing and fine arts departments.

**1997**



The Class of 1999 was the last Blair class to graduate on the front hill.

productions. The School's newest dorm, Annie Hall, which today offers expansive views of the Bowl and an incredible common room that includes a fireplace and kitchen, would not be complete until fall 1999. Athletes used Walker Gymnasium and Tracy Hall as hubs for all athletic activities, while the turf field, Blair's expanded fields and pedestrian campus were still many years in the future. Day student parents dropped off their kids right at the Arch or at West Hall and drove straight through campus to exit through the back gate.

Students started their days by grabbing breakfast in the dining hall (before it was renovated to include the Wean Room), and stood in lines for the omelet chef who made eggs to order a few days a week, an offering that is now a daily fixture at breakfast.

Then it was off to class in Clinton, Bogle and Weber Halls, where legendary teachers like Martin Miller, PhD, Hon. '81, *Carolyn Conforti-Browse '79*, Kaye and Craig Evans, Bob Brandwood and Jim Moore, Hon. '93, shared their passion for history and English, respectively. On Clinton's third floor, students took typing classes using massive desktop computers that had Mavis Beacon typing tutor, a cutting-edge software at the time that made learning to type 70 words a minute into a fun game. No one knew what the Internet was, although in 1999, Director of Technology Sam Adams held classes in Bogle Hall to explain how the World Wide Web worked and why we would have email addresses as we left Blair for college. Everyone had begun to worry about what the year 2000 would bring and if Y2K was really going to be a big deal.



**1998, WHEN THEN BECOMES NOW:** "When Then Becomes Now," a sculpture by J. Seward Johnson, is gifted by the Class of 1943 for Blair's sesquicentennial celebration.



**1999, VICTORY BELL:** The tradition of ringing the Victory Bell after a win is established by the classes of 1949 and 1999, on the occasion of their 50th reunion and graduation, respectively.

**THE GSA:** The student organization, the Gay-Straight Alliance (now known as Gender and Sexuality Awareness or GSA), is founded to offer a safe space to discuss issues faced by the LGBTQ+ community.

## EARLY 2000S



Students regularly received physical mail from their families, so as part of their daily routine, many visited the first floor of Clinton, where mailboxes lined a wall right outside the bookstore, which occupied a space that has since been transformed into three language classrooms. There was nothing better than scoring a bag of gummy worms or pretzels from a boarder friend whose folks had sent a care package!

Then it was off to School Meeting, followed by an activities block in the Can, located at the bottom of Ivy Hall where the business office is today. This was the place to hang out with friends during free blocks and in the evening hours before and after study hall (or during study hall for those lucky enough to have unlimited!). With *Dawson's Creek*, *90210* and *Melrose Place* playing in the background, kids played games, listened to music on their Discmans and returned calls from their parents from the upstairs pay phone. The ubiquitous use of cellphones was still a few years away, although there were a handful of us whose parents got in touch by paging us on our beepers. The Can favorites were not so different from today, with egg-and-cheese sandwiches, frozen grapes, bagels with butter, cinnamon and sugar, or tomato and melted cheese, and every possible variety of Snapple topping the most popular orders.

Walking past West Hall, the soundtrack of campus life included bands such as Creed, the Dave Matthews Band, No Doubt and the Spice Girls. Thick-heeled platform shoes and Docksidors abounded, as well as baggy flannel shirts and carpenter pants, mohair sweaters, polos by Tommy Hilfiger and

Abercrombie & Fitch, and Patagonia and North Face jackets. Highlights of the year were asking someone or getting asked to the Sadie Hawkins dance (now the Winter Ball), carrying a torch to light the bonfire as a senior, taking part in a skit at the pep rally (especially memorable was when members of the football team did an impressively spot-on dance-and-song routine impersonating the Spice Girls!), pulling for the Bucs on Peddie Day, watching lacrosse games in the Bowl, sitting with your legs hanging over the side of the second-floor indoor track (in today's Can) and cheering until your voice grew hoarse as the Blair wrestlers clinched another victory. In the afternoons, it was also fun to run around that track during wrestling practice, as watching the grueling work happening below was a good motivator to keep going.

Dressing up for formal dinner (now known as family-style dinner) four times a week was a staple of Blair life and the scent of Gap's Dream perfume wafted across the dorm hallways and into the dining hall as attendees sported dresses, skirts and dress shirts and pants and sport coats. Then Assistant Headmaster Dave Low was strict about dress code, which required attire to be formal and specified that any dress or skirt must be longer than where your fingertips hit your leg if you put your hands at your sides. Some rituals, such as math department chair Latta Browse working with his table foot to engage students in lively conversation, still remain the same today.

Back then, the dining hall only offered buffet dinner on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays, and the kitchen's pizza oven



**2000, COMMENCEMENT MOVES TO BIGGER VENUE:**  
For the first time, graduation moves from the front hill to the Sharpe House lawn to accommodate a growing enrollment.

**JEWISH STUDENT UNION:**  
An informal association of students and faculty of Jewish faith is established.

**2003**

**EARLY 2000S**

**SENIOR SPEECH CONTESTS COMMENCE:** Senior public-speaking contest is established.



From left to right, members of the Class of 1996: Craig Powell, Nick Marcalus, DeShon Carter, Clay Gaitskill and Jeff McGinn.



**2004, INTERNATIONAL PERFORMANCE:** Blair Singers travel to Italy, marking Blair's first international performance tour. The group, as well as the Orchestra, performed in England and France earlier this spring.



**2004**

**INAUGURAL HEADMASTERS' SOCIETIES GAMES:** The series of games during which Blair students, faculty and staff compete against one another begins.



meant that day students and boarders could pick up a pie to bring back to the dorms or bring home to enjoy later in the evening. The fitness center was one small room in the basement of the old gym, which is hard to compare to the state-of-the-art facility that overlooks the turf today. When not in class or engaged in sports or weekend activities, we signed out in Mr. Low's office for trips up the Paulinskill Trail, time spent at White Lake and weekends together at the homes of amazing day student parents who welcomed us as if we were their own.

The Hardwicks were a visible and supportive presence at games and activities across campus, with Mr. Hardwick zipping around campus on his bike or golf cart, closely followed by their dog, Boswell. Mrs. Hardwick was always a source of moral support for so many of us, as well as an early model of what it looked like to balance a job with family life as a working mom.

Some things are different today: The prom, back then, was held at the United Nations and on boat cruises in New York City, and students joined their friends in renting limos to get to and from campus, some of them staying the night in the city with generous parents (special shout-out to my dad!) offering to chaperone and arranging for a shuttle bus home the next day as everyone cheered and expressed their thanks. Before commencement took place on the front hill and graduates filed through the Arch and smoked cigars in celebration of officially joining Blair's alumni ranks, seniors had a week off. "Senior week" took us everywhere from Ocean City, Maryland, to the

New Jersey shore, before returning to campus for all the old rites of passage, including Baccalaureate at the First Presbyterian Church on Main Street in Blairstown and commencement the following day on the front hill.

While much has changed at Blair in the last 25 years, so much has remained the same. Many of us who graduated in the 1990s have come back to work at Blair and are proud to call our former mentors current friends and colleagues. The relationships that students develop with faculty and staff—and one another—continue to shape who they are and who they become. For me, friends made on this hilltop remain more fundamental and, in many cases, closer than those made in college and later in life because Blair bonds were forged during an extremely formative time in our lives.

In the years since, we have remained connected and have supported one another through life's highs and lows. It has been wonderful to meet former classmates' spouses, partners and children at Alumni Weekend. Even before the pandemic, my own Blair ties grew stronger than ever as four of my best Blair buddies flew cross country to celebrate the birth of our dear friend's first child and recommitted to being a regular presence in one another's lives. We have stuck to that promise, and, sure enough, much of the information shared here came from a text string with this chapter's contributors, many of whom got reacquainted at our 20th reunion, and, despite so many years having passed, picked up old conversations as if no time had passed at all. ■

**HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS COMMITTEE:**  
The HRC is established to foster strong connections across the community.

2009

2009

**HARDWICK HALL:** The renovation and expansion of the School's athletic center, as well as the *Ever, Always* Campaign—which raised \$52 million in support of capital needs and the endowment—concludes.





*by Seleena Desai '23*

**Entering Blair during** the demisemiseptcentennial is unlike any year before. For the first time in three years, all students were welcomed back on campus for in-person learning and there are no masks to be found. Not only did we welcome back students, we also welcomed back families, friends and sports to enjoy in Blair spirit.

The overall layout of Blair has not significantly changed in the past 20-odd years. With that being said, we have a new science building, Bogle Science Center, located behind West Hall and across from Tracy Hall. We also have a new innovation and collaboration building: The CECIC, more formally known as the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for



**2010**  
**PEDESTRIAN CAMPUS:**  
Blair completes its pedestrian campus.



**2012, SOLAR PANELS:** In January, Blair turns on its first solar array on the roof of Hardwick Hall. Today, solar power accounts for 25% to 30% of the School's energy, peaking at close to 50% over the summer months.



“ My favorite Blair memory is the night before Peddie Day. The Pep Rally never disappoints, and I vividly remember laughing with my friends at the skits. I finally got to hold the torch and light the bonfire as a senior standing beside my friends. I’ll never forget the night when Blair comes together as a community to have fun and prepare for our battle against the Peddie chickens the next day. ”

—Chloe Lau '23

Innovation and Collaboration, is home to the art studio (located on the third floor), the robotics room (second floor), and the maker space and the ceramic studio (basement).

Since the coronavirus pandemic, Blair has implemented a new class day schedule, which consists of eight class blocks, conference block, activities block and School Meetings. On average, each student takes six academic courses, leaving them two free blocks. During conference blocks, students often meet with teachers or other students to review work. Activities and clubs meet during the activities blocks. Even though Blair life can be crazy, we still find time to gather with the whole community three times a week. The first meeting of the week takes place on Mondays run by [Associate Head of School] Mr. Pagotto. Then, on Wednesdays, we gather as a group to hear a member of the community talk to us about something they

have embraced or struggled with during Chapel. On Fridays, we gather for Friday School Meeting run by the SCC [Senior Class Council].

Every morning starts the same way: breakfast in the dining hall, where ninth graders are required to sign in. Then, off to a full day of classes. Classes occur in most buildings on campus. Students complete their history, language and English requirements in Clinton Hall. They complete their science requirements in Bogle. Then, in Weber, they complete their math requirements. In the CECIC and Armstrong-Hipkins, students complete their arts requirements. Blair students often visit at least two of these buildings a day, depending on their schedule.

In addition to the normal requirements, ninth graders take “Frosh Seminar,” where they spend half a semester working



2014

**DAY OF SERVICE—MAY 16:** Blair’s 16th Head of School, Chris Fortunato, establishes the annual Day of Service tradition as a way for students and faculty to serve area nonprofits.

with the technology in the maker space and half a semester learning about promoting health and wellness. Sophomores take LEADS, where they learn about leadership, service and mindfulness. Similarly, in January, we take a two-week-long, pass/fail course during J-term, where we learn about a topic in which we are interested.

Once classes are over, students go back to their dorms to get ready for practice. Although a lot of students engage in one of the many sports offered on campus, there are many who choose to take part in other activities such as the *Oracle*, the *ACTA*, theatre, etc. These activities take place for an hour or two. Since there are three sports seasons, students are able to pick more than one sport or activity to participate in, allowing them to explore new opportunities and experience new situations.

After practice, there is some free time, which students can use however they see fit. Many people find time to hang out with their friends, get packages from the basement of Hardwick or get a head start on their homework. This is an essential part of Blair, as it allows students to find the balance between school and social life.

Dinner is open from 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. most nights in the dining hall. Many students may choose to order from the various local restaurants, or they may order from the Canteen after 7 p.m. Day students have the option to stay for dinner, but many leave to have dinner with their families. The only days boarding students are required to have dinner in the dining hall are Tuesday and Thursday. Family-style dinner, previously known as formal dinner, takes place on Tuesday and Thursday night. Each student is assigned a table and allowed a chance to make friends with the people at their table. Every three to four weeks, the table's seating changes and we are off to meet more members of the community.

After dinner, there is an hour of free time. Certain days of the week call for certain activities. On Tuesday nights, the Society of Skeptics brings in a person outside the community to talk about their line of work or their job. On some Tuesday and Thursday nights, there are Current Events Forums, where students discuss what is going on in the world. Sometimes, club meetings or artists' receptions take place during this time. If nothing is happening, then enjoy some of your free time before study hall.



**2016**

**ATHLETIC HALL OF FAME:** To recognize and celebrate the outstanding athletic achievements of its alumni and coaches, Blair establishes an Athletic Hall of Fame and honors its first five inductees.

**INCLUSIVITY COMMITTEE:** Blair creates a faculty and staff Inclusivity Committee focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging.

**2016**





**WEBER HALL:** With the completion of Weber Hall's renovation in September, Blair math students and faculty gathered in a single location, facilitating greater opportunities for collaboration and fostering the exchange of ideas.

**2017**

**2017**

**CHIANG-ELGHANAYAN CENTER FOR INNOVATION & COLLABORATION (CECIC):** The CECIC opens, serving as home of Blair's technology and fine arts departments.







**2018**

**INTEGRATED SCIENCE RESEARCH:** Science department chair Kelly Hadden introduces the Integrated Science Research (ISR) program, now overseen by director Dr. Nadia Abascal.

**CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC:** In response to the global pandemic, Blair Academy offers distance learning until the community could come back together in person for the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

**2020**

**NEW COMMITTEE:** Blair's Trustees create a standing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee at the Board level.

**2020**





2021, J-TERM: Blair launches “January term,” a signature curricular offering allowing students and faculty to dive deep into topics about which they are curious.

**B&E COMMITTEE:** Engaged students create a new leadership position at the School—the Belonging & Equity Committee—while the Five Fundamentals are created to express Blair’s values and hold community members to a standard for living and working together.

2021



“As a sophomore in my Advanced Software Design course, I created a web application that provides style suggestions based on the weather, called ‘Style Me.’ After the course was over, I realized that coding/programming is something I could see myself pursuing, and I created my own independent study. My focus was to improve my application to make it the best that it can be. For the past two years, I have used my independent study to learn more about programming while improving my own application.”

—Seleena Desai '23

From 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., there is study hall for all students. During this time, students are able to meet with teachers, silently study or collaborate with others. As ninth and tenth graders, you may stay in your own room to work on homework assignments. During junior and senior year, you gain more freedom on where you can complete your homework.

As you can tell, life at Blair Academy is not easy and may seem the same for every student. Life at Blair can be

challenging. But, everyone has the choice to make their experience unique. For example, you can create an independent study to explore more about a certain topic. You can join Integrated Science Research, where you get to put together a proposal for your project and then complete said project. Leading and being unique does not only happen in the classroom. You could also be captain of a sport’s team, cast a lead role in the play or create in robotics. ■



**2022, INAUGURAL ARTS GUILD:** To recognize the achievements of alumni and former faculty in the arts, Blair inducts the first class of fine and performing artists into the School’s Arts Guild.



**2022, DEAN OF EQUITY, INCLUSION & BELONGING:** Evan Thomas, an accomplished educator, is appointed Blair’s inaugural Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging.

## 2023

**2023 DEMISEMISEPTCENTENNIAL:** Blair celebrates its 175th anniversary and publicly announces the largest capital campaign in School history, *All In*, with a fundraising goal of \$140 million.





**ON OUR 175TH ANNIVERSARY**, we celebrate Blair’s vibrant history and dynamic community and work to amplify our forward-thinking programs, while also doubling down on the student-centered philosophy and commitment to academic excellence that are at the heart of the Blair experience. We also continue to enhance our historic and scenic campus by adding state-of-the-art facilities and are always working to secure the School’s long-term financial strength—all with the goal of ensuring that future generations of students have the opportunity to learn and grow and take advantage of all of Blair’s extraordinary educational offerings. As we mark our demisemiseptcentennial year, here is a brief look back at the School’s growth since it was founded.

<p><b>1848</b></p> <p>Blairstown Presbyterian Academy welcomes “a handful” of students, est. 3 faculty</p>	<p><b>2022-23</b></p> <p>2023 Blair Academy: 478 students, 95 faculty</p>	<p><b>1 &amp; 463</b></p> <p>Acres of campus in 1848 (1) &amp; 2022-23 (463)</p>	<p><b>1 &amp; 65</b></p> <p>Campus buildings in 1848 (1) &amp; 2022-23 (65)</p>
<p><b>~\$140M</b></p> <p>Endowment today</p>	<p><b>1st dorm</b></p> <p>Insley Hall (originally called Blair Hall)</p>	<p><b>11</b></p> <p>Number of dorms today</p>	

**A snapshot of the early curriculum:** reading, spelling, etymology, penmanship, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, surveying, bookkeeping, English grammar, Greek, Latin, rhetoric, botany, natural philosophy, astronomy, history, composition, geology & declamation.

**A snapshot of our curriculum today:** analytical reading, communication skills, global issues, scientific inquiry, algebra, geometry, immersive language learning, English grammar, Greek, Latin, rhetoric, biology, chemistry, physics, philosophy, astronomy, engineering science, psychology, U.S. history, constitutional law, software design, architecture, photography, ceramics, statistics...and much more!

**Blair’s founders:** Mr. John I. Blair, Mr. John Bunnell, Rev. John A. Reiley.



**“AGREEABLE TO NOTICE, PUBLICLY GIVEN**, the citizens of Blairstown and vicinity convened in the Presbyterian church, in Blairstown, this day, for the purpose of selecting a site for an Academy, and appointing a committee whose business it shall be to superintend its erection... The hilltop west of the Methodist Church and south of the burying ground in Blairstown was selected for the site of the building, and was offered gratuitously for the purpose by the possessor, John I. Blair.”

—Blair Academy, *A Sesquicentennial History* by **Arthur T. Hamlin '29**







# BLAIR'S STUDENT LIFE OFFICE: LOOKING BACK ON THE PAST **25** YEARS

BY ASSOCIATE HEAD OF SCHOOL **RYAN M. PAGOTTO '97**

**I**N 1998, the student life office (known at the time as the student affairs office) was in the same location as it is in 2022-2023: on the left as one enters Clinton Hall. The structure of the office space has undergone a few renovations, the prevailing technology has changed and its occupants—with the exception of administrative assistant Kathy Otinsky—have naturally changed since 1998. The hub of student activity, The Canteen, was quaintly situated in the ground level of Ivy Hall; the bookstore and student mailboxes were nearby on the ground level of Clinton Hall. The place of all community gatherings was in the process of transitioning from Memorial Hall to DuBois Theatre in the newly constructed Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts.

As we look back on the last 25 years through the lens of student life at Blair, there are numerous changes in terms of facilities, which have enabled enhancement of the student experience. Blair built three new dormitories and repurposed one; the School acquired 120 additional acres in the form of the Siegel Property; the Romano Dining Hall expansion changed the way students experience the dining room; the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration

became an additional place for student gathering and learning; and the construction of Hardwick Hall and additional outdoor athletic facilities allowed for growth in terms of Blair's athletic and extracurricular offerings.

And, yet, the mission of the student life office and the tenets that define the Blair experience remain constant: to know every student well and to support them in growing into the best versions of themselves. The student life office continues to advance that mission by supporting the faculty as they create experiences with students—as dorm heads, counselors, advisors—across all dimensions of school life. Longtime Assistant Headmaster Dave Low, himself a Blair institution, embodied this mission from 1979-2011 and served as a role model for scores of Blair faculty members about how to “care for young people, respect [them] not only for who they will be but for who they are now, and have fun with the job.” For those of us who have worked in the student life office or, more generally, as faculty members during DTL's tenure, Dave was our mentor, and we have endeavored to carry his torch to the best of our abilities in the more recent Blair era.

## LET'S TAKE A LOOK BACK AT SOME OF THE MORE NOTABLE CHANGES OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST 25 YEARS.

### 1998-2003

- Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts becomes the new home for School Meetings, Chapels and Blair's performing arts.
- Annie Hall is constructed.
- The Victory Bell is gifted to the School by the Classes of 1949 and 1999.
- Blair's video studies program begins under the leadership of faculty members Steven and Judith Kampmann. In collaboration with students, numerous videos are produced under their direction and leadership that capture so much of the Blair experience in the early 2000s.
- In 2002, the yellow school buses arrive and replace the blue Blair vans. Blair faculty members must obtain commercial driver's licenses in order to transport groups of students for athletics and weekend activities.

### 2003-2008

- Blair begins taking students annually into New York City to catch a Broadway show.
- Blair begins an annual sophomore and senior public-speaking contest.
- Headmasters' Societies Games are established by David Vachris, then Dean of Residential Life. They are led over the subsequent years by faculty members Mike Schloat, Nathan Molteni and Ann Williams, Caroline Wilson, Andee and Mike Ryerson, and Rod Gerdsen.
- Trip to the Feast of San Gennaro in New York City becomes an annual tradition on the second community weekend.

### 2008

- Blair hires Jessica Matzkin as its first full-time school counselor.
- The first "kon-tiki" cardboard and duct-tape boat race on Blair Lake happens. It has since become a staple of the first community weekend each September.
- History teacher *Quint Clarke '87* begins taking students to Kenya, a tradition that grows into a project to establish two schools through the independent nonprofit, Blair in Kenya.



Students gather in The Black Canteen, better known on campus as "The Can."





Students participate in the inaugural Day of Service in 2014.

## 2011

- Assistant Headmaster Dave Low and his wife, Candy, retire from Blair. Candy assisted Dave with numerous tasks in the student life office, including serving as *ACTA* advisor and Blair's (official and unofficial) school photographer for many years. Candy is also fondly remembered by many alums for her support as a tutor during their tenure at Blair.
- Blair begins its four-year winning streak on Peddie Day.

## 2009

- Blair purchases the "Girl Scout Property," which includes Lake Genevieve and expands the campus by 120 acres. The property is named in honor of Blair Trustee and benefactor, **Herbert J. Siegel '46**. It presently includes miles of walking trails cleared by Blair's grounds team and various community members.

## 2012

- "The Game" (it will have numerous names over the years...The Purge, The Hunger Games, Battle Royale, etc.) is started by the Senior Class Council.
- **Ryan M. Pagotto '97** moves to the student life office as assistant headmaster for student life and begins new traditions, such as holding the Clinton Hall door to greet students before first block class with a high five, handshake or fist bump.

## 2010

- The pedestrian campus is established with the removal of the road through campus and the burying of power lines.
- Blair's first performance by a full orchestra. Their final piece: the Buccaneer fight song, "Pirates of the Caribbean."
- **Carolyn Conforti-Browse '79** delivers a Chapel talk on gratitude, which will grow into a favorite Blair tradition of the spring: the annual Gratitude Chapel.

## 2012-2019

- International Weekend, Martin Luther King Jr. Week seminars, Senior Seminars, Health-a-Palooza, Broadway musical trips, winter long weekend trips, senior bowling trips, etc. are ongoing, new or revamped elements of the student life experience.
- Blair begins its annual Day of Service in 2014.
- East and Davies Halls are demolished and replaced by Kathryn and Lakeside Halls, as well as the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration.

## 2020-2022

- COVID-19 lockdowns interrupt school life in spring 2020, and Blair offers virtual learning, virtual School Meetings, virtual prize assemblies, diplomas hand-delivered by advisors to graduates who live within two or three hours of campus and a virtual commencement ceremony followed by a drive-through celebration of graduates who could travel to campus.
- The 2020-2021 school year opens with all students remaining on campus for weekends. Under the leadership of Associate Dean of Students Rod Gerdson, weekend activities include food trucks, a faculty tailgate experience for students in lieu of a true Peddie Day, and a winter event called The Great Thaw (complete with fireworks) upon students' return from winter break and the beginnings of school returning to normal.
- Blair's version of a committee focused on matters of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging has taken various forms from its Multicultural Student Union in the late 1990s and early 2000s, to Perspectives to an Inclusivity Committee established in 2016. At present, Blair has a staff and faculty Inclusivity Committee and a student inclusion committee called Belonging & Equity.
- Be Well @ Blair is established as a group of student leaders who are focused on issues of student wellness and mental health. This group has partnered with the school counselors and other faculty members to lead evening seminars on health-and-wellness topics.

## ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT: THE FRIENDLY FACES SO MANY ALUMS COME BACK TO SEE

In 1998, Kathy Otinsky was the school office administrative assistant and Millie Klaver was the administrative assistant to Dave Low.

Over the years, while Kathy has continued her tasks (many of which have evolved with technological progress) in the student life office, the other friendly faces in the office have changed a few times.

Millie Klaver was succeeded by *Rita (Washburn) Worman '78*. Rita was succeeded by Jo Ellen Van Vliet, who held the post for 12 years. Jon DeJesus, who also serves as assistant coach of the Blair varsity boys' basketball team, presently serves as the office's administrative assistant.



Getting ready for the Peddie Day bonfire in the years before fire department regulations decreased the size.



With the opening of the Armstrong-Center for the Arts in 1997, DuBois Theatre becomes the central gathering place for many Blair events, including twice weekly School Meetings, Baccalaureate and the annual prize assemblies.



## WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 1998?

- The Blair dress code (a bit less strict compared to 1998).
- The cellphone policy (students didn't have cellphones in 1998; today, students are not permitted to use them on Blair's walkways).
- Ninth graders now sign in at breakfast.
- Ninth graders now convene for Monday night study hall in Bogle Science Center rather than their dorm rooms.
- Under the leadership of Director of Counseling Ally Thomas, Blair's counseling staff expands to three full-time counselors.
- The Health Center, led by Director of Health Services Rosalyn Zamora, includes four full-time nurses.
- Per fire department regulations, the Peddie Day bonfire size has become smaller.
- The site for commencement changes to the lawn next to Sharpe House.
- The Grease Slide during the first community weekend is now the Soap Slide.
- The Sadie Hawkins dance is now called the Winter Ball.
- The prom is no longer in New York City!
- East and Davies Halls are gone.
- Varsity boys' and girls' basketball games continue to draw large crowds of dedicated fans.
- Blair offers monthly "cereal nights" for the school.
- There is no longer a cinder track around a grass football field, and the indoor track in what was formerly known as Walker Gymnasium now houses Blair's college counseling office and offers additional seating overlooking The Black Canteen. Hampshire Field's turf is used for multiple sports under the lights, including field hockey and lacrosse and the all-weather track supports one of Blair's largest teams: spring track.

## WHAT'S (MOSTLY) THE SAME SINCE 1998?

- The Blair Facebook (Mr. Pagotto continues to offer The Facebook Challenge: Any student who can provide the names of 10 students or teachers at random wins a pizza party for their dorm).
- Family-style dinner takes place twice a week in the fall and once in the spring.
- Christmas Vespers takes place downtown at the First Presbyterian Church in Blairstown. Students can also now opt to attend a Winter Gathering service in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration.
- Sunday morning work squad is a consequence for students who have disciplinary or attendance infractions.
- School Meetings happen twice a week (with Senior Class Council continuing to run Friday School Meetings).
- It is a Blair rite of passage for seniors to carry torches to the Peddie Day bonfire.
- Students choose their own advisors.
- The Society of Skeptics still happens every Tuesday night, with Zoom sometimes opening up speaker possibilities that would otherwise not be feasible.
- Appliances such as air conditioners, toasters and hot pots are still not permitted in student rooms.

## CONCLUSION

I hope this has been an enjoyable trip down memory lane. Much has changed, but several important things have stayed the same: late-night chats in the dorm between prefects and faculty members, impromptu drives for ice cream with an advisor, extra help with willing teachers and the overall commitment to sustaining a strong sense of community each day. What will change for Blair in the next 25 years? Hard to project, but we know one thing that won't change: our chant of Go Bucs, Beat Peddie!! ■



BY **SUZY (MARTIN) LOGAN '99**

**I**N 2011, just a few weeks before he retired from Blair after 32 years of service, longtime Assistant Headmaster David T. Low and his wife, Candy, shared some reflections on their three decades on the hilltop at Alumni Weekend. Noting that they looked forward to embracing retirement and the time it would allow them for grandparenting, traveling and homemaking—all of which could be challenging while living in the boarding school world—the Lows acknowledged that they would miss the energy, excitement and camaraderie of the Blair community.

That Alumni Weekend presentation—as well as a number of Skeptics on the Road events up and down the East Coast throughout the following academic year—allowed them the opportunity to reconnect with Bucs of all class years and emphasize their key takeaway: “One doesn’t really ‘move

on’ from Blair,” said Dave, better known to many former students and colleagues as “DTL.” “As life takes us in different directions, the time we spend at Blair—whether one year or 32 years—becomes even more meaningful and informs much of what we do.”

To reconnect with some specifics from years gone by, Dave turned to *The Blair Breeze* to share a narrative snapshot of four distinct years during the Lows’ tenure at Blair. He also offered some recollections from his vantage point in the Dean’s Office that illustrate various aspects of school life during these four time stamps. “I hope that, even if you don’t relate to names and details, the particulars will help you to understand how much the School has changed...and how much has stayed the same,” Dave concluded. “And, for you youngsters in the crowd, it can serve as a short Blair history lesson!”



# 1980-81

324

ENROLLMENT

\$3.6M

ENDOWMENT

\$115K

FINANCIAL AID BUDGET

\$6.2K

TUITION (BOARDING)

\$3.7K

TUITION (DAY)

YEARBOOK DEDICATED TO:  
Biology Teacher Larry Joline

## BLAIR BREEZE HEADLINES...

- The Bonfire...A Dying Tradition?
- Junk Food Limited in Canteen... No Sodas before 1 p.m.
- Celebrating John Lennon's 40th Birthday
- School Commits to Plan for Reducing Electric Usage by 10%
- New Faculty Member Dr. Marty Miller Lectures on Ireland & Reveals a Passion for Traveling to Political Hotspots

## SOME OTHER CAMPUS SNAPSHOTS

- Landline phones in dorms still years off.
- Breakfast no longer required; lunch and dinner still served family-style.
- Cars can still drive through the Arch.
- Blair's 14th Head of School, Jim Kelley, and his wife, Elaine, are known for their approachability and kindness, setting a tone on campus that has since become a Blair trademark.
- Blair would soon increase the School's financial stability with the Keenan Campaign, which nearly doubled Blair's endowment.

# 1990-91

361

ENROLLMENT

\$16.1M

ENDOWMENT

\$615K

FINANCIAL AID BUDGET

\$14.7K

TUITION (BOARDING)

\$9.5K

TUITION (DAY)

YEARBOOK DEDICATED TO:  
Bookstore Manager  
Brenda Weiland

## BLAIR BREEZE HEADLINES...

- Pros & Cons of U.S. Position in the Persian Gulf
- Dress Code Committee Studies Proposed Changes, Including Elimination of Jeans & Sneakers
- Recession at Blair...What Lies Ahead for the School?
- Squash Courts Likely in Near Future
- The Future of Laptop Technology

## SOME OTHER CAMPUS SNAPSHOTS

- Blair's 15th Head of School, Chan Hardwick, and his wife, Monie, in the second year of their 24-year tenure, lead the School through a period of significant growth and prosperity.
- No more sit-down lunches; formal dinner five times a week, including on Sundays.
- All dorms now have pay phones.
- Bogle Hall comes online as home of the science and math departments.
- Seniors still sleep outside to protect the bonfire the night before Peddie Day.

**YEARBOOK DEDICATED TO:**  
Video Studies Teachers  
Mr. & Mrs. Kampmann

**BLAIR BREEZE HEADLINES...**

- Remodeled Romano Dining Center Opens
- Alumnus *Jim Krugman '65* Donates Media Center
- Quality vs. Quantity...The Case for Less—& More Significant—Homework
- New Prom Rules...School Insists on Bus Transportation to & from the Event
- Insley Reconstruction Begins, Marking the Return of the Flight Deck

**SOME OTHER  
CAMPUS SNAPSHOTS**

- 23,000-square-foot Annie Hall, dedicated in 1999, raises the bar for residential living at Blair.
- Pedestrians enjoy Meerwarth Courtyard, completed in 1995, and cars can no longer drive in the area between Locke and Clinton.
- Tracy Hall, dedicated in 1993, continues to boast three squash courts, golf shop, Board room and locker rooms.
- Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts, which went online in 1997, continues to serve as a gathering place for the community, as well as hub of performing arts at Blair.
- Pay phones become relics...all boarding students now have landline extensions in their rooms.

**2000-01**

**432**  
ENROLLMENT

**\$46.8M**  
ENDOWMENT

**\$1.65M**  
FINANCIAL AID BUDGET

**\$27.2K**  
TUITION (BOARDING)

**\$19.4K**  
TUITION (DAY)

**YEARBOOK DEDICATED TO:**  
MR. & MRS. LOW

**BLAIR BREEZE HEADLINES...**

- Blair Students Travel Abroad to China, Ecuador, Kenya & Normandy
- Teachers & Facebook...Do They Mix?
- Girls' Basketball Wins MAPL & Prep State A Titles for First Time Ever
- Headmasters' Societies Games Unite the School & Provide Fun & Diversion in February
- Blair Wrestlers Win 31st-Consecutive National Prep Title at Lehigh University

**SOME OTHER  
CAMPUS SNAPSHOTS**

- Pedestrian campus completed; all electric wires buried and vehicular traffic eliminated from interior of campus.
- Student body demographics:  
Male: 55%  
Female: 45%  
Students of color: 17%  
International students: 17%
- Virtually everyone has cellphones; landline phones removed from student rooms.
- Social media continues to present new opportunities for connection, as well as challenges.
- Commencement moved to midweek, and now takes place on Sharpe House lawn, instead of front hill.

**2010-11**

**454**  
ENROLLMENT

**\$66.6M**  
ENDOWMENT

**\$4.5M**  
FINANCIAL AID BUDGET

**\$45.7K**  
TUITION (BOARDING)

**\$32.5K**  
TUITION (DAY)



# DTL'S CONCLUDING

## Thoughts



These are just a few of the snapshots Dave offered at his popular Alumni Weekend and Skeptics on the Road presentations. (After all, who would miss an opportunity to catch up with DTL and Mrs. Low, who is equally beloved and served for many years as school photographer, caring tutor and Blair mom to so many?)

Snapshots aside, what stands out most to the Lows about their 32 years of living and learning at Blair? Certainly, the School's size (both in terms of growing campus acreage and enrollment), the remarkable improvement of facilities, rising test scores, increased financial-aid dollars and broadening curriculum. That said, Dave and Candy are quick to note that, in some fundamental ways, the Blair community remains very much the same today as when they arrived on the hilltop all those years ago, which they have found resonates with the many alumni, parents, faculty and staff with whom they keep in touch.

“Close, meaningful relationships between students and faculty are the essence of the Blair experience,” Dave concluded. “Young people come to Blair to sharpen their skills and discover their passions...and then they move on to become responsible and contributing members of society. And, even as so many of them have happy and successful college careers, it is to that hilltop campus in western New Jersey that they return to remember and honor years that were the most formative for them.” ■



# BLAIR Ascendant

THE SESQUICENTENNIAL YEAR REVISITED



**TWENTY-FIVE** years ago in early December 1997, just after returning from Thanksgiving break, the Blair community of students and faculty walked through the doors of the newly constructed Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts. The student body of just over 400—at the time Blair's largest—began with whispered excitement to file in for the first time, entering by class, dozens of rows of new and cushioned seats, finding their spot, ready for the inaugural weekly Chapel service in the soaring beauty of a place so different from the old Memorial Hall, circa 1952. The “seniors first” dismissal, transferred to the new building, was called out at the Chapel's conclusion allowing the Class of 1998 to rise and walk up the carpeted aisles, as the younger classes waited and, from the curving balcony above, the freshmen looked down at the older students, hoping their time to sit below would come.

As Blair now celebrates its 175th birthday, the mix of old traditions, veteran faculty and staff, and 21st-century facilities continues to impact, enhance and serve the School's mission. Back when the School entered its 1997-1998 sesquicentennial year, Blair was also enjoying steady evidence of its progress, including rising applications, a stronger endowment and healthy budget increases on an annual basis. Newly constructed Armstrong-Hipkins, containing all of the School's performing arts space and serving as our community multi-gathering center, was dedicated in an October ceremony headed by then Blair Board Chair, **John C. Bogle '47** (pictured on the top right of page 50).

Jack, as he was universally called (or “Saint Jack” in the financial world), cut the ribbon, cheered the moment and led the amazed crowd through the parts of the new building that were open. With the campus addition not only of a new performing arts center, but also of the 1998 spring-dedicated Timken Library—named for **William R. Timken '53**, the transformative Board leader during the late '90s and into the new century—the School completed the first stages of the master plan. From there, Blair began to emerge fully from its many decades of building inertia

as the ambitious campus planning of the early 1990s, spearheaded by the Trustees, turned into a sustained period of campus growth and reorganization.

The first stage of Blair's growth actually started in the late 1980s when, in giving the most significant gift in school history, Jack Bogle advanced the construction of a new math and science building, named for his brothers: Bogle Hall. Despite inevitable delays, that building opened in the second half of the 1989-1990 school year, carrying with it such a positive impact on the School that the Trustees felt emboldened to imagine an ambitious master plan to continue supporting Blair's rising reputation.

Over the next two years, Lo-Yi Chan, a New York architect who was a protégé of the renowned I.M. Pei and who had worked on the campus plans for many schools and colleges, agreed to work with the Board and came to Blairstown to develop an architectural/campus master plan for Blair, a bold one that identified not only what buildings needed to be constructed and/or renovated, but also where those new facilities would go and what school needs would be met.

**“WE SHAPE OUR  
BUILDINGS AND  
AFTERWARDS OUR  
BUILDINGS SHAPE US.”**

—WINSTON CHURCHILL (OFTEN QUOTED BY  
**JOHN C. BOGLE '47**)



Some of the buildings—a new performing arts center and renovating Memorial Hall into modern library space—should have been and were started as soon as possible; completion by the sesquicentennial was the goal. Other campus needs—new/renovated/expanded dorms and athletic spaces; a new loop road around a green, open, walking campus—were confidently put into the plans for future Boards and administrations to consider and act upon. Entering the new century, those aspirational campus plans emerged and steadily became the new Blair reality.

## ON TO THE 175TH BIRTHDAY

From the 1997-1998 opening of the first of these projects—Armstrong-Hipkins and Timken Library—to the Blair of 2022-2023, over a dozen building and renovation projects have been completed, and the Blair campus has been transformed from a cluster of 19th-century buildings along the spine of a northwestern New Jersey hilltop to a graceful, multilayered campus stretching out in all directions and fulfilling a variety of academic, residential and activity goals. New dormitories and faculty housing, an improved campus walkway and road plan, the Siegel Property addition, new and renovated athletic facilities, playing fields, the tennis bubble, a new Canteen, an innovation and collaboration center, and the renovation of Bogle Science Center—all these projects and much more filled the 25 years between the School's major birthdays. It is not surprising that the whole of the Blair campus, already historic, has been frequently called one of the most beautiful among national boarding schools.

Even as the Blair campus was being redefined with exciting construction projects, the school community itself evolved with an expanded student body, increased faculty, curricular innovations, new athletic and artistic offerings, and a commitment to a student-centered philosophy. By the 1997-1998 school year, Blair's "student-choice" advisor system, the initiation of monitor oversight, faculty review meetings of each student, a variety of weekly, all-community meetings, and a

new collaborative student government philosophy were all in place. Further, during the '90s, a new grading system was established, as well as more flexible dining, increased class-time length and a slightly more formal dress code.

Over the next 25 years modifications would occur—especially during the pandemic years—but, in general, the foundation for today's Blair was in place at the sesquicentennial. The key to such progress included a commitment to use student ideas and foster their leadership and the willingness of the faculty to support change and offer creative responses to evolving boarding school life. From rethinking Peddie Week to initiating the Headmasters' Societies Games to adding film and architecture to arts offerings, creating school-wide public speaking opportunities, and starting a top crew program in athletics, a variety of new initiatives were advanced through purposeful community building, thus enhancing the Blair experience for individual students.

Now, as the School celebrates its 175th birthday, with thousands of students (now alumni) and three school heads beyond the 150th, the Blair family of students, faculty, staff, parents past and present, alumni, and Trustees must keep touch with our values to ensure the continuity of our mission and purpose. In the last 25 years Blair, as have all schools, absorbed and faced significant issues and challenges. From the impact of the Internet—which was just becoming a thing in 1997-1998—and the 21st-century rise of social media to the recent disruptive pandemic, we have carried on and successfully emerged from a unique time in Blair history.

Given this culture of learning and our rising confidence in our future, Blair will continue to shape a school community that can respond to the challenges that will surely come as we move toward our 200th year. Faculty and staff, and all those who love the School, must stay focused on the individual student, on their learning and growth, on their connection to the School and one another. Keeping those values as priorities will ensure that Blair is more than a beautiful campus and collection of buildings, but a thriving school home that prepares our students for the future and inspires them to make a difference in the world. ■





## It's All About Curriculum

Former Dean of Academics Sam Bacon on the growth & development of Blair's academic program since 1990.

BY **SUZY (MARTIN) LOGAN '99**

By the time Sam Bacon came to Blair in 1990, he was already a seasoned teacher, college counselor and department chair with nearly two decades of experience under his belt. He got his start as an English teacher at his alma mater, the Hun School of Princeton, and then spent 17 years at Dwight-Englewood School before joining Blair's faculty, first as an English teacher and then as Dean of Academics.

I had the pleasure of speaking with Mr. Bacon about how he and the department heads strengthened and expanded Blair's academic offerings and reputation during his 24 years as dean. He may have retired from Blair in 2015, but Mr. Bacon's passion for his life's work as an educator is clearly stronger than ever as he reflected on the multipronged approach he took to his work at Blair. At the same time that Mr. Bacon emphasized the importance of placing "student-centric" people at the core of the curriculum, he also strongly encouraged and supported Blair's arts offerings and worked with a long list of talented department chairs who worked diligently to expand the curriculum and raise the bar of academics at Blair.

"At the end of the day, teaching is a commentary on curriculum," said Mr. Bacon. "You have to figure out what you want your students to know at the end of the year, and work backward, constructing your course. A critical part of the Blair experience is that kids are immersed in the curriculum, while being surrounded by faculty members who model





Dean of Faculty Life Leucetia Shaw (*middle*), who began her career at Blair as a language teacher, works with students during Spanish class.

learning beyond the classroom.” Another huge boon for Blair’s academic program, he added, was that students were encouraged to stay engaged even after the school day ended. With art exhibits and the Society of Skeptics in the evenings, learning at Blair was truly an all-day affair, with many day students not leaving campus until 8:00 in the evening.

Having spent two years at Hun, which had a solid boarding component at the time, and then moving to the very academics-focused day school, Dwight-Engelwood, Mr. Bacon understood how much the residential experience contributed to such immersion. When he arrived at Blair, he found the School’s curriculum student-centered but traditional, with—in his experience—insufficient focus on the arts. As then Head of School Chan Hardwick continued to put the right people in the right places—Lew Stival as Dean of College Counseling, Barbara Haase as Dean of Admission and Rachel Stone as Dean of Faculty, just to name a few—Mr. Bacon found their visions for Blair aligned and they set out to attract the best students and teachers who would thrive and contribute to the growing community.

For example, hiring Kate Sykes, Jennifer Pagotto and Craig Evans, who later became chairs of the fine and performing arts programs, was a game changer for the arts at Blair in that the School was now able to grow its arts curricula in ways never before possible—and this attracted a whole new market of students to apply to Blair. While curricular expansion was certainly important, Mr. Bacon was also impressed by how engaged and student-centered young faculty members like the Sykes and the Pagottos were. That, coupled with the blossoming arts program, ushered in a new era for Blair. “Being able to hang out with other kids and your teachers after class or rehearsal or as part of an athletic team in the context of still being educated changes the dynamic and the vast majority of faculty at Blair quickly came to understand that vital part of the Blair curriculum. Often, what is important is the singer, not song,” noted Mr. Bacon. In addition to modeling that as an English teacher and occasional softball coach for many years, Mr. Bacon says that this dynamic only grew as Blair attracted more and more student-centered faculty.





Students experiment in one of Bogle Science Center's state-of-the-art labs.

Throughout the 2000s, Mr. Bacon and the academic department chairs continued to broaden Blair's curriculum to focus on science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM), and thanks to the generosity of parents and alums over the years, Blair has constructed facilities to house these growing programs (Bogle Science Center, the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration, and Weber Hall, now home of the math department).

"There are so many interconnected pieces," Mr. Bacon said. "Just think about the science and mathematics of ceramics and architecture. The process of creating something is so much more educational than repeated tasks." Among the arts classes Blair added to its course catalog were architecture, video, graphic design and digital music.

Mr. Bacon credits fine arts teachers, including Rita Baragona and Eli King, with instilling in students a solid arts foundation from which they could go on to take specialized electives they could explore further in college. He also

underscored the importance in how many studio spaces are now available at Blair, which has done much to broaden the artistic experience.

Other game changers were former Dean of Faculty Rachel Stone's classes in epidemiology and science department chair Kelly Hadden's pharmacology course and, today, the Integrated Science Research (ISR) program developed under the leadership of Mrs. Hadden and now led by director Dr. Nadia Abascal. These courses, Mr. Bacon says, taught students much about the importance of observation in academics and stood out to colleges as impressive courses on a Blair transcript. All the while, Blair continued to build its public-speaking program, in large part thanks to then English department chair Bob Brandwood, and continued to offer religion and philosophy classes.

The power of technology in the classroom evolved constantly during Mr. Bacon's career at Blair, and he is quick to acknowledge that his teaching never grew as much as it did in the last six years he was there. "I learned to do so many things



Public speaking has long been a priority at Blair, and students build their communication skills and confidence in a variety of settings from their first days on campus at School Meeting, grade-wide speech contests and as part of The Blair Leadership Stories Project.

with Google; it turned my teaching upside down and inside out, and completely changed how I taught writing. It made the classroom much easier for kids and me. Looking back, I cannot give enough credit to the work of Director of Technology Sam Adams over the years as he labored to integrate and expand the use of technologies across the curriculum” (*see page 83 for a look back at technology at Blair*).

During our conversation, Mr. Bacon took a moment to compliment Blair’s first counselor, Jessica Matzkin, and her work to move the start of the school day to 8:30 a.m., despite some resistance to pushing it back 30 minutes, which much research supports today as optimal for students’ learning—so, in many ways, Blair was ahead of the curve. In retrospect, Mr. Bacon felt this was a seismic change that meant so much to the students and showed that Blair was student-centered. When I shared that Blair’s schedule now includes 10-minute periods between classes, Mr. Bacon, with his classic good humor, called that a “much more humane” arrangement. “Extra time between classes makes the time you have in class infinitely more valuable,” he said.

The appointment of Rachel Stone as Dean of Faculty, Mr. Bacon added, made a huge curricular difference. “I cannot compliment her enough on her firm-but-friendly, friendly-but-firm approach with our faculty,” Mr. Bacon recalled. “Rachel was great at speaking with people and

**“You have to figure out what you want your students to know at the end of the year, and work backward, constructing your course.”**

– Former Dean of Academics Sam Bacon

perceptive about hiring; her influence on the curriculum was tremendous. Her work paved the way for many extraordinary teachers to come to and remain at Blair.”

As curricular offerings changed over the years, so did Blair’s academic departments. Although today there are nine departments, computer science lived in the math department for many years, and the fine and performing arts grew from one department to two. The growth of academics at Blair rests largely on the shoulders of its department chairs, Mr. Bacon added, whose leadership played a central role in not only curricular development but also hiring. Joking that he is an inherently lazy person with a knack for surrounding himself with very hardworking people who get the job done, Sam credits department chairs like the late Rick Clarke, Judy Wenner, Latta Browse, Phil Homes, Marty Miller, Andy Hay, Doc Sayers and Bob Brandwood with moving Blair forward and creating a curriculum and culture that valued flexibility and continues to this day.

“We all shared the philosophy that if you look at the curriculum and determine what you want a Blair student to take with them out the door, everything else will fall into place along the way,” Mr. Bacon concluded. “Well, that and having Jim Frick never say ‘no’ to anything I asked for. Having a Chief Operating Officer who had been a longtime classroom teacher at Blair made it all possible.” ■





## Today's Curriculum & Looking Toward the Next 25 Years

BY **SUZY (MARTIN) LOGAN '99** WITH DEAN OF ACADEMICS NATHAN MOLTENI



One of the most interesting parts of putting together this issue of the *Blair Bulletin* has been looking back at where Blair has been and ahead to where we are going as we approach our bicentennial. Dean of Academics Nathan Molteni joined me when I interviewed former Dean of Academics Sam Bacon about the evolution of Blair's curriculum over his long tenure, and then sat down to share his perspective on where we are today and what the future holds.

"It was interesting to hear Sam talk almost primarily about people in his articulation of curriculum," Mr. Molteni said. "That was embedded into our collective mindset when I came to Blair in 2008, and it is clear that curriculum originates and is successful when it is delivered by the right people. There is definitely truth in the idea that students will engage more deeply with something

when it comes from a faculty member with whom they have a strong relationship. In part, Sam built curriculum at Blair by bringing in people who were really student-centered and passionate about boarding school education."

Noting that is still a critical aspect of the academic office's work, Mr. Molteni added that Mr. Bacon planted seeds leading to the growth we see today, which includes being intentional about identifying the curriculum we want to deliver and recognizing it as something that is constantly evolving. For example, knowing we wanted to grow our science program before the renovated Bogle Science Center went online in 2019, we hired two PhD scientists to boost that program. Today, Dr. Nadia Abascal heads up Blair's Integrated Science Research (ISR) Program, a one-and-a-half-year-long student-directed science research course first introduced in 2018 that has grown so exponentially that the need arose for a dedicated director of the program in 2022.

Other new offerings include J-term, which takes place each January and gives students a chance to learn about a fascinating array of topics not usually covered in our standard curriculum. Students enroll in one of nearly 40 unique, faculty-designed mini-courses, where they meet and interact with peers of every grade level both on and off campus. In these small-group settings, participants experience the pure joy of learning as they delve into topics that pique their interest. “J-term, ISR and our science poster expo are all reflections of a shared philosophy in the academic office that the best motivation is work shared with the community so we can inspire one another.” In fact, the visibility of student work has been one significant change over recent years, including presentations during J-term, the arts and public speaking, that has been gratifying to see.

Reflecting on the growth of the arts at Blair, Mr. Molteni noted that Blair’s offerings in this area are the strongest they have ever been. “We have really expanded in terms of participation, and the quality of the student experience has been great,” he said. “While some students come to Blair because of that, another large percentage find an artistic discipline they really care about because we have so many choices and we expose them to the arts through our course requirements. Beyond creativity and developing an artistic passion, there is a real element of joy, discovery and peace of mind that can come from the arts.”

Another area on which Mr. Bacon focused during our conversation that resonated with Mr. Molteni was the

critical role that department chairs play in delivering on Blair’s mission and graduating students with the skills and confidence to successfully navigate the ever-changing world beyond Blair. Building on the legacy of those department chairs that Mr. Bacon acknowledged, Mr. Molteni noted the strength of our current academic leaders at Blair: All are long-tenured, bring something impressive to the table, and embrace and model Blair’s student-centered philosophy every day. “Our department chairs are really attuned to what the best learning looks like in their disciplines, always connecting with peer schools and collaborating within the broader educational landscape to determine what students need right now,” Mr. Molteni said.

Today, Mr. Molteni and Dean of Instructional and Professional Growth Amanda Lucas partner closely with department chairs to focus on the way in which strong relationships between faculty and students lead to greater agency for students in their learning. “Our goal is to inspire and connect students to what they are learning so they will be more capable, interested, excited and invested in doing the positive work of learning and growing themselves as people over a variety of dimensions,” Mr. Molteni explained. “We are doing that in a number of different ways: In addition to always asking the question about how our curriculum is relevant and what skills students will take into their future studies and lives after Blair, we are also looking for ways to build their own capacity through learning.”

**“Our goal is to inspire and connect students to what they are learning so they will be more capable, interested, excited and invested in doing the positive work of learning and growing themselves as people over a variety of dimensions.”**

– Dean of Academics Nathan Molteni

This year, Blair was the first high school in the country to adopt the St. Andrew’s Episcopal School Center for Transformative Teaching and Learning’s “Neuroteach Global Student Learning” program, which emphasizes neuroscience-backed strategies for key aspects of learning, such as note-taking, study skills and reading retention. All ninth-grade students have been given access to the program and will be expected to complete it independently in the year ahead with support from our ninth-grade program structures with the goal of best leveraging the way their brains function to achieve their goals.

As we consider the future of our advanced curriculum, Mr. Molteni remarked, we also know the best experiences for our students are at the intersection of their own burgeoning interests and the connections they form with adults who care about them. “Ultimately, we believe that it is how students remember feeling about a course which helps them transfer what they’ve learned to the greater arc of their lives,”





More than 100 Blair and Gill St. Bernard's School students and teachers gathered in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration for the second annual TEDx Blair Academy conference in 2018.

**“The distinguishing aspect of the Blair experience is that we want students to come learn in our classrooms and feel that what they are encountering there was designed with them in mind.”**

– Dean of Academics Nathan Molteni

he said. This has led Blair teachers to become more technical and intentional about how they approach teaching. While our faculty still emphasize warmth and rigor, they continue to develop a deeper understanding of how the brain works and the most effective strategies for teaching and learning. On the hiring front, Blair is working not just to bring in the right faculty and staff to deliver our curriculum, but also to give them the tools to do the best work they can through resources such as the Sigety Faculty Summer Institute, which, in turn, gives students the tools to reach their academic potential.

Looking to the next chapter of students' educational journeys beyond Blair, Mr. Molteni again underscores the importance of feeling a sense of agency, being able to work as a team, identify personal values, and understand themselves more fully as key to flourishing in college and beyond. “Students learn when they do the work and develop a personal, compelling narrative, resourcefulness and self-determination,” he said. “In

college, being invested and learning how to access resources within the community puts our students a step ahead of their peers, as does understanding they have to put in the work, figure out how to get past obstacles and engage with people whose opinions differ from their own.” Considering conflicting viewpoints, understanding the importance of growing and changing, and making a decision on your own perspective is invaluable, he added.

Reflecting on Blair's academic offerings and curriculum in the pandemic, Mr. Molteni expressed pride in what the School was able to accomplish—and how much the experience of being online has led students and faculty to embrace the opportunity to live and learn together in person more than ever. As Blair returned to a “normal” school year as we celebrate our demisemiseptcentennial, faculty and staff have doubled down on their commitment to hold students accountable with care and to challenge them to meet high standards.

Looking toward the next 25 years, Mr. Molteni reflected on the concept of “superior academic preparation,” one of Blair's Seven Principles, as he considered the best ways to measure it. “The distinguishing aspect of the Blair experience is that we want students to come learn in our classrooms and feel that what they are encountering there was designed with them in mind,” he said. “Our classrooms are populated with adults whose first priority is to understand and connect with students as people of all backgrounds and experience. It is the people our students remember much more than the course. Our faculty shape the experience, which works well because of our focus on connection, and the skills we teach only serve to deepen those relationships.”

This focus on the expertise and talent of Blair faculty members is a major reason that we will be moving toward a new vision for advanced curriculum beyond Advanced Placement (AP) courses beginning in 2024. “We believe that the best educational experiences for Blair students are designed by the Blair faculty who work with them every day, and students should have more tangible evidence of their learning to encourage the transfer of knowledge to their future pursuits,” said Mr. Molteni. “That's why Blair is in the process of redesigning its advanced curriculum offerings to more closely align with the School's vision for its graduates. We look forward to offering a number of programs of distinction in place of AP courses in the years ahead.”



(Top): Blair students participate in collaborative learning to promote a better understanding of the material. (Bottom): In language teacher Allan Issenschmidt's French class, students practice vocabulary and immerse themselves in the French culture and language.

With the goals of giving students a greater sampling of college-level work and ownership of coursework with room to explore with their teachers, starting in fall 2024, Blair will offer two types of advanced curriculum courses. Advanced survey classes designed to align with first-year college courses in core subjects like Calculus, Economics, Java, Biology or U.S. History, for example, would prepare students with a broad overview of the introduction to these disciplines at the college level. Alternatively, advanced seminar courses will take a deep dive into a particular theme, skill or discipline along

the same lines as Blair's current Integrated Science Research program.

"As we look toward the future, the academic office is partnering with our admission and college counseling offices to intentionally and strategically expand access to advanced curriculum for our students and increase the number of subjects, experiences and skills in our courses that deserve 'advanced curriculum' credentialing," Mr. Molteni concluded. "We are fortunate to have put the mechanisms and resources in place to make this shift while maintaining quality and rigor." ■



# THE EVOLUTION OF ACADEMICS AT BLAIR



IN THIS FEATURE, BLAIR'S DEPARTMENT CHAIRS OFFER THEIR THOUGHTS ON THE EVOLUTION OF THEIR DISCIPLINES AND PROGRAMS AS THEY LOOK BACK ON THE SCHOOL'S HISTORY AND TOWARD THE FUTURE.

## ENGLISH

BY JAMES MOORE, HON. '93

**IN SOME WAYS, THINGS HERE** in the Blair English department are ever thus: Most of our classes meet on the third floor of Clinton Hall, with its giant windows, and doors that don't quite close all the way; Parauda, the Evanses, *Carolyn Conforti-Browse '79* and Brandwood hold forth every day, their copies of *Macbeth* and *Gatsby*, like them, a little more dog-eared, but still brimming with wisdom and meaning; a cohort of impossibly young and energetic new teachers, who remind the veterans of our earlier selves and help us understand how to stay connected to the youth of

today; and our students, who file in every day, expecting the best of us, even when they look like they've just rolled out of bed. Alumni who wander into Clinton and make their way upstairs will be reassured that whatever challenged, intrigued or even delighted them about the study of English at Blair—the texts, the conversation and the hard work of writing—is still the focus of what we bring to each member of the School every day.

To be sure, the ground has shifted beneath our feet in the last quarter-century, challenging our department

to explore new methods of making our classrooms a place of discovery. Every generation of teachers since the invention of English departments has complained that “Kids don't read as much as they used to,” but, today, that may not be the case; rather, they may read even more than they have in the past, but they do so on the eminently legible screens of their phones and other devices, and even those who identify as avid readers are more inclined to peruse the news and other articles. Likewise, the human desire for narrative is readily satisfied by the generally good and often excellent

## THE EVOLUTION OF ACADEMICS AT BLAIR

offerings of Netflix, Amazon and other streaming services, whose long, complex and compelling multi-episode arcs seem structurally similar to those serialized novels of Dickens and Hardy, whose audiences a century-and-a-half ago were equally obsessed. We are, as a colleague noted a few years back, tilting into a headwind as we ask our students to disconnect for a while, lean back in their chairs and, with a thoughtful pencil, underline, emphasize and comment in the margins of *Death of a Salesman* or *A Farewell to Arms*.

But ask we do, and our students continue to respond. They do so in part because our reading lists, in addition to a fair helping of the “classics,” include works by contemporary authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Amy Tan and Yaa Gyasi, which offer our students a broader perspective of the world they will inherit, as well as examples of simply superb writing. They respond because our notions of class participation and public speaking have broadened as they’ve intensified, so that even the quietest voice has a chance to be heard, and that a good idea can start with a half-formed one. They respond because they

learn how to write, and, as they make their way through Blair, begin to realize that this way of organizing what they have to say, whether in or out of the classroom, will serve them well as they move on into the rest of their lives.

From the English office, on the third floor of Clinton, I can see through the doorway a bookshelf we have installed in the hall. On either side of it are two old, upholstered club chairs, liberated from storage in the Locke attic; the chairs rest on a suitably threadbare Persian carpet of unknown provenance. In one chair, a student reads Salinger’s *Nine Stories*, which she’s doing for my English 1 class; in another, her friend is absorbed in one of the Harry Potter books, probably for the second or third time. On the rare occurrence when what is envisioned becomes reality, we see with clarity the product of our efforts, and that is what keeps us moving confidently ahead, honoring the past while always, always looking to the future.

One kid reading for work, the other for fun. We’re doing good work, as we always have. ■



English teacher Doug Compton and his students gather around a Harkness table to discuss literature.



Students in the early 2000s enjoy a break in their daily schedule under the magnolia tree.

**“They respond because our notions of class participation and public speaking have broadened as they’ve intensified, so that even the quietest voice has a chance to be heard, and that a good idea can start with a half-formed one.”**

—James Moore, Hon. '93, English department chair



# HISTORY

BY JASON BECK

**OVER THE PAST 25 YEARS**, much has changed in the structure and offerings of the history department. Our ninth-grade course, Global Issues, has evolved into an ever-changing look at the major current events of each year and the historical forces that inform those events. Sophomores still study Modern European History and juniors still study U.S. History, while seniors have a wide range of new electives meant to culminate their study of history at Blair. These offerings include Microeconomics, Constitutional Law, Race in America, Intellectual History, and Comparative Government and Politics. In addition, electives including Latin American History, African American History, 1968, Women's Rights in America, Economics Theory, and Ancient History have rotated in and out of the curriculum.

Beyond the classroom, the department has supported and developed a number of important co-curricular programs since the 150th anniversary of our founding. These programs are aimed at connecting the learning that students do in the classroom to the broader world—helping them recognize that they have a part to play in the world of ideas swirling around us. Students have attended Intelligence Squared Debates in New York City and lectures at area colleges and universities, and participated in the *Atlantic Magazine's* Washington Ideas

Forum. We have hosted TEDx conferences on campus that highlight student speakers from Blair and Gill St. Bernard's School in Peapack-Gladstone, New Jersey. And, of course, the history department continues to be the home of the Society of Skeptics speaker series. While Skeptics events have moved from Cowan Auditorium to the forum of the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration, the program itself remains much the same—bringing important voices from around the world expressing many different viewpoints to Blair Academy as our speakers spend time with our students each Tuesday evening after family-style dinner.

While students no longer all receive a fresh copy of *The New York Times* under the Arch each morning, instead accessing the news and the world from their phones or computers, the goals of history classes at Blair remain. Our teachers connect their students with historical moments through the use of primary documents and excellent secondary sources. We work to have students read critically, do research, write analytically, and ask good questions about the readings, the history, their peers and themselves. Ultimately, this skill set pays dividends in other courses, in college and in life. Ever, always. ■



Blair's history teachers, including Director of Timken Library Ann Williams (*left*) and **Quint Clarke '87** (*right*), connect students to events of the past through primary documents and secondary sources, encouraging them to read critically, do research, write analytically and ask questions.



# COMPUTER SCIENCE

BY SAMUEL G. ADAMS IV

**BLAIR'S COMPUTER SCIENCE DEPARTMENT**—an academic department separate from the technology office, which is operational (*see story on page 83*)—has grown enormously since I joined Blair's faculty in 1995. Blair already had a course in basic programming, and we expanded those offerings to include several new courses, including Advanced Placement Computer Science, computer-aided Software Design, and Computer Application and Programming. Of course, my tenure at Blair coincided with the explosion of the World Wide Web in the mid-1990s, when the number of Americans buying desktop computers with modems that connected to the Internet grew exponentially.

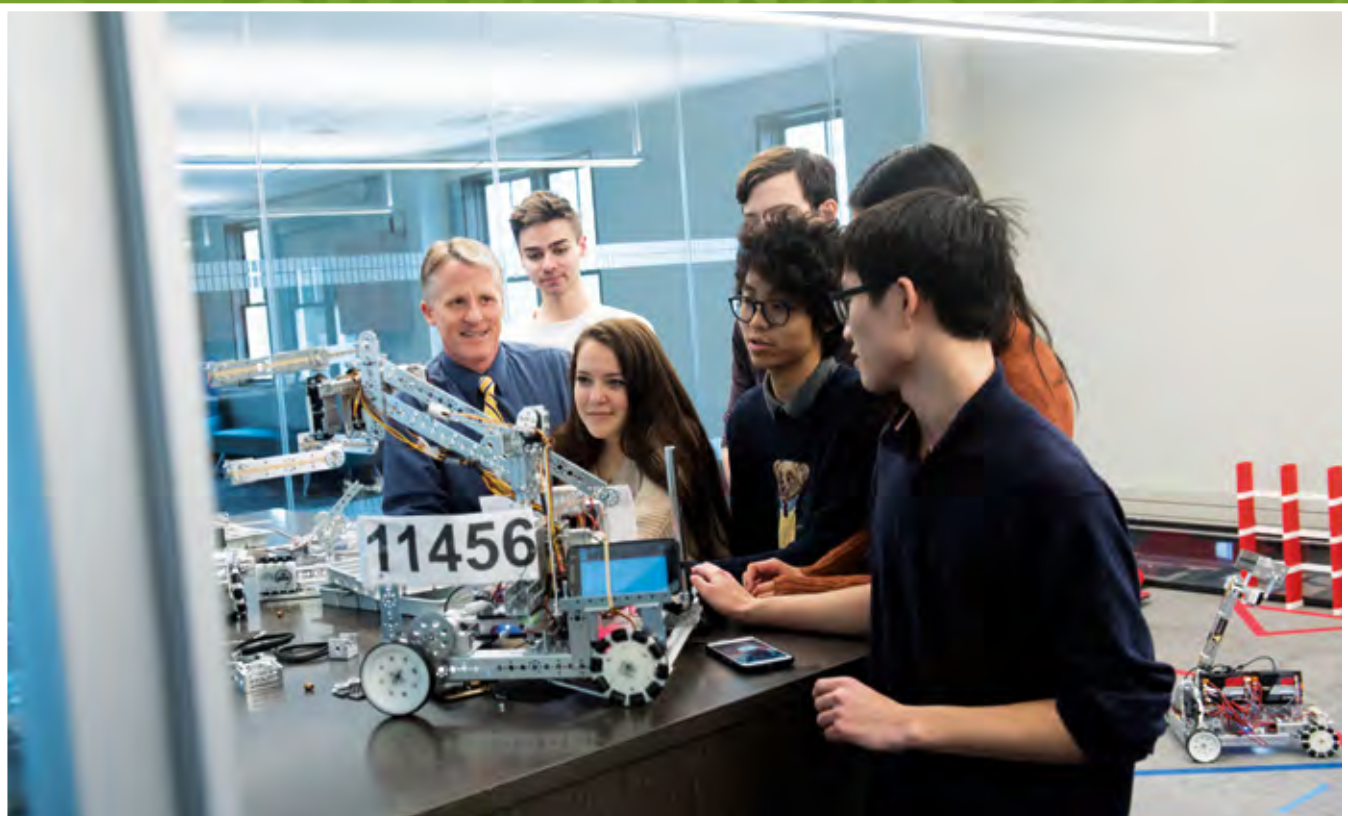
Throughout my career, I have taught an AP computer science class that has cycled through three different programming languages. In 2012, we piloted some robotics classes that drew

only one student in year one; but, in year two, we had eight students and, in year three, 16 kids were excited about the curriculum.

Other computer science electives have focused on artificial intelligence and phone app design; when the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration opened during the 2017-2018 school year, the robotics classes that had begun in the Park Street maker space flourished under new computer science faculty member Michael Garrant.

When he came to Blair in 2016, he brought to his role nearly 30 years of experience in engineering, including defense electronics and medical device product development.

Blair's robotics program continues to grow, with students having the opportunity to take part in three different experiences: building robots from kits; learning how to make



The robotics program at Blair has flourished under the guidance of computer science teacher Michael Garrant, and the robotics team ranks among the top in New Jersey.

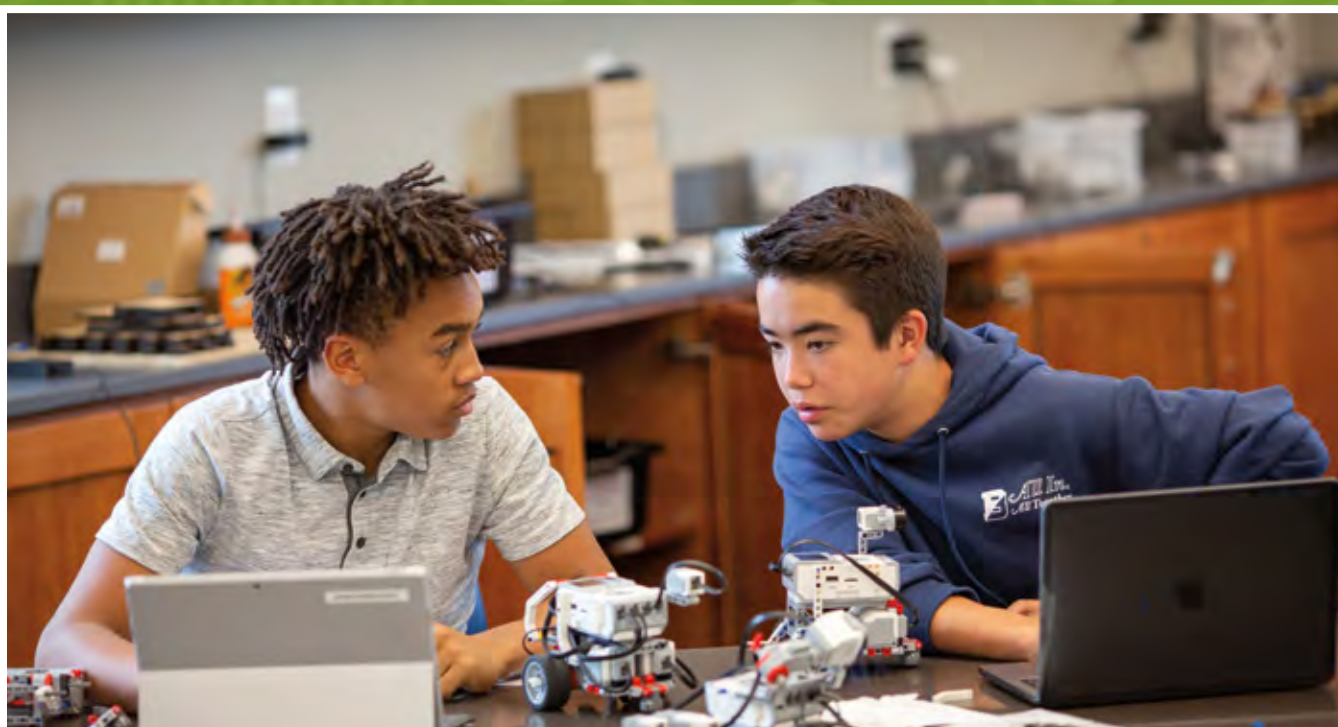


industrial robots solve real-world problems; and joining the robotics team, which competes with other schools and has been enormously successful over the last few years.

It is hard to believe that it has already been 25 years since Blair's sesquicentennial celebration. Someone will be sitting down 25 years from now at the bicentennial to reflect on the changes that have occurred from today and moving forward. Computer science continues to change at a rapid pace; in fact, we estimate that most of the hardware on campus will be obsolete within seven years of purchase, so whatever is being

used decades down the road by students, faculty and staff will likely be very different from what we currently have on campus.

We imagine that coding, web design, graphics and robotics will be even more relevant in the future than they are today, but we really don't know what that will look like, both in our classrooms and in the world beyond our hilltop. We do know and take pride in, however, the strong program we have built over the last quarter century, which serves as a good foundation upon which to pivot and change as needed as we look toward the future. ■



**Carnegie Johnson '23** (left) and **Zac Baker '23** (right) collaborate in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration's robotics classroom.

**“It is hard to believe that it has already been 25 years since Blair’s sesquicentennial celebration. Someone will be sitting down 25 years from now at the bicentennial to reflect on the changes that have occurred from today and moving forward.”**

–Samuel G. Adams IV, Director of Technology and computer science chair

# MATHEMATICS

BY R. LATTA BROWSE

**MATH IS THE LANGUAGE** in which science, technology and engineering are expressed, but even more, at Blair, it is considered an art form to be studied for its own beauty and merits. Blair mathematics has seen significant advancements in pedagogy since the sesquicentennial, but that fundamental approach—math qua math—continues to underlie all that we do in the department. In 1998, few students advanced beyond BC Calculus, the course that served as the gateway for entry to elite engineering schools; the first “post-BC” course, Multivariable

Calculus, or “Multi,” was offered to a small class of four students only in 1999. Fast-forward to 2022-2023, and BC Calculus is taken by numerous sophomores and juniors, allowing us to offer courses in Number Theory and Linear Algebra along with Multi on a rotating basis to students who love mathematics “just because.”

In 1998, an observer would have seen math courses taught in four different buildings (Bogle, Clinton, Timken and the recently-opened Armstrong-Hipkins); that all changed in 2017, when the department moved into Weber,

renovated to house the entire math department. How appropriate that the space formerly dedicated to the fine arts became the locale for the “mathematical arts.” Our pedagogy had already changed in the early 2000s when we stopped using textbooks in favor of teacher-generated materials. This allowed us to design courses more closely aligned with our student needs and interests and led to a greater degree of intradepartmental collaboration. The move to the shared space in Weber enabled us to communicate in a way we had always desired but had found challenging due to



Interim math department chair R. Latta Browse has taught generations of Blair Bucs and continues to inspire in today's students a lifelong love of mathematics as an art form.



our dispersion across campus. Along the way we reconfigured our classrooms to promote student collaboration and discussion, discarding the lecture format that was still in vogue in 1998.

Looking forward to Blair's bicentennial in 2048, we anticipate our curriculum to be less calculus-based than it is now, leaning toward a greater emphasis on discrete mathematics and statistics as we join the move to big data. Forecasting the future with any degree of accuracy is a prospect fraught with uncertainty—we were “supposed” to have self-driving cars

by now, and would any of us have predicted smartphones, Google and TikTok taking over our lives—but thinking creatively remains, nonetheless, an energizing activity for students and teachers alike.

Katherine Johnson, the inspirational mathematician whose portrait hangs in the second floor hallway of Weber, is reported to have said: “I was just excited to have challenging work to do and smart people to work with.” We hope all our students can concur with her after having taken math courses at Blair. ■



Since Blair's sesquicentennial, math courses have become less lecture-based and more collaborative and focused on classroom discussion.



Current Athletic Director **Paul Clavel '88** has held many roles during his tenure at Blair, including teacher of mathematics.

**“Math is the language in which science, technology and engineering are expressed, but even more, at Blair, it is considered an art form to be studied for its own beauty and merits.”**

—R. Latta Browse, math department chair

# SCIENCE

BY KELLY HADDEN



Science has evolved at Blair, from a mid-19th century classroom (left) to former science teacher Rachel Stone, who later became Blair's first female Assistant Head of School for Academics and Dean of Faculty, with a student (right).

**AS BLAIR CELEBRATED ITS** sesquicentennial in 1998, the School's science department had settled in nicely to Bogle Hall, which had been dedicated about 10 years earlier and allowed our program to move out of Clinton Hall. Although the math department also occupied some real estate in Bogle, our classes were spread out through the building, with Physics being taught on the first floor, Chemistry on the second and Biology on the third floor. By that time, department chair and beloved late faculty member Dr. Richard Clarke had taught at Blair for 27 years, and it would be another 11 years before he retired from the School. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Bogle afforded students the opportunity to conduct laboratory experiments with easy access to gas and electricity. Although Environmental Science was a course offering, there were no electives available for students to choose from, a marked difference from our curriculum today that allows students to take classes in a wide range of subjects that interest them.

Beginning in the 2000s, the science department increasingly focused on immersing students in inquiry-based learning and giving them hands-on experience in an effort to deepen the impact of what they were learning in classes. Faculty members' passion for different aspects of scientific study led to more electives in subjects like Epidemiology, Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Sciences, a selection of courses that mimicked the emergence of technology and scientific revolution in the areas of climate change, public health, and techniques

such as cloning and genetic recombination. By 2010 to 2015, we added Biotechnology, Biochemistry and Marine Biology; a few years later, we would continue to introduce more science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics (STEAM)-focused courses, such as Foundations of Research and Integrated Science Research (ISR) and Engineering, all of which we have continued to enhance over the years and still offer today. In fact, the size of our ISR program grew so much last year that we appointed Dr. Nadia Abascal as a full-time director to oversee the course and partner with students and their external mentors as they pose hypotheses and propose solutions to complex problems.

As students' mental well-being continues to be a priority in everything Blair does, our AP Psychology course covers topics such as the physiology of the brain and how people cope with challenges. Our physics curriculum includes two of the highest-level offerings in a high school curriculum, AP Physics C-Mechanics and AP Physics Electricity and Magnetism. We also now offer Honors Anatomy and Physiology, as well as Astronomy, for students who wish to explore interests in all realms of science.

Another exciting development in the last decade or so has been the increasing transfer of information outside the classroom, such as the presentations our students give at the annual Science Poster Exposition started by Dr. Jolene Schuster in 2014. At first, only our Biotechnology, Pharmaceutical





Blair's state-of-the-art Bogle Science Center, which opened in 2019, has made possible a wide range of scientific inquiry and exploration in every discipline. Students can apply for the School's increasingly popular Integrated Science Research program or take independent studies in a wide variety of areas as they seek to further their knowledge.

Science and Astronomy courses participated, but the event has grown significantly over the past nine years; today, it is a school-wide annual event that includes the top research from many of the Blair science courses.

Beyond our courses always expanding and evolving, among the most exciting developments of the last 25 years has been the renovation and expansion of Bogle Hall into Bogle Science Center. The upgraded building, which opened in 2019, more than meets the needs of our hands-on laboratory-based curriculum, boasting six new laboratories, an advanced laboratory for research and a classroom-lab (or "CLAB") teaching space for AP Biology and all physics and engineering classes. In addition to square footage, the renovations also added exhaust trunks at the lab benches so that students could perform laboratory experiments themselves instead of gathering around one hood and watching their teacher do it. We have also designed the facilities to be dynamic and flexible spaces where all furniture can move and utilities come from the ceiling to allow for flexibility within the space. The CLAB environments allow for an inquiry-based approach to teaching, as well as the intersection between classroom and laboratory learning. We also incorporated a classroom that

could be turned into a dark room to be used for physics, engineering, astronomy and chemistry in order to immerse the students in astrological experiences and model electron spectroscopy.

Finally, a pivotal advancement for our department's capabilities occurred when the administration supported the hiring of a dedicated laboratory technician to help with the daily laboratory setup, purchasing, calibration and maintenance of our equipment. This allowed the teachers more time to develop creative, immersive and meaningful classroom and laboratory experiences for our students.

As the science department looks to the next 25 years, our philosophy and approach to teaching and learning will continue to support and shape the "whole student," giving them the tools, skills and culturally responsive content knowledge to thrive in the next stage of their educational journeys. We are increasingly using an inquiry-based approach and offering more opportunities for independent research, which will provide scaffolding for students to discover their own scientific vision and develop confidence in the classroom or laboratory as they leave Blair for college and enter their professional lives with critical skills they learned in Bogle Science Center. ■

# LANGUAGE

BY JOYCE LANG



Blair language teachers like Lian Wang (*left*) continue to stay on the cutting-edge of language pedagogy, thanks to the early foundation laid by former department chairs **Ferd Marcial '39**, Judith Wenner, Don Morley and Tim Devaney (*pictured above, right*).

**TAKING THE OPPORTUNITY TO** look back on the history and philosophy of Blair's language department over the last 25 years has been enlightening and affirming on many fronts. Our faculty members have long been committed to thinking creatively about ways to deepen students' ability to communicate and connect to other languages, cultures and experiences. Although our teaching-and-learning philosophy has evolved and the number of language teachers and course offerings has grown over the years, Blair was already on the cutting edge of language pedagogy when the School celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1998, thanks to the vision of then-department chair Judith Wenner, who believed that language learning would happen naturally through immersion.

Her efforts to create a foundation of student-oriented goals coincided with the explosion of technology at Blair—first, by incorporating video resources into the curriculum for the first two years of the study of Spanish and French, and, later, by creating the School's first language lab and the opportunities made possible thanks to the Internet. The language lab, which was initially located in the basement of Clinton Hall and later moved to the basement of Timken Library, featured a dozen recording booths and a console for playing audio selections. The goal was to foster linguistic and cultural immersion and provide a connection to the real world.

Our classrooms went from being totally tech-free—with the exception of boom boxes and overhead transparency

projectors—to adding a growing number of audio-visual systems starting in 1999 that included digital projectors, computers, CD players and speakers. Blair language teacher Maria Bowditch worked alongside Judy for 17 years and incorporated the use of "French in Action," a soap-opera-esque video series popular in Yale University language classrooms at the time (with a similar series being used for Spanish). Chinese instruction continues to be based on comprehensible input, and there is an immersion component of instruction that is balanced with learning to form and comprehend the Chinese characters, as well as to write in Pinyin (a system of Romanized spelling). In Latin class over the years, in addition to translation of ancient texts, there has been an emphasis



on spoken Latin from time to time, which allows teachers of classics to collaborate with modern language teachers.

Music was always an important piece of the curriculum, and the School's support of access to authentic materials for language learning allowed the purchase of numerous VHS recordings of newscasts, television commercials, programs, films and early music videos in the target language. With the rise of laptops and mobile devices connected to the Internet and Wi-Fi, Blair phased out the language lab in 2013.

While the evolution of technology and how we use it in our curriculum were among the most visible changes to how our language teachers operated in and outside of the classroom, travel opportunities have also provided incredible opportunities to connect students' learning to the real world. Over the years, trips have grown from one exchange with a school in Normandy, France, in Judy's early days to travel that has taken Blair students and teachers to Spain, Italy, Ecuador, Haiti, China, France, Canada, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Peru, Cuba and China.

Mentorship from colleagues has also played a big role in our department's philosophy and approach to teaching and learning. Judy learned much from *Ferd Marcial '39*, a legendary department chair and one-time interim Head of School whose home, Marcial House, remains as a visual reminder of his presence and whose generosity lives on through a named faculty chair stipend.

After Judy Wenner's retirement in 2006, Don Morley stepped in as department chair until 2010, followed by Tim Devaney, who took the helm from 2010 to 2017, and renewed the department's commitment to immersion-based cultural understanding as the entry point to language acquisition. Under Tim's leadership, Sarah O'Neil [who now teaches religion and philosophy at Blair] brought to Blair the principles of language immersion that she had studied at Middlebury College, creating a complete immersion program for Spanish 1 and 2.

Throughout the 2010s, our commitment to leadership-oriented international travel grew, and we forged local connections with nearby communities where our target languages are spoken. We also hosted guest speakers from a broad spectrum of backgrounds and cultures, a programmatic element that continues to be a foundation of the language

department's teaching-and-learning strategy to this day. Mandarin teacher Lian Wang began a virtual collaboration with Chinese teachers and their students at peer independent schools this past fall. Of course, the pandemic made in-person interaction somewhat difficult, but we are excited to consider new opportunities as travel restrictions continue to lift.

Since 2017, as chair, I have been proud to build on the work of my predecessors and colleagues as we teach students all levels of Spanish, French, Chinese, and traditional Latin and Greek, while also continuing to foster a department culture of collaboration and professionalism. It has been so fulfilling to take on the role of J-term coordinator this year, and to see how much the planning and execution of these 35-plus courses provide opportunities for such partnerships, while also creating experiences that allow students to learn purposefully and joyfully in a class focused on a subject of their choice.

Regularly scheduled department meetings and the Sigety Faculty Summer Institute have also permitted us to do some innovative and forward-thinking work related to curricular design and learning outcomes—allowing us to provide students in all levels a more uniform experience focused on reading and listening comprehension instead of textbooks. The Sigety Institute, in particular, has also set the stage for faculty within and across departments to collaborate in new and effective ways.

Community outreach has also been a priority, and we are proud of La Conexión, the community service club in which students tutor Spanish-speaking students in nearby Newton, New Jersey, with the dual goals of supporting immigrants for whom English is a second language and simultaneously learning from the young students, their families and their school community.

As we look to the future, we understand that learning languages and deepening students' understanding of countries and their cultures are essential skills for success in our interconnected world. The Blair language department looks forward to continuing to work with them to build those skills—so that Blair students leave our hilltop not only communicating in languages with a high level of proficiency, but also equipped with intercultural learning skills such as deep listening, respectful curiosity, perspective-taking, empathy and cultural humility. ■

# RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

BY SUZY (MARTIN) LOGAN '99



**OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS**, Blair's religion and philosophy courses have honored Blair's Presbyterian roots while also becoming increasingly interdisciplinary, focused on the central question of "What is a good life and what responsibility do we have as human beings to provide a good life for one another?"

This central focus on the "good life" has evolved over the years under the leadership of longtime Blair chaplain, the Rev. Peter Amerman, who chaired the religion and philosophy department for 38 years, as well as the Rev. Cindy Crowner, who expanded the department's cross-disciplinary nature and integrated more hands-on community service work during her nine-year tenure. A staple of Blair's religion and philosophy department for many years has been Blair's World Religions course, which introduces students to the foundational beliefs, practices and worldviews of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (as well as Indigenous religious traditions, such as those of Native American tribes).

In addition to understanding people's relationship to religion, belief structures and spirituality, Blair's religion and philosophy curriculum includes Human Rights and Introduction to Ethics, the latter of which is currently taught by Chaplain and Blair Trustee Emeritus the Rev. David Harvey, who joined the faculty in 2022. These courses examine the diverse ways we make meaning in our lives, as well as consider the moral and ethical responsibilities of individuals and society at large.

"While the interdisciplinary nature of these courses and the points of entry may have changed for students over the last 25 years, we are still trying to achieve the same things while we ask

the same questions in different ways," said Dean of Academics Nathan Molteni. Courses, such as religion and philosophy teacher Sarah O'Neil's Science of Happiness, encourage students to look inward at their relationship with and response to the world around them. "The goal of these classes is to deepen students' understanding of how they experience life, process stress and challenges, physiologically respond to stimuli and make good choices to make their own lives better, as well as the lives of those around them," Mr. Molteni explained.

Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Evan Thomas' Art for Social Change course offers students a collaborative experience designed to raise awareness about critical issues within the Blair "bubble" and beyond. With the good of others and society as a whole in mind, students create and participate in a wide variety of art forms to foster dialogue and action in the community, which empowers them to understand art as a catalyst for change.

Over the years, a number of other courses have offered students unique perspectives on religion and philosophy, including Gandhi and Non-Violent Revolution, Morality and the Modern World, and Faith Through the World's Music. "Over time, we have packaged the concepts of our courses differently, but the way in which we find points of relevance for students continues to change and evolve," Mr. Molteni concluded. "Twenty-five years from now, the underlying questions about having a moral framework in life will not have gone away. But, the conversations and the themes will shift to represent where students are in their own lives at that point in time." ■



# PERFORMING ARTS

BY JENNIFER PAGOTTO



**WHEN I JOINED BLAIR'S** faculty in 2005, Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts had just been built, changing the face of Blair's arts programs and bringing it to a new level. It created a new, beautiful and acoustically sound home for Blair's theatre and vocal music programs, which had been staples of the Blair arts scene for many years and continue to be strong facets of our program. During my tenure, it has been such an honor to contribute to the expansion and growth of the School's instrumental music program, including the creation of our Symphony Orchestra, honors Chamber Orchestra and Jazz Ensemble, as well as string, wind and chamber ensembles. These ensembles now share the performing spaces in Armstrong-Hipkins, and it is simply a joy to see and hear the arts center come to life during our numerous annual performances, including the three theatrical productions and five music concerts that take the stage each year.

Over the last 18 years, it has been wonderful to also see the expansion of our private-lessons program, which gives students the option to work with numerous professional musicians on the study of all instruments and voice, and I am grateful for the expertise these instructors have given our students. I am also deeply appreciative of my fellow performing arts colleagues, who have guided and shaped the choral and theatre programs at Blair, such as Chris Eanes in the early 2000s, veteran theatre directors Craig

and Kaye Evans and Micki McMillan; directors of vocal music Bill Hammer, Chris McMillan, Kathryn Hylton, Nate Wideltz and Ryan Manni; technical directors Wayne "Razz" Rasmussen and Michael Ryerson; as well as other faculty who joined our department over the years.

Just as Armstrong-Hipkins ushered in a new era for Blair's performing artists, the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration has offered tremendous opportunities for the growth and development of our digital music program, including offerings for beginner-through-advanced composers and audio engineers, and we look forward to sharing the work of these musicians at our first digital music festival in spring 2023. Likewise, under the direction of Mr. Evans, who developed the Robert J. Evans Open Air Theatre by Blair Lake, our theatre electives in acting, playwriting, directing and improv give our performing arts program a constant energy and growth that is fulfilling and infectious, and I look forward to seeing where that takes us in the future.

This spring was especially exciting as Blair's Orchestra and Singers took their music beyond the walls of Blair, and embarked on an international performance tour in England and France. Performance tours in the United States and abroad have become a routine part of Blair's schedule and culture, and we have visited

## THE EVOLUTION OF ACADEMICS AT BLAIR

Prague, Budapest, Vienna and Italy, in addition to England and France. Domestically, favorite tour destinations have included locations up and down the coast of California.

Blair's performers continue to audition and qualify for solo and chamber competitions and festivals, such as the New Jersey regional and all-state ensembles, including choir, orchestra, band and jazz ensembles. They are also excited to regularly perform at School Meeting and other community events, including the "Music on the B" recital series, which has been expanded to include soloists and small ensembles within the department.

We look forward to supporting the growth and development of the performing arts at Blair for the next 25 years as Blair approaches its bicentennial. And we are grateful our own family has been a part of the community for much of the time between the sesquicentennial until today. Thank you to all the parents, alumni and donors who have made the progress we have seen in the last 25 years possible. We look forward to the next 25 and all that our performing artists will do as they leave Blair. ■



Blair's performing arts program has come a long way since the School's early days. In addition to staging several on-campus theatrical productions and concerts each year, the Orchestra and Singers have grown to include more than 80 students (*pictured above: a band plays circa 1950; Mrs. Pagotto conducting during a performance in Italy in 2015*).



# FINE ARTS

BY KATE SYKES



**THE LAST 25 YEARS HAVE SEEN EXCEPTIONAL GROWTH** and expansion in the fine arts department. Having a wonderful legacy on which to build has been instrumental to our success and has informed and shaped our way forward. Thanks to the strong leadership of former department chairs Phil Homes and Rita Baragona, and the development of the video studies program under fine arts teachers Steve and Judith Kampmann, the arts have long been a place where students could build their creative skills and develop their voice. Our curriculum and facilities have evolved since I became chair in 2008, but our philosophy of guiding and supporting our students as they discover their interests and passions remains at the center of all we do.

When I first came to Blair in 2003, the jewelry classroom had been recently converted to a space dedicated to film production and Blair's graphic arts course was born, albeit in a Timken Library classroom where math and computer science courses were held. Our dip into graphic design was a technological starting point as we began to give students practical experience using software and digital design tools (including the industry standards, Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop). Eventually, the film production and graphic arts classroom migrated to a shared space in Weber Hall, where we fully outfitted an Apple Lab, utilizing more of the Adobe suite for creating and editing. With a generous parent gift, we added a large-format printer. The science teachers got to know that machine just as well as the fine arts teachers! A few years

later, the fine arts department purchased the School's first 3D printer with the hopes of expanding our students' prototyping, thinking and creating.

As time marched on and we evolved, our connection to technology deepened while we kept the strength of our existing artistic traditions intact. Today, with our home in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration (CECIC), we have found new and exciting ways to encourage students to expand their knowledge of art and design using technology, as well as time-tested, hands-on techniques and materials. Beginning photography students are still learning the magic of analog photography in our dark room, and progressing through upper-level courses with digital cameras in hand, printing their photos on a large scale in our maker space. Our ceramics students can craft forms on the wheel, but also try their hand at 3D printing clay. As our students are challenged to find and refine their voice, they have many different means to authentically express themselves.

Programmatically, the fine arts department has made art more accessible and visible on campus. Whereas, in the past, students may have found the art studios off limits except for students enrolled in art classes, the CECIC offers everyone spaces to work and exercise their creativity. It is not only a building built for convening and creating, but it is also inherently a call to action; it practically screams, "Do something! Make something! Work at something!"



Before the CECIC opened in 2017, I recall chalking the sidewalks on the first day of school so students wouldn't walk past our old home in Weber Hall. No such problem now! The only issue now is letting students know which of the CECIC's

four floors houses their destination. A studio space where you can create small sets for filming, a recording studio and two digital photography studios keep students busy creating in ways they never had the resources to previously. The ceramics/sculpture studio is adjacent to the maker space, bringing to the ground floor a place to work in community, across disciplines, merging a host of 2D design knowledge with 3D design skills. Thanks to the vision of the early fine arts department, the 3D printers and large-format printer are now mainstays of the maker space. With the addition of the vinyl cutters, dye sublimation tools, CnC router and laser cutter/engraver, there are few things our students can't design and make.

The visibility of the arts is elevated not only by having a state-of-the-art facility, but also by the commitment of our arts faculty and students. Their passion for art and interest in pursuing artistic disciplines at a high level work in a cyclical nature. When students bring their best selves to their arts courses, teachers must endeavor to support and challenge them, which leads to our ability to take our programs and the courses to even greater heights. It is our privilege and honor as educators to be nimbly working and partnering with our students in this way. As we envision our advanced curriculum, our students will play a larger role in the display of their work and, perhaps, taking their creativity and skills into more multidisciplinary paths. Additionally, we want to craft courses where students will still be able to dive deeply and develop a sustained thread of content, but also survey a broader scope of ideas. We have shifted to having two student art shows a year and regularly highlighting the "Art Stars" within our community weekly at School Meeting. Our students also share their work with a larger audience in competitions and film festivals; many are applying to colleges with more robust art portfolios and supplements than ever before.

Most recently, we have created a leadership position for student fine artists with the Junior Arts Guild. These students represent the arts at admission and advancement events, introduce the community to exhibiting Romano Gallery artists and serve on the selection committee for future gallery shows. In my early years at Blair, it sometimes felt as if the arts were running counterpoint to athletics, held separate; while some students crossed over, that was more of an exception than the rule. But, in recent years, our efforts to capitalize on our students' multifaceted interests and complex creative identities have enriched and expanded the ways our student artists can shine.

There are countless ways in which our arts faculty have been able to "art up" the experiences of our entire community. Our student photographers, for instance, now capture athletic media days, during which they shoot portraits and pose shots that the athletics office shares with the community in advance of competitions. Fine arts teacher Tyson Trish's photo club allows students to capture daily campus life and share their work with parents and alumni on Blair's website, social media platforms and in our magazine. These real-world art activities give our students a way of placing and seeing themselves in the art world.

As our fine arts teachers design art related J-term courses, including "Design for the Other 90%" and "Conscientious Carpentry," they connect students from all backgrounds and experiences with a broader sense of the importance of art, design and culture in our society. On our annual Day of Service, ceramics students use their talents to benefit the greater good of our community as they create bowls for NORWESCAP's annual Empty Bowls event, which we have supported for the last 14 years. Even our beloved annual Headmasters' Societies Games feature photography and mural competitions that are a highlight of the winter.

The induction of the Arts Guild's inaugural class last summer was a seminal moment filled with love, warmth and celebration of the arts at Blair. We look forward to continuing to spotlight the long-lasting role that art plays in life and how Blair grads continue to spread their artistic light and voice beyond our hilltop. The students of today will be the Arts Guild members of tomorrow!

Looking toward the next 25 years, we plan to continue weaving the arts into the fabric of Blair life in innovative ways as we celebrate the vision and impact of our fine artists. ■



# NAVIGATING FOR COLLEGE SUCCESS

BY DEAN OF COLLEGE COUNSELING **NIKI APPLEBAUM '01**



remember hesitating mid-sentence during one of our ninth-grade class council meetings. Never one to be shy, I nonetheless wasn't quite sure if I had the right pronunciation of "sesquicentennial," but I wanted to make a point about our "Absolute Bogle" T-shirts: We would raise

even more money if we commemorated Blair's 150th on the shirts and could sell them to alumni as well. Fast-forward 25 years, and "sesquicentennial" as a demarcation seems like an absolute breeze to pronounce by comparison. It's now our demi-semi-septin-sesquicentennial (or something like that). In the intervening time since that 150th year, I've spoken as an admissions officer to audiences of over 1,000 people and (as I

said previously), I am not, by nature, shy, but I can assure you I will once again be hesitating in sentences where I have to utter archaic Latin terminology for commemorative anniversaries. Most likely, I will simply say how happy I am to be celebrating Blair's 175th year, now in my role as an alum and as Dean of College Counseling.

The fall of 1997 to the current day has brought so many changes to Blair, to northern New Jersey, to our world, and, most importantly—for this article—to college admission. In the year of Blair's 150th anniversary, the Common Application—today's dominating platform that logged over 1.8 million application submitters last year—had barely 150 member schools and was just going to an online format, which only some tech-savvy users would rely on for the next few years. Now, by Blair's 175th anniversary, the Common Application has more than 1,000 member schools, many of which students

can apply to with just a few clicks to indicate their preferred major, a few words typed to answer a supplemental question and a few bucks spent to pay the application fee.

Back in that 150th-celebration year, the drive down the stretch of Route 94 that runs from Sparta to Blirstown brought me past an old farmhouse boasting a quaint restaurant named the Tea Hive, a place that—perhaps not surprisingly given the name—exclusively served tea and tea sandwiches. Now, 25 years later, when I drive down that same stretch of 94 on the way to visit my mom (who still is in nearby Sparta), that same farmhouse touts an unobtrusive navy sign advertising The Circle restaurant located in its environs. A farm-to-table rising star, The Circle boasts an inventive menu: small plates of fruit-infused raw oysters and local cheeses; seasonal, house-made pastas and innovative salads; Asian-influenced fish options and French-inspired succulent meat dishes. All are capped off with delicious pastries made by the baker at nearby Windy Brow Farms.

This shift in the variety of menu offerings echoes the shift in the now vast optionality of the Common Application. Back in Blair's 150th year, not a single public school was represented in that group of limited schools using the Common App. Now the Common Application serves the full range of menu options for higher education: It is the clearly dominant platform despite multiple challenges from start-ups emerging (and subsequently dwindling—like the intermittent attempts at businesses in said farmhouse) over the years.

Unfortunately, the very ease the Common Application offers students to apply to over 1,000 institutions also increases student stress in the college process: Application numbers crept up incrementally since 1998 but then exploded exponentially at the onset of the pandemic, when test-optional admission policies resulted in students throwing their hats in the ring at places they wouldn't have attempted earlier. Selectivity skyrocketed, with the Common Application seeing an over 20 percent increase in the volume of applications in the past three years, with nearly 6.5 million applications submitted through the platform last year.

In developing the continued parallel between the Common Application and Route 94's restaurants, the vast (and very tasty!) offerings of The Circle have enticed diners to its locale from far and wide, well beyond what the limited scope of the 1998 Tea Hive could have drawn. Recently, *Food & Wine* reported that this rural New Jersey restaurant entices "a stream of visitors with New York and Connecticut plates" to their rural location. The Circle's much broader menu options since the days of the limited offerings of the Tea Hive have made scoring a table increasingly difficult—akin to securing the golden ticket of admission to one of the increasingly selective schools around the country.

And, one more note about this echo between higher education and Sussex County's restaurant scene: These changes that allowed for the accessibility to many more options—with opportunities to submit to a diverse set of international schools







Former Dean of College Counseling Lew Stival (pictured left with a student) worked for more than 30 years to strengthen and broaden the list of schools at which Blair students matriculate alongside a team of talented college counseling staff. In 1999, he hired Associate Dean of College Counseling, Joe Mantegna, and the two worked together for the next 20 years to best position Blair students to navigate the college process.

and with dishes to draw those with more diverse palates than tea sandwiches—certainly did not translate to affordability. The price of higher education continues to rise exponentially while a three-course meal at The Circle promises to cost a pretty penny. Both are out of reach for so many because of their prestige and their cost.

We work in Blair college counseling to help students navigate this increasing selectivity brought about, in large part, by the expansion of the Common Application and then the pandemic. We've adopted the best available Internet platforms for keeping balanced lists, for understanding college admission trends and for seamless submission of Blair's documents for students. Naviance, adopted in 2002 under longtime Dean Lew Stival (who was my own college counselor and who has become a lifelong mentor), was replaced by SCOIR as I came on

board at Blair as Dean in 2020 and now is supplemented with College Kickstart, a planning tool relying on data and metrics to optimize strategic application planning and balanced lists.

Additionally, given the increasing selectivity at schools across the nation and the need to be strategic yet genuine in students' searches, we've not only instituted a junior-year college counseling class to cover general information but also added a fourth full-time counselor this past year to enhance personalized attention. At Blair, we've set students up to navigate their college process with as much ease as possible, the ease with which I hope the term "demisemiseptcentennial" will roll off my tongue sometime soon. And, by the end of Blair's 175th celebration, I'll seek the chance to savor The Circle's exquisite duck in celebration of Blair's Class of 2023 finding success in accessing colleges that are the best fit for their homes beyond Blair. ■





## THE CENTRAL ROLE OF HEALTH & WELLNESS AT BLAIR

Each day of the academic year, Associate Head of School **Ryan M. Pagotto '97** upholds a tradition that he began 12 years ago when he moved into his current role at Blair. Standing under the stone archway of Clinton Hall, he pulls open the sturdy door and, holding it, greets students by name as they walk to their classes. He converses with many of them, chatting about what's going on in their lives and making sure that new students feel welcome. With 97 new ninth graders and 380 additional students weaving through campus at the start of this school year, it's no easy feat to recall each student's name on the first day of class, but Mr. Pagotto is glad to dedicate himself to the task. "New students are often excited and eager on the first day of school, but there's also often an element of anxiety. Our role as educators is to help them through that," he explains. He hopes that, by making a point of connecting with students at the start of each day, they understand that he is there to support them.

As Associate Head of School, part of Mr. Pagotto's job is to connect with students in different capacities and ensure that Blair is delivering on its mission of knowing our students well. And, so, students often find him popping up—in the dining hall, at Skeptics lectures, art openings,

in the doorway of Clinton and wherever they are—to talk, to listen and to ensure that Blair's community members are supporting students in all aspects of their lives. After 22 years of working with adolescents, Mr. Pagotto feels strongly that health and wellness play a critical role in fulfilling that mandate.

"We've been fortunate to retain faculty and staff who know our kids and understand the importance of being a presence in their lives," he explains. "Our counseling team, along with our health center staff, are a critical resource as we support students' psychological and emotional health. The first step in helping them acquire those wellness skills is knowing our students well and being a part of their lives."

**“Daily exercise in the open air is required except when the weather forbids. Calisthenics for the girls and military drill for the boys, three times a week.”**

—Blair Academy's 1883 catalog





Health and wellness play an integral role in everyday life at Blair, from a daily greeting from Associate Head of School **Ryan M. Pagotto '97** (left) before class each morning, to weekly wellness initiatives led by a team of educators, including Acting Dean of Students Andee Ryerson (right).

## REGULAR EXERCISE IS REQUIRED

Mr. Pagotto, who is one of several dedicated teachers leading health-and-wellness initiatives on campus, says that in Blair Academy's earliest years, exercise was central to the cultural understanding of student wellness. A reference from the 1883 catalog states, "Daily exercise in the open air is required except when the weather forbids. Calisthenics for the girls and military drill for the boys, three times a week." After 100 years of operation, the School continued to emphasize the importance of physical health; the 1948 *Blair Academy Bulletin* records that, in addition to seasonal sports, "Regular exercise is required of all boys who are not exempt for special reasons."

## A MODERN, HOLISTIC APPROACH

In the last quarter century, Blair has embraced a more holistic approach as our understanding of wellness has broadened to encompass the mental, emotional and social factors, as well as physical, that impact student well-being.

Former Director of Health Services, Diane Sauvé, RN, joined Blair in 1987 at a time when she recalls perceptions evolving. As director of the Hoffman Health Center, Mrs. Sauvé supervised the community's medical needs and

taught health class once a week to students. "We worked hard to incorporate mental health, counseling and athletics as part of an integrated approach to health services," she recalls. "It was a different time, though. This was before computers, and we didn't have access to the Internet yet," Mrs. Sauvé says. "To give students information, the School invested in bringing in experts as a resource for kids in addition to regular health classes. We also held a good number of health fairs, bringing in professional health organizations to share information and conduct preventive screenings."

Some issues, such as the need for deep and regular sleep, impacted students just as much then as today. "As soon as students got cellphones," she remembers, "it became apparent that family and friends would call students on their time, which could be the middle of the night here. Getting enough sleep could be a problem!"

As time passed, Blair continued to find new ways to support student health. In the last decade, as part of Blair's *All In Strategic Plan*, the School recognized the role that peers play in well-being. Under the leadership of former health-and-wellness coordinator Erin Fortunato and Acting Dean of Students Andee Ryerson, the School started an



An architectural rendering of the future Center for Health and Well-Being to be constructed as an addition to Hardwick Hall.

extracurricular group called “Be Well @ Blair” to create positive change on campus through peer health education. In 2021, a meditation garden was opened to all members of the Blair community. Located in a clearing beside the woods and overlooking Lake Genevieve on the Siegel Property, the garden offers students, faculty and staff a calm and peaceful spot to practice meditation or simply take a breath.

## NEW THIS YEAR

In the 2022-2023 school year, Blair will continue to support student wellness through enhanced curriculum, new dining options and added mental health resources. Seeking to give students a strong base with two years of health-and-wellness education, Blair is shifting the curriculum of LEADS, the School’s signature leadership education initiative, to focus more on health and wellness. “Now students will start with ninth-grade seminar followed by 10th-grade LEADS class, providing them with weekly touchpoints about wellness,” Mr. Pagotto explains. “We are also continuing our Be Well talks, which are peer-led presentations and discussions on defined topics.”

In addition to curricular enhancement, one change this year that excites many students is a switch to dining provider Flik. Along with offering a wide variety of fresh and local meal options, Flik educates students

about healthful eating habits. As part of the fall student orientation process, for instance, Flik’s on-staff nutritionists addressed dietary choices with students while preseason athletes had the opportunity to sit down with certified nutritionist **Dr. Joseph Stanzione ‘08** about optimal eating to support athletic skill, strength, endurance and recovery.

Finally, Blair added counseling and support resources for students and teachers this year. The School has hired a chaplain as well as a Dean of Equity, Inclusion and Belonging, brought a third full-time counselor to campus and provided mental health training to teachers at the start of the year. “Mental health needs of youth have been increasing nationally,” Mr. Pagotto says. “Our hope is that this training will help us build on the good work we already do with our students by giving us additional tools to best reach those who may be struggling and that it will help our educators support teens beyond Blair.”

This year’s new resources augment the excellent work done by Blair’s school counselors, faculty and staff to take good care of students. With those resources, the added wellness education and health support system, as well as preliminary plans underway for a new Center for Health and Well-Being at Blair, Mr. Pagotto trusts that each and every student he high-fives in the Clinton doorway on the first morning of classes is well-equipped to live the most positive and productive school year yet. ■



# FROM WORD PROCESSORS TO THE CLOUD

LOOKING BACK AT A

QUARTER-CENTURY OF

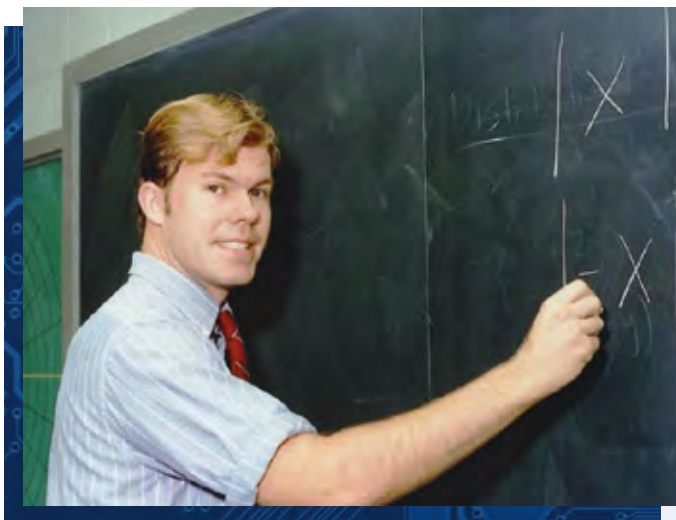
TECHNOLOGY AT BLAIR

BY **SUZY (MARTIN) LOGAN '99**

**WHEN** I sat down with Samuel G. Adams IV to learn more about how the School's use of computers, the Internet, networks and software has grown and changed since Blair's sesquicentennial in 1998, he was finishing his 27th year at Blair, 26 of which he has served as Director of Technology and chair of the computer science department. Given that Sam was the teacher during my Blair days who explained to me what the World Wide Web was and why I would be assigned an email address when I got to college, our conversation about the evolution of technology at Blair was an especially poignant and fascinating trip down memory lane.

## ALL HANDS ON DECK

Sam came to Blair in 1995, soon after graduating from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, where he completed his undergraduate work and earned an MBA in technology management. He joined the Blair faculty as a math and science teacher, assistant dorm head of East Hall, and leader of swimming and outdoor skills activities. Building on experience he had gained as a freelance tech consultant and working with children at Camp Pasquaney in Hebron, New Hampshire, during his first year at Blair, Sam taught precalculus and physics and, gradually, took on more responsibility in supporting campus technology as computers became ubiquitous in classrooms, offices and, eventually, dorms. "Basically, I helped anyone who needed it and filled in where it made sense that first year, teaching four classes, coaching and living in the dorms," he said.



(Top): Director of Technology and computer science department chair Samuel G. Adams IV teaches in the classroom during his first years at Blair. (Bottom): Students learn to type in an early computer lab at Blair.

## FROM TEXTBOOKS TO DIAL-UP

It was during his second year at Blair that he took the reins of the technology and computer science departments. “When I came to Blair, there was no Internet access, no email accounts and very few computers,” said Sam. Each office had a word-processing station, but “none of these were networked to one another, so you couldn’t transfer files from one system to the other,” he went on to explain. Blair had only two computer labs: one on the third floor of Clinton Hall, where students learned to type using Mavis Beacon software, and one in the basement of Bogle Hall. As Blair hardwired its campus for Internet, the School was fortunate that it was one of the first clients of the nearby company, Net Access (now Code Logics), founded by *Alex Rubenstein '92*, who helped Blair get online.

One of the first projects Sam tackled in his new role was to install a dial-up email server in the first floor of Clinton Hall, used by a limited number of faculty members. “Not everyone was interested because mail came in and went out once a day,” Sam recalled with a laugh. “You’d come in, walk up to the server, type your username and password and send a message, but it wouldn’t send or download until midnight.”

## A WIRED CAMPUS

By 1998, the School had created a server room in what is now the technology office in the basement of Timken Library and decided to make a strategic capital investment in networking campus buildings together, laying fiber-optic cable so that every classroom and dorm had an Ethernet jack. As head of the tech office, Sam was charged with designing the fiber-optic network and Ethernet wiring. The end result? Blair was among the first boarding schools to have a one-to-one “port-to-pillow ratio,” meaning that by 1999, every student had a computer and phone jack for an analog landline in their dorm rooms. This all took place, of course, before the cellphone era, at a time when pay phones served as the primary source of communication with families, even as a few students used beepers to know when to call home.



As Blair built its modern computer network out of local servers and moved from its inaugural dial-up email system to a Microsoft exchange server, Sam created the first Blair domain and website. By 1999, every teacher had one computer in his or her classroom and all employees had a PC on their desk (in his efforts to standardize technology at Blair, Sam favored Microsoft accounts and servers at the time). Pay phones were slowly phased out, and the website was seen more as a work environment for students and teachers in the classroom than as a way to connect with current and prospective families and donors, as it is today. “Ironically, that initial vision is much closer to how we use Google Classroom in our curriculum today,” Sam said.

Thanks to a set of folders set up on a local server in Timken Library, any Blair teacher could create a webpage that linked to the School’s website, which included a public section and a password-protected intranet just for employees. “In the early 2000s, the demand for computers and email skyrocketed,” Sam said. “We couldn’t keep up, and this ushered in an era of growth that continues to this day. Every Blair office wanted its own button or prime real estate on the homepage, so the first few years required trying to manage that while trying to ensure there was an ease to the navigation that made things easy to find for users wanting to know more about Blair.”

Beyond navigation of the public site and intranet, Sam worked with colleagues to create custom solutions for Blair, including an attendance system in which faculty could enter absences and generate immediate reports and a calendar system that kept everyone on the same page about campus events and programs throughout the year. Sam and his team also coded early versions of the School’s online giving platform and an online directory of employees.

## A DIGITAL BLAIR BULLETIN

As users’ expectations about the depth and breadth of website content continued to grow throughout the 2000s, Sam turned over day-to-day management to Blair’s publication office—which later became the communications office—because staff in that department wrote articles and captured photos in their efforts to authentically convey the Blair experience digitally. “As all websites

did, ours became a publication, not a tech project,” Sam explained. “The website was ultimately a version of the *Blair Bulletin* that anyone could access.” Given this evolution, in 2012, after years of freelancers and a part-time employee hardcoding changes to the website in Adobe Dreamweaver, Blair joined the growing number of schools to hire a web vendor to host and manage its website through a content-management system that allowed any employee to update his or her own content.

Another bonus of getting rid of Timken Library’s basement servers was that website outages could easily be restored and backed up, which was mission critical for the admission team as they accepted online applications and the advancement office as it began promoting the ease of online giving. The new web system led to the rise of website news stories, single-sign-on solutions that required only one password for multiple systems and fresh content on a daily basis through not just [www.blair.edu](http://www.blair.edu), but also a mobile app in which the dining hall menus and class day schedule are accessible with just a few clicks.



Computer labs in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration equip students with the latest technology.

### FROM HARDWIRED TO WIRELESS

While each classroom previously had a computer and a digital AV system with a projector, around 2005, computers became more ubiquitous in classrooms and dorms as the School moved to Wi-Fi. As Blair phased out hardwiring, the School took a gradual approach and initially restricted Wi-Fi in the Romano Dining Hall, Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts' DuBois Theatre and dorm common rooms, since those were key gathering spaces where Blair wanted to encourage students to engage with their classmates and teachers, not look at their devices.

As the 2010s began, Blair reassessed its technology department staffing needs and the team grew to include Sam and four other employees with high-level expertise that has enabled them to provide students with a seamless tech experience on campus. Today, the department includes a database administrator; an assistant director of technology who is a certified Cisco network supporter and helps with budgeting and ordering; a user support specialist with Apple Store experience who handles the majority of the requests for tech assistance that Sam and his colleagues receive—a system that Sam credits as the most transformative management tool since Blair became connected to the Internet; as well as an instructional technologist charged with providing one-on-one

training to Blair employees as they seek to best utilize software to maximize teaching and learning in their classrooms.

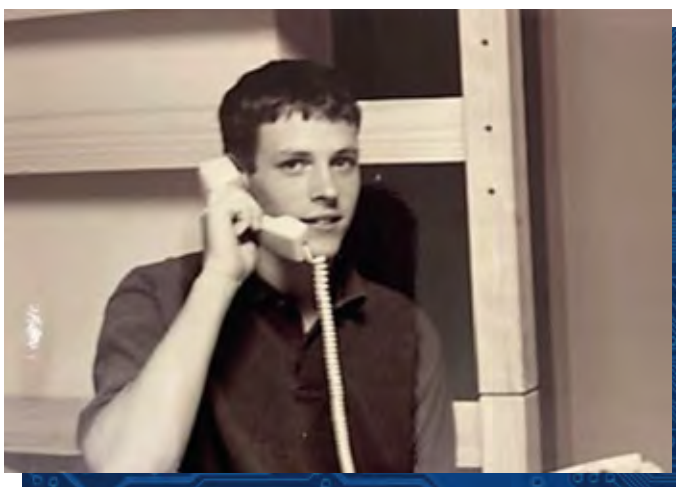
In the years since, Blair has continued to upgrade its Wi-Fi, which Sam notes is all that students can see in terms of technology on campus. "They don't see the databases, website development, account management, software licensing, classroom support or the fact that the School owns, operates and supports 450 computers," he shared. "Even cloud networking is now a given after we phased out our campus servers." While all of this has felt like progress, Sam notes that, in the old days, he used to sit in the server room and fix the problem. Now, he simply submits a ticket and awaits a response from the School's Internet and software vendors as they remedy issues that arise.

### AN EVER-GROWING BANDWIDTH

The biggest difference from 1998 to 2023, Sam admits, is the fact that it is very difficult to do anything without the Internet these days. "You literally can't manage a modern classroom without online access," he said. "Whereas, in the 1990s and early 2000s, most of our students' experience included textbooks and other resources, and essays were literally typed on typewriters or word-processing machines that predated desktop computers."



Students work in the Clinton Hall computer lab in 1983.



Chris Garrels '00 places a call from a dorm room phone in 1998.





Associate Dean of Students and marine biology teacher Rod Gerdson brings the ocean to life in the classroom with the use of Oculus virtual reality systems.

Looking ahead, Sam admits that the demands for more bandwidth, a faster network and a larger staff don't seem to be abating. "Over the years, I feel that I've been an agent of growth. That process has not ended as I don't believe there is a 'there' to get to in terms of achieving and then stagnating. There is always something new to do."

Future projects likely include revamping the technology offices in Timken, working on installing a redundant Internet line that will reduce the possibility of outages and upgrading infrastructure. As the amount of information shared on Blair's fiber-optic network only continues to increase, keeping up with the pace of campus needs and expectations will remain a top priority. "Ten years ago, the idea that anyone could FaceTime or Zoom in real time on their phones or other devices, even on a cell network, seemed

like science fiction," Sam said. "We were so gratified that, when we had to move to remote learning in COVID, our campus had the capacity for students in their campus dorm rooms to video conference with their classes—and it worked. We can't change our access to connectivity quickly or inexpensively, so having a plan for growth before we actually needed it really paid off."

The technology office has also been instrumental in outfitting Blair's state-of-the-art buildings with the latest tech, ranging from the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration, Bogle Science Center and Weber Hall. From ensuring that Chromecast works on every screen to confirming the video studio's offerings are top-notch, the tech team does their utmost to support day-to-day school operations, as well as connection among members of the Blair community.

## CELEBRATING SCHOOL MILESTONES

When asked what he thinks of the fact he will have been part of Blair's sesquicentennial and demisemiseptcentennial, Sam gets a little nostalgic about how much fun it was to connect with alums, parents and students at the 150th. "School spirit was on an amazing display that year," he said. "I hope the 175th does the same in bringing our community together."

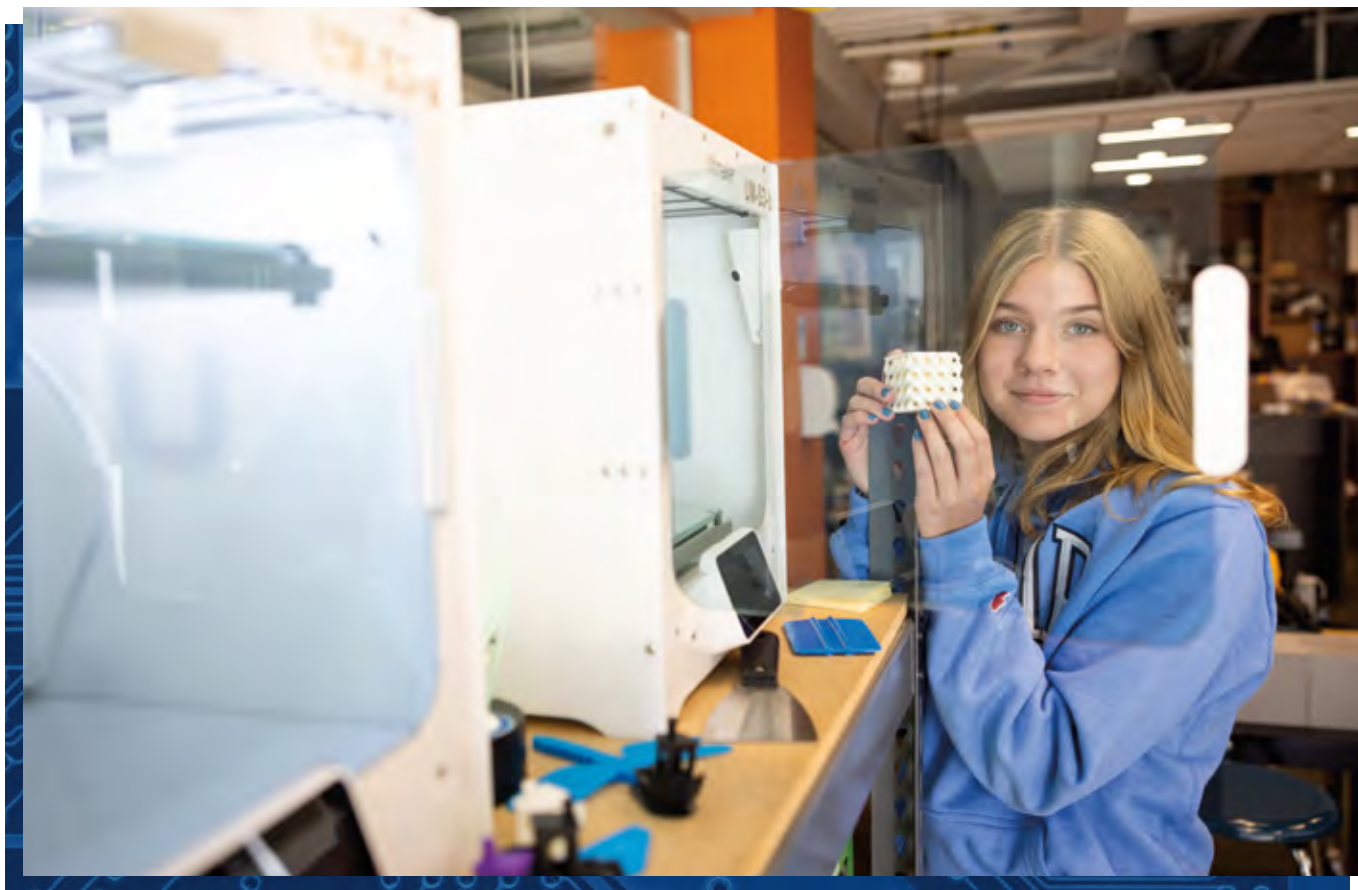
All of our event planning and behind-the-scenes work aside, Sam has always felt that the difference you make in someone's life comes in the form of moments. "The new networks we have installed or new buildings we have built don't compare with the difference we make in our individual conversations in terms of our impact on others' lives," he concluded. "Blair is the kind of place that makes those interactions possible." ■

“

"TEN YEARS AGO, THE IDEA THAT ANYONE COULD FACETIME OR ZOOM IN REAL TIME ON THEIR PHONES OR OTHER DEVICES, EVEN ON A CELL NETWORK, SEEMED LIKE SCIENCE FICTION."

—Samuel G. Adams IV, Director of  
Technology and computer science chair

”



**Hannah Wilson '26** presents her 3D printer creation in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration maker space.



## Saying Thank You

BY MONIE HARDWICK, former Director of Development & Strategic Planning



*Mrs. Hardwick worked at Blair from 1989 to 2013, serving in a variety of roles, including as the Director of Development during the Ever, Always Campaign.*

Sometimes a job comes to you. Even when you're not looking for it.

In 2003, we had been at Blair for 15 years. During that time, I had taught English, started the teacher training program, done admissions, and, for a short stint, been the Director of the Timken Library. I referred to myself as the “utility player.”

The School had made great progress under *John C. Bogle '47's* leadership. *William R. Timken '53* had taken over the reins. It seemed clear to everyone sitting around the Board room—and especially to Chan—that Blair needed to raise money. Serious money. Soon.

Although I tried to ignore a growing conviction that I could raise that money, one morning I finally walked into Jim Frick's office and told him I wanted to take on fundraising and run what came to be called the “*Ever, Always* Campaign.” I'm not sure if Jim looked shocked or merely skeptical. What do you say to the headmaster's wife when she announces she wants a new job?

Living in Sharpe House was like being in the strategic nerve center of the School. I knew a range of remarkable alumni, parents and Trustees. I knew the students and their stories. And I knew our teachers, who were among the most dedicated of any boarding school in the country. The potential was there. Someone just needed to make the connections.

The *Ever, Always* Campaign ran from 2002 to 2009, straight through the 2008 recession. Here are some of the important lessons I took away from those years:

- **Leadership matters.** Blair has been blessed with an extraordinary continuity of Board leadership. Equally important has been the leadership within the School—and the supportive partnership forged between the two.
- **If you want something, you have to ask.** Thank you to *Mitch Jennings Jr. '63* for that early piece of advice.
- **Blair students are our best ambassadors.** Independent education is expensive. The need is great. When donors meet scholarship recipients, they know they have made a good investment.
- **Patience and persistence are key.** Donors need to see impact and develop trust. We eventually persuaded many more people that Blair was worthy of their investment. Over the course of the campaign, 55 percent of alumni and 80 percent of parents contributed to the effort.
- **All of which leads to school pride.** The more people gave, the more the School prospered, the more students and teachers thrived. The very definition of a virtuous circle.

In my experience, philanthropy is a spiritual act. The donors and families who built Blair over the years overwhelmingly did so out of deeply held values as an expression of their belief in the future and of their responsibility to help make the world better. Their generosity brought them a lasting satisfaction and happiness not often found in the material world or acquisitions.

I still live daily with the gratitude and appreciation I feel to the many people who helped provide the resources Blair needed to fulfill its mission. I would like to name you all, but to do so would invariably lead to unintended omissions. I do know that I will never be able to say thank you enough. ■

**“In my experience, philanthropy is a spiritual act. The donors and families who built Blair over the years overwhelmingly did so out of deeply held values as an expression of their belief in the future and their responsibility to help make the world better.”**

—Monie Hardwick, former Director of Development and Strategic Planning



## Looking Toward **Blair's Bicentennial**

BY CHIEF ADVANCEMENT OFFICER CRAIG HALL



As we reflect upon 175 years of teaching and learning at Blair, we are deeply grateful to our students, parents, alumni and friends for their generosity, leadership and support. As we in the advancement office look back at our history and toward the future, among the most critical priorities remain continuing

to connect and engage with alumni and parents, grow our endowment, enhance our facilities, and make Blair accessible to students of all backgrounds and experiences through philanthropy.

Thanks to new programs like Blair Connects and the opening of Sigety Alumni House in the fall, we are doing more than ever to bring the best of the world to Blair and the best of Blair to the

world. It has been wonderful to see so many alumni mentoring the next generation of students as part of J-term and the Society of Skeptics programs; we also continue to meet our graduates wherever they are in the world to make sure they realize that Blair is far more than just your time as a student—for, as Head of School Peter G. Curran says, once you are part of the Blair family, you are a member for life. This is not just true for our graduates, but also their parents and other relatives. I can't tell you how many stories I have of parents and alums coincidentally meeting, whether on vacation, at the airport, randomly at dinner... Love for Blair runs deep, and it is really special how a shared Blair connection often makes for instant friendships with otherwise strangers!

What distinguishes our graduates is a deep care for the institution. This is why our alums and parents get involved and give back. It is, of course, not all about dollars raised, but



“What distinguishes our graduates is a deep care for the institution. This is why our alums and parents get involved and give back.”

—Chief Advancement Officer Craig Hall

a commitment to making Blair stronger for today’s students in myriad ways. As Blair Board of Trustees Chairman Emeritus **John C. Bogle ’47** said in the fall of 2007 at the kickoff of the *Ever, Always* Campaign, “The task is large...to preserve, to protect, and to defend this fount of liberal education, this island of opportunity, this community of teaching and learning. At Blair Academy, we give some of the most promising young men and women in our land the opportunity to learn more than they might otherwise have learned, to accomplish more than they might otherwise have accomplished, and to develop their character and their values more than they might otherwise have developed them. If these seem like unremarkable goals, I assure you that they are anything but. Such young citizens are the core of our civilization, our hope for years to come.”

We are also fortunate to have skilled staffers carrying out the work of Blair’s advancement office, and our team approaches the work ahead with love for Blair and excitement for the future. A big part of that is making connections with our constituents in person, on Zoom, by phone and on social media, which has become a key tool to how we communicate and engage. Adding more video into the mix of our outreach has also been an important way of creating a sense of nostalgia while sharing with the world the

transformative nature of the Blair experience today. We are also proud to be doing more than ever to educate students about the importance of philanthropy while they are still at Blair, and it has been inspiring to see so many senior classes reach 100 percent participation in their class scholarship fund drive. It bodes well for a bright future for Blair.

Speaking of named scholarships, we have 116, 27 of which have been established in the last four years. Our advancement office has had great success raising money for financial-aid dollars, and many individuals have been excited to support class-specific scholarships. We look forward to increasing our endowed scholarship funds, and continuing to make a Blair education available to all students.

I would be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge and thank the Blair leaders who have done such a phenomenal job of moving the School forward—current and former members of our Board of Trustees, Board of Governors and International Board of Governors, as well as former Heads of School and former department heads and employees across campus. Without their faithful service, we would not be in the position of strength we find ourselves in today. It will remain a top priority to continue to cultivate that pipeline of future leaders as we also remain grateful for the contributions of our volunteers and class representatives.

In terms of facilities, we continue to move ahead with preliminary plans for a new Center for Health and Well-Being, which could be completed in the next two years. More immediate priorities include adding a second turf field to campus, while considerations for a new dining hall are probably five to eight years off. Of course, we will

“At Blair Academy, we give some of the most promising young men and women in our land the opportunity to learn more than they might otherwise have learned, to accomplish more than they might otherwise have accomplished, and to develop their character and their values more than they might otherwise have developed them.”

—Blair Board of Trustees Chairman Emeritus **John C. Bogle ’47**

continue to make connection and engagement central to our efforts to solicit gifts that will help to secure the School's financial future—by the time Blair turns 200, it would be incredible if we could secure an eight-figure gift that would transform our endowment and take the pressure off our operating budget. In the meantime, we are preparing to announce the most ambitious capital campaign in Blair

history, which will fund many of our strategic priorities through 2025; it is indeed an exciting time for advancement at Blair.

Again, thank you for all you have done and continue to do to support Blair. We would not be the school we are without your leadership, engagement and philanthropy. Here's to another 175 years! ■

"The investment we make in students today pays off a thousandfold in bright, articulate, thoughtful leaders tomorrow."

—Former Chair of the Board of Trustees **William R. Timken '53**





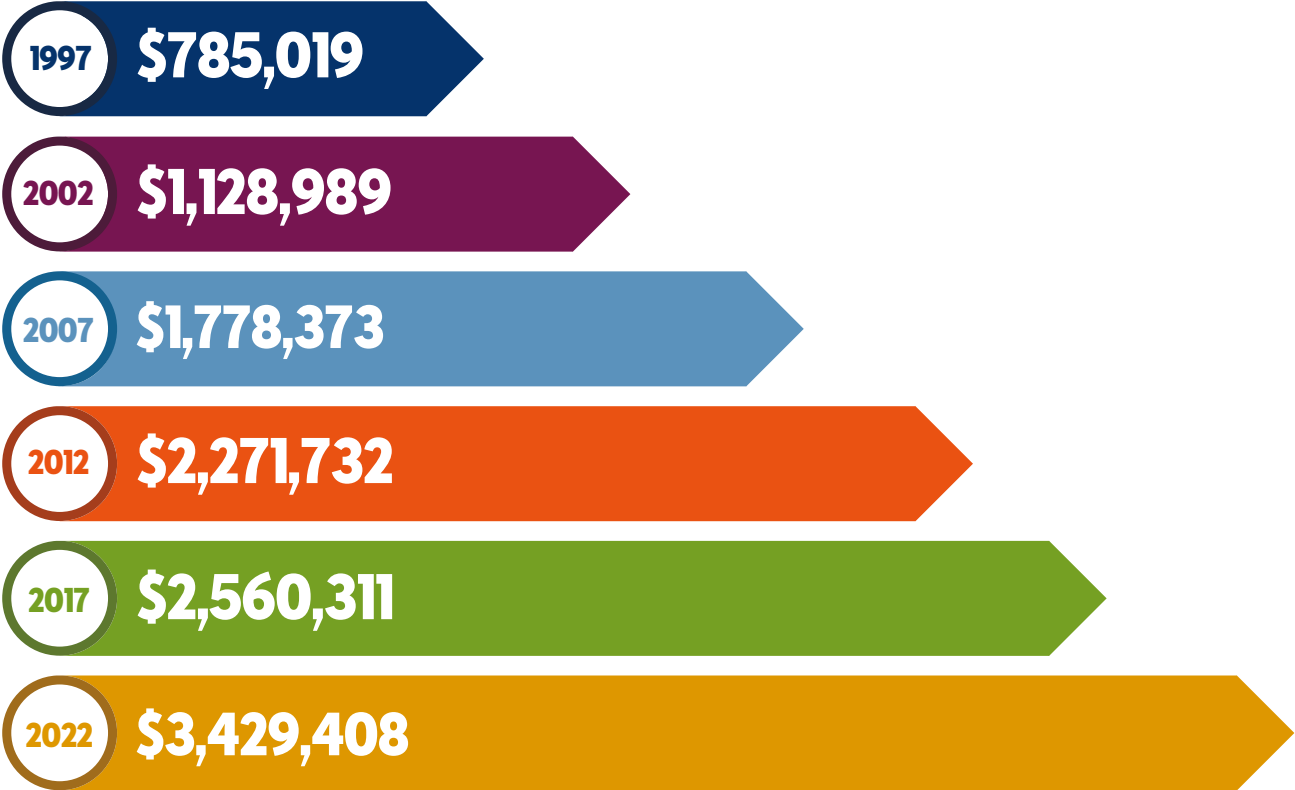
# By the Numbers: 25 Years of Advancement

The impact of advancement at Blair over the past 25 years is difficult to present in numbers, statistics or charts without the omission of so many quintessential programs that are distinctively Blair. However, those figures represent the broader passion and commitment shown by the School's supporters, whose philanthropic gifts strengthen learning opportunities for students by funding everything from

extracurricular programs and state-of-the-art facilities to scholarship aid and leadership experiences. Through growing support of the Blair Fund and endowment over the past 25 years, Blair has been better equipped to provide students not only with transformational learning experiences but also with the tools necessary to pursue their education here and beyond. ■

## The Blair Fund

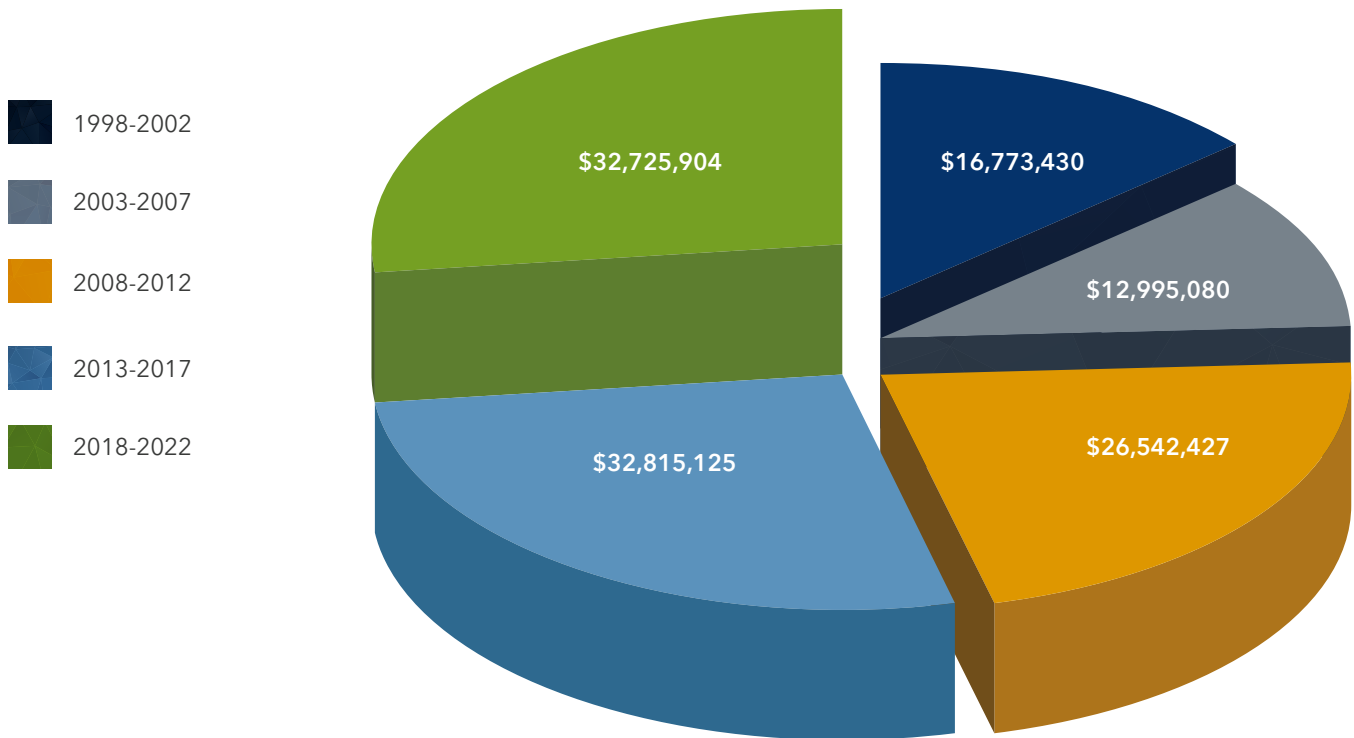
"Blair relies on a vibrant, growing Blair Fund to provide educational excellence for students."  
—Monie Hardwick, former Director of Development and Strategic Planning



## 25 Years of Capital & Endowed Funds

Over the past 25 years, a total of nearly **\$122 million** has been gifted to Blair as capital and endowment funds.

**More than 50% of those funds have been contributed in the last 10 years.**

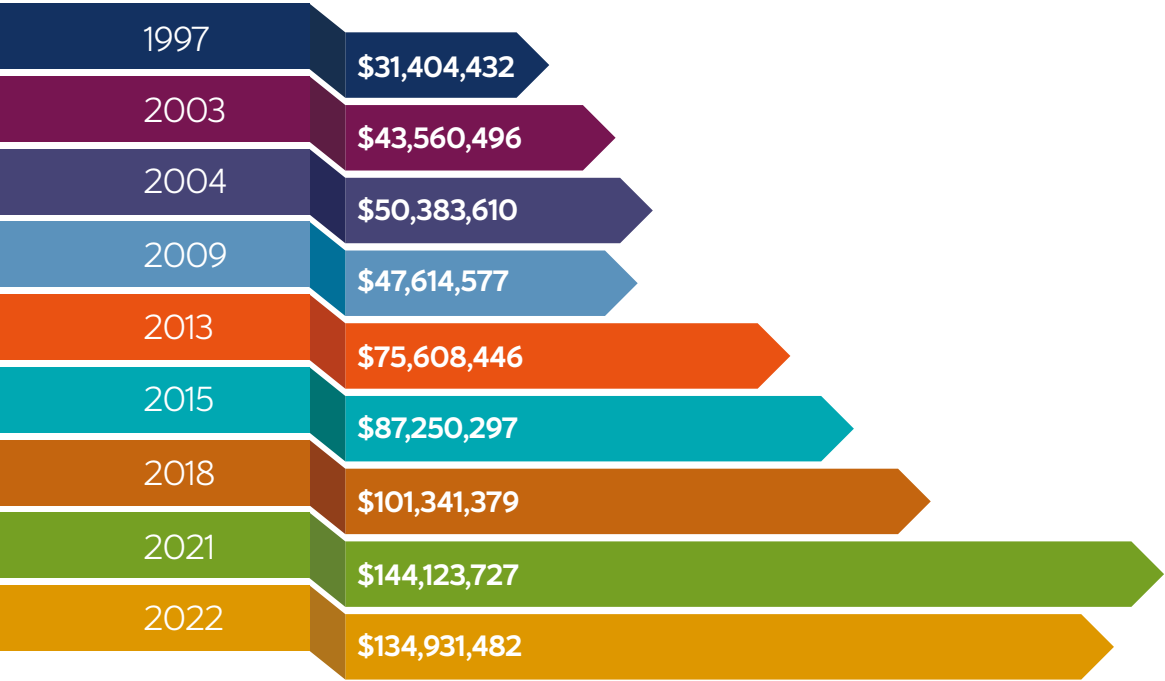


“Our endowment is an investment in the future, ensuring Blair can pursue its essential mission in perpetuity. A strong endowment gives us confidence to plan and make strategic long-term decisions on a foundation of financial security.”

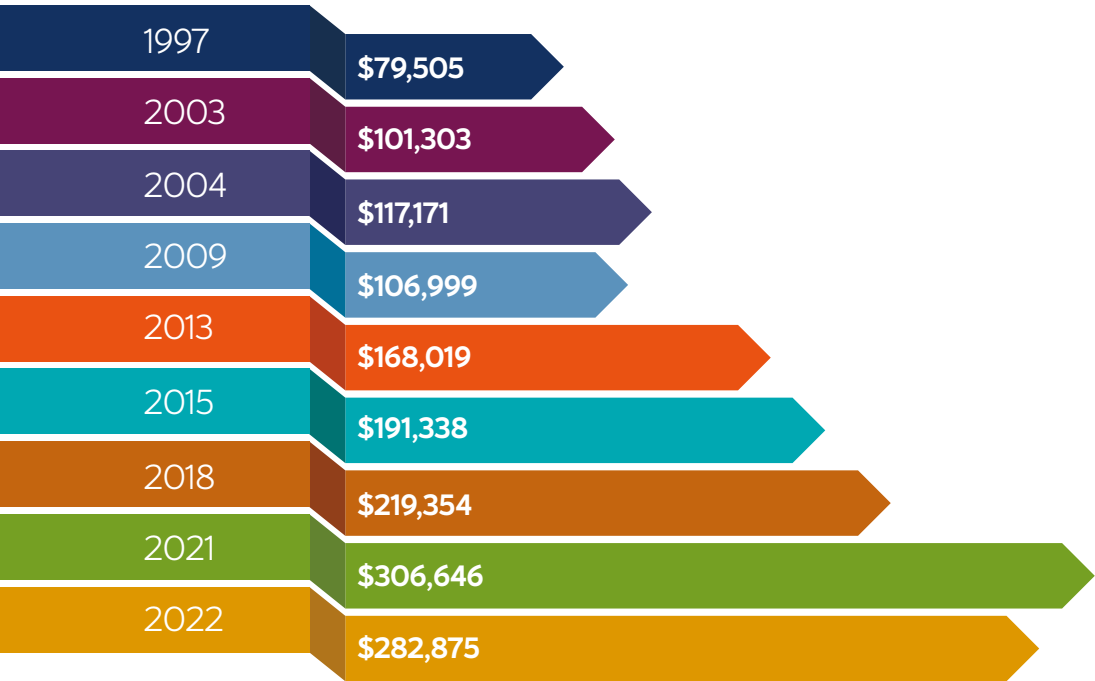
—Cara Mohlmann, Director of Advancement

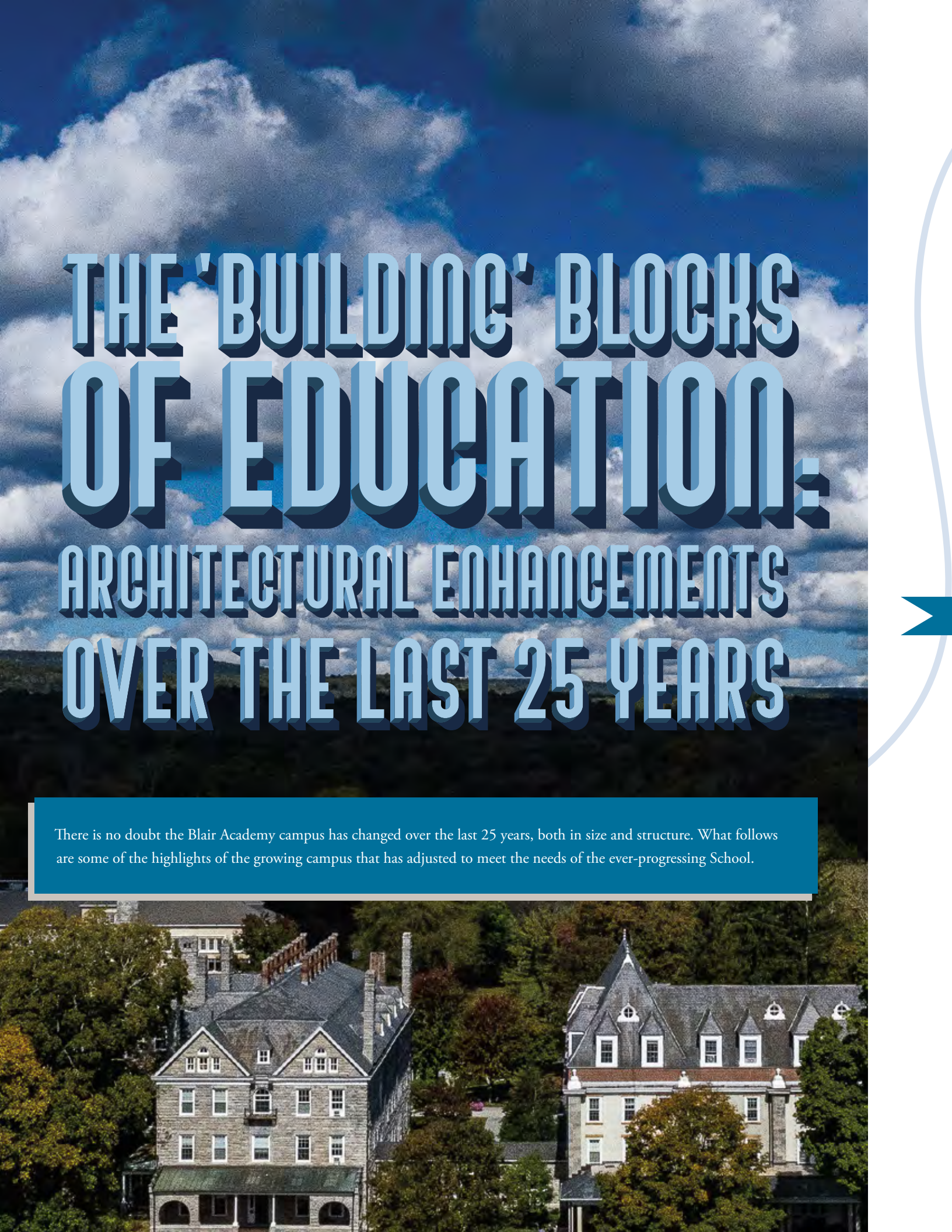


## Endowment Value



## Endowment per Student



An aerial photograph of the Blair Academy campus, showing several large, multi-story stone buildings with gabled roofs and dormer windows, surrounded by lush green trees. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. Overlaid on the top half of the image is large, bold, blue 3D-style text.

# THE 'BUILDING' BLOCKS OF EDUCATION: ARCHITECTURAL ENHANCEMENTS OVER THE LAST 25 YEARS

There is no doubt the Blair Academy campus has changed over the last 25 years, both in size and structure. What follows are some of the highlights of the growing campus that has adjusted to meet the needs of the ever-progressing School.



The Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts is dedicated to the grandparents of **John C. Bogle '47**. Today, it encompasses the DuBois Theatre and the Romano Gallery.



1997

1998

Memorial Hall is renovated to create Timken Library after benefactor **William R. Timken '53** and includes an archive room, classrooms, computer lab and offices.



Annie Hall is built as a girls' dormitory and named after Ann L. Siegel, wife of **Herbert J. Siegel '46**, who passed away in 2005.



1999

2000



The dining hall is renovated with additional seating and a new serving area. It is renamed the Romano Dining Hall after the Romano family.



The Robert J. Evans Open Air Theatre is opened in honor of teacher and theatre director Craig Evans' father.



2004

2005



Ciancia House is donated by Jeremiah and Yolanda Ciancia and renovated into a faculty house in 2009.



Blair purchases the Girl Scout Property with a gift from **Herbert J. Siegel '46** and renames the 120 acres the Siegel Property.

2006

2007

To enhance and expand the outdoor athletic facilities, Blair adds a new track with an all-turf field, tennis center and courts, and new playing fields.





Howard House faculty residence is gifted by the Class of 1958 for their 50th reunion in honor of former Headmaster James M. Howard and his wife, Selena T. Howard.



2008

2009



Walker Gym is renovated, expanded and renamed Hardwick Hall by **John C. Bogle '47** after Blair's 15th Head of School and current Trustee, T. Chandler Hardwick and his wife, Monie, and houses Blair Commons, which includes the bookstore, college counseling and The Black Canteen.



A pedestrian center of campus is constructed with cobblestone walkways and seating areas. Landscape plantings and improvements are made to the entrances of the School and golf course.

2010

2014

A new grounds and maintenance complex is opened at the west entrance of the School's campus due to the generosity of Blair Board of Trustees Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair **Rob Sigety '75 P'16 '18 '20 '21**.





Two new dorms are added to campus. Kathryn Hall is built as a girls' dormitory and named after Kathryn "Kay" Romano P'74 '76 '85. Lakeside Hall is built as a boys' dormitory and named by former Board Chair Doug Kimmelman P'12 '13 '15 '22 and his wife, Carol, who also served on Blair's Board of Trustees and passed away in 2017.



2015

2017



The Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration is dedicated to inspire creativity, promote innovative thinking and foster collaboration, funded by generous gifts from the family of former Trustee **Lai Yuen Chiang '84 P'14 '16** and brothers, **K. Thomas '62** and **Frederick Elghanayan '66**.



Weber Hall is renovated and becomes home to the mathematics department.

2017

2018

The Assistant Headmaster's House is renamed Peachey House, after longtime Assistant Headmaster for Finance and Development **Dennis Wm. Peachey '62**, who worked at Blair for 40 years.





Bogle Hall is renovated to become Bogle Science Center with new glass-walled classrooms, state-of-the-art labs and dedicated research space.



2019

2019

The winter sports complex—also known as the Blair “bubble”—opens and is later dedicated as “Lulu’s Place” in honor of former Trustee Carol Kimmelman P’12 ’13 ’15 ’22.





The J. Li Golf Training Center is built, featuring two hitting bay simulators and a putting/chipping area, allowing Blair athletes to practice year round and is named by the parents of **Tianzhuo (Brian) Li '19**, Mr. Jingzhe Li and Ms. Kaiyan Chen.

2019

2020



Kathleen House on Main Street is renovated to house Blair faculty.



The Crew Training Center opens, offering Blair crew athletes the ability to practice on the water during every season in an eight-person rowing tank complete with mirrors and video that help them hone their technical skills.



2021

2021

Steckel House is rebuilt to include two faculty residences and the renovation is dedicated by the Romano family in honor of former faculty members Charlie L. "Cap" Steckel and Dr. Martin Miller, Hon. '81, and their families.



Students name the brand-new outdoor basketball and pickleball courts "The Shipyard."



2022

2022

Sigety Alumni House is dedicated, and includes a faculty apartment and five guest suites. The project came to fruition thanks to the support of Blair Board of Trustees Buildings and Grounds Committee Chair **Rob Sigety '75 P'16 '18 '20 '21** and **Neal Sigety '76 P'16 '18 '19** and their families.





Hoby House opens as a faculty residence. The building, which was formerly the First National Bank of Blirstown, includes unique architecture, and is named after longtime Blair Trustee, **Hoby Van Deusen '54**, whose generous support with wife, Nancy, made the project possible.



A note of gratitude to all the students, parents, alumni and friends of Blair who have made the growth of our campus and the enhancement of our facilities possible over the last 25 years and beyond. We would not be the School we are today without you!

2022

TO  
COME



In 2023, the Blair Board of Trustees approved the design of a new Center for Health and Well-Being off Hardwick Hall. The new facility, which will allow our health-services and counseling teams to occupy the same space for the first time in School history, will include areas where students can access health resources, study and socialize. To see exterior and interior renderings of the center, visit [www.blair.edu/flythrough](http://www.blair.edu/flythrough).

## The Show Goes On for the Blair Academy Players

BY ENGLISH & THEATRE TEACHERS **CRAIG & KAYE EVANS**



**Sean Callahan '15** leads the chorus for the Blair Academy Players' 2015 production of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

The Blair Academy Players have a proud tradition of entertaining audiences all the way back to the School's beginnings, as evidenced by archival pictures of plays from the past two centuries. In the past 25 years, that tradition has continued with the addition of three new performing arts spaces: the Dubois Theatre and the Wean Studio Theatre in the Armstrong-Hipkins Center for the Arts and the Robert J. Evans Open Air Theatre next to Blair Lake. The Players currently produce three plays a year, including one musical.

Certainly performers and audiences alike have enjoyed the wide variety of offerings on the various stages, and the range of performing spaces have enabled a wider range of shows. The larger stage and orchestra pit of the DuBois Theatre has been the site of larger productions, starting with the first show *Crazy for You*, followed by highlight musicals such as *Into the Woods*, *Urinetown*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *In the Heights*, *Chicago*

(High School Edition) and, recently, *Mamma Mia!* In the Wean Studio Theatre, certainly a highlight was *Metamorphoses*, wherein technical director Wayne Rasmussen built a pool to accommodate playwright Mary Zimmerman's vision of the sea-oriented Greek world. The backstage/onstage flip associated with *Noises Off* (directed by former faculty member Micki McMillan) was accomplished by the audience flipping places between acts. Two promenade productions, *Frankenstein 2029* (also directed by Micki McMillan) and the original *Once Upon a Midnight Dreary's* first production, utilized the many spaces of Armstrong-Hipkins, as the audience moved around the building to see various moments of the plays. In the Robert J. Evans Open Air Theatre, the Players took advantage of the outdoor setting to let the natural surroundings enhance the evening. Memorable moments under the stars include the opening show of *Our Town*, ending with candles and tiki



torches for lighting; *Julius Caesar*, including a full-theatre battle and a Jeep driven onstage; and *Almost, Maine*, which proved why the play is one of the most popular productions in America.

Theatre at Blair has presented many exciting opportunities and challenges over the past 25 years. While Armstrong-Hipkins was being built, the Players moved to Blairstown's Roy's Hall for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Opening night was in jeopardy when a certificate of occupancy was denied until a half hour before curtain (and the cast waited nervously in costume on Main Street). Director Bill Hill from Peddie suggested the two schools join together to produce *Arcadia*, which had a production one weekend in Hightstown and the following weekend in Blairstown (the set was moved between schools). *Excursion Fare* lost power in the second act, but the show went on by candlelight. Power also failed a half hour before opening night of *Working*. Three days before one opening night, a storm came through and completely destroyed the open air theatre's technical tent, disabling all of the lighting and sound equipment. The open air theatre now features a shed, built by former faculty member Wayne Rasmussen and the technical crew. Actors flew for *The Wizard of Oz* and *Seussical the Musical*. *The Teen Angel* also dropped from heaven in *Grease*. Other memorable effects included the witches from *Macbeth* and *Sweeney Todd* rising from the earth using the stage

elevator in DuBois. The resurrection in *Godspell* was enacted using the fly system. In the spring of 2020, the pandemic-challenged production of *Twelfth Night* succeeded through the magic of Zoom, wherein actors signed in from three different continents. The outdoor production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown* featured an all-Broadway pit taking advantage of the hiatus of professional work to perform with Blair's orchestra under the guidance of Director of Instrumental Music Jennifer Pagotto. Fire-breathing dragons, special lighting and sound effects courtesy of Technical Director Mike Ryerson made the Dungeons and Dragons-world of *She Kills Monsters* come to life.

Blair's 175th year was celebrated with a Shakespeare-focused bill, opening with *Shakespeare in Love* (High School Edition), *Something Rotten!* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. It has been an honor to work with the current team of Jennifer Pagotto, Mike Ryerson, Vocal Director Ryan Manni and choreographer Andee Ryerson. As the memorable line from *Shakespeare in Love* explains, somehow, the show always goes on: "Let me explain about the theatre business. The natural condition is one of insurmountable obstacles on the road to imminent disaster. That is an impediment to look forward to. But it always works out in the end. How? I don't know. It's a mystery." ■



Over the years, the Blair Academy Players have shown their range, performing every genre of theatre from 2007's Roman comedy *The Braggart Soldier* (left) to 2022's sunny jukebox musical *Mamma Mia!* (right).

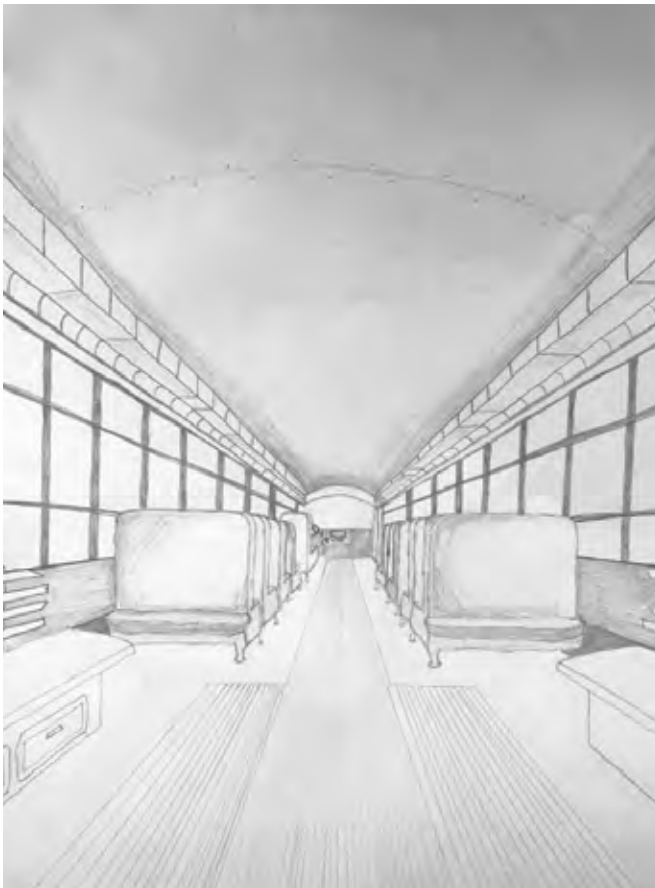
## The Fine Arts at Blair Today

Earlier in this issue of the *Blair Bulletin*, department chair Kate Sykes took a look back at the last 25 years of the fine arts at Blair (see page 75) and the ways in which students are finding comfort and fluency using the spaces in the fine arts department's home in the Chiang-Elghanayan Center for Innovation and Collaboration.

In addition to offering Blair student artists the choice of more than 20 classes and state-of-the-art facilities, Blair art teachers are purposeful about providing an art “lens” for the community at large—while also finding new and exciting

ways to encourage students to expand their knowledge of art and design using technology, as well as time-tested, hands-on techniques and materials from our disciplines where a hands-on practice sets them up for success in their advanced-level work.

Over the years, the School has introduced a number of new offerings, including courses focused on the workflow of design thinking, digital photography, film production and art for social change, just to name a few. Here's a closer look at some of this year's art stars to give you a feel for the work of today's student artists. ■



Student artists have multiple opportunities to showcase their work for the Blair community throughout the year, including weekly “art stars” announcements at School Meeting. Above, the work of art stars **Ella Gaitan '24** (left), **Eve Rubenstein '24** (top right) and **Ava Walters '25** (bottom right) display their skill and talent.





Blair's wide-ranging curriculum allows students to explore many different mediums or master just one, and mixes the traditional with the contemporary. In the fine arts, that means offering classes in drawing, painting, ceramics and film production as well as video, architecture, design and digital photography.

# Favorite Blair Memories



Blair is a school rich with tradition, and one worth noting is the history of long, loyal service by so many faculty and staff. In the United States, the average tenure of employees in education is five-and-a-half years, and the fact that so many of Blair's faculty and staff have worked at the School for a quarter-century deserves our gratitude and recognition. As we celebrate our demisemiseptcentennial, we honor all those whose service to the School has made our curriculum and community thrive, from our stately buildings and manicured grounds to our lifelong connections with one another.

As they have served so many generations of Bucs, we asked the faculty and staff with tenure of 25 years or more to share the hallmarks from their time at Blair. These pillars of the community noted favorite places on campus, as well as cherished memories and interactions—just some of the reasons why their experiences on the hilltop hold a special place in their hearts.



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**“My favorite memory over 38 years at Blair is when my kids graduated in 2004 and 2005.”**

—Steve Fields, who joined the grounds crew in 1984

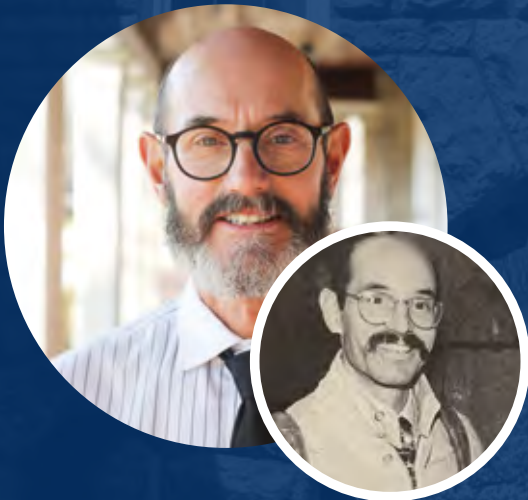




“

**One of my favorite parts of campus is the black-and-white checkered floor of Locke Hall. It is the first thing I remember when I came to Blair. As far as memories—there are way too many good ones to single one out!”**

—*Carolyn Conforti-Browse '79*, Dean of Campus Life and Director of Leadership Programs, who returned to Blair as a faculty member in 1984



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**“Talking with advisees, both real and unofficial, is always the highlight of my day. And seeing runners crush a really tough workout. I get so excited that I practically hyperventilate.”**

—*R. Latta Browse*, interim math department chair and cross country coach, who joined Blair's math department in 1982



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**“I have so many wonderful memories from the past 25 years. Most revolve around interactions or conversations with students and alums. I don't have a specific memory, but rather a collage of warm, friendly, fascinating talks with people in the process of growing into themselves and their lives. Simply to be a part of that process is a privilege.”**

—*Bob Brandwood*, Blair's longest consecutively serving faculty member, who joined the English department in 1985





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**“My interaction with students has changed over the years—from getting to know the ones who were my office runners in the ‘80s and early ‘90s, to then hiring them to babysit my kids, to ‘parenting’ them when I was their parents’ age and now ‘grandparenting?!’ It’s been a pleasure watching them mature and still knowing them today as many are now parents of students here or returned as faculty or staff members.”**

—Kathy Otinsky, a Blair employee since 1985, who now serves as administrative assistant in the student life office



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**“It speaks to the communal aspect of Blair that favorite memories in a long career most often deal with larger community events like Peddie Day. I am also grateful that those special moments do not always deal with the best or brightest or highest level, but instead are a celebration of young folks striving their best and being recognized in a way they could have never imagined.”**

—Tom Parauda, who joined Blair’s English department in 1988



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**“My favorite interaction at Blair was working with Adam Sampieri '99 on the title role of *Macbeth*, where we watched a few versions and dug deep into his thoughts about the character. I remember when he performed the last speech every night, the ‘She should have died hereafter’ soliloquy, you could feel the shared humanity in the theatre, as he made the entire audience think about their lives.”**

—Craig Evans, veteran English and performing arts teacher, who has been at Blair since 1994

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**“The Arch holds a very special place in my heart as it is a window into the history of this School. I marvel at the thought of all the people who have walked through this beautiful piece of architecture.”**

—Olga Brazaitis, who has been at Blair since 1995, first in Timken Library for many years and now in Blair’s advancement office



“

**“My favorite place on campus is Lake Genevieve and seeing students enjoy all the 120-acre Siegel Property has to offer.”**

—Dave Schmitt, Director of Facilities, who has served Blair in various capacities since 1992



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**“My favorite place on campus is the Arch, and my favorite memory is the day I was hired in 1979.”**

—Andy Gramberg, who joined Blair’s grounds crew in 1979



“

**“Graduation day is an enduring celebration that was beautiful on the front hill and remains so today on Sharpe House lawn. Sharing my daughter’s and son’s accomplishments, as well as the many students I have known as I helped to nurture them during their time at Blair, will always bring special memories for me.”**

—Reanne Mauriello, bookstore manager, who started at Blair in 1996



“

“My experience at Blair has been so rich that it is hard to pick just one memory. My time here has been a steady stream of wonderful moments: students gleefully hugging friends after returning from vacation; faculty sitting with students for extra help sessions in the evenings; the laughter and applause for skits and performances during School Meeting; the sound of cheering as Blair wins a game; the smiles and tears on parents’ faces as their children cross the stage at commencement; meaningful one-on-one conversations during quiet moments that returning alumni will talk about for years to come; and the constant support and friendship of veteran faculty with whom I have had the privilege to share the passing decades.”

—Samuel G. Adams IV, Director of Technology and computer science department chair, who has been at Blair since 1995



“

“While I have a lot of favorite memories, the one that comes to mind was watching my two children, *Faith '05* and *Dylan '08*, perform ‘She Sings’ in the Blair Academy Singers for their final performance, with Chris Eanes conducting. I was so happy to see them perform together for the last time at Blair, and the Singers were so good! I actually cried at the end of the concert.”

—Kaye Evans, English teacher, who has been at Blair since 1994





# HONORING THE PAST: A HISTORY OF SERVICE

At Blair, they walked the familiar steps that all students have, under the Arch and around Blair Lake, along stone pathways and through many of the same buildings that students frequent today. But when they left, these Blair students spread to every corner of the globe, settling in unfamiliar ports to dedicate themselves in service to the country. The following pages chronicle some of the changes that war has brought to Blair throughout the School's 175-year history, and they highlight a few of the alumni who have distinguished themselves through military service after leaving the hilltop.



(From top, left to right): In November 1943, women of the Blirstown Red Cross made surgical dressings in the Insley basement at Blair. Former Dean of Teaching and Learning **Caren (Gonsiewski) Standfast '95** (left) and Director of Security and Athletic Facilities **Brian Antonelli '93** (right) both served in the U.S. Marine Corps as captains.





A few of Blair's distinguished military veterans include Dean of Admission **Teddy Wenner '96**, who served as a U.S. Army Field Artillery captain; naval aviator Lieutenant junior grade **August Will '16**, seen in the T-6 during flight training; U.S. Marine Corps Infantry Major **Ray Mendoza '87** (pictured above with his wife, Karen, and children, **Kiana '11** and **Aleksandr**), who was killed in the line of duty in 2005. The bottom photo captures Blair students training in the Bowl in 1917. With the onset of WWI, the student body voted unanimously to make military drill training a regular feature of Blair during the war.



## HONORING THE PAST: A HISTORY OF SERVICE

Several years ago, Director of Timken Library Ann Williams came across an innocuous-looking cardboard box. Opening it, she found hundreds of letters exchanged between Blair faculty, Blair graduates serving in the military and their families during wartime. “Reading those letters,” she recalled, “took the better part of my summer and led me down a path paved by Blair that changed the way I look at duty, service, honor and loyalty.”

Below are just two of the many wartime letters in Blair’s archives. The first was penned by Pittsburgh native **Benjamin C. Detchon**, Class of 1906, who entered Blair in the fall of 1904 and subsequently graduated from Princeton and Pennsylvania State College in preparation for a career as a mechanical engineer. By September 1918, Benjamin was sailing across the Atlantic to take

his position as an ordnance officer on the Western Front. He died at Brest, France, on October 1, 1918, 15 months after he wrote the (excerpted) letter below to his mother.

**William F. “Buck” Dawson**, who was also called “Bill,” graduated from Blair in 1939 and the University of Michigan before going on to serve as a glider trooper with the 82nd Airborne in World War II. Recipient of 17 military decorations, including the Bronze Star, Bill wrote the letter on the following page to his mother on May 8, 1945, the day that marked the end of the war.

We hope this small sampling of letters from the archives will take you on a journey of reflection and appreciation for the many Blair graduates who rose to the occasion and gave so much in the service of others. ■

Tuesday, [July 3, 1917]

DEAREST O'REDDY: [a pet name for his mother]

After reading your letter of Sunday evening, I don't know whether to pat you on the back or give you a really good shaking. For I see right off that you've let this War get on your nerves until you're morbid about it....

I've taken an off-hand view of a philosophy of life that I don't think you subscribe to. As nearly as I can express mine—life consists of doing, not being; doing for the welfare of some one aside from one's self. If every man who goes to France were to stay there, he would still have crowded into a short time the experience of the Kingdom of God, the Power, and the Glory of service to an ideal, which he would not have in all probability experienced had he lived to the century in the ordinary way. “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”—freely translated—“Let me pass on a little sooner under the high, white light of joy, to an end attained, a purpose served—a tangible end, and tangible purpose—the defense of and victory for what I know in my heart and soul to be right.”

You see, you can't be sorry for the boys who go even if they don't return. There's the joy of life that we who stay only feel dimly...

I had my physical examination yesterday. If I pass, will receive my commission as First Lieutenant, Ordnance Officers' Reserve Corps. Tell sister that I am not sending her any money until I know more; if I am accepted, may have urgent need of all my ready cash.

Cheer up! O'Reddy! Be a sport.

Lovingly,

Ben



**Benjamin Detchon**, Class of 1906.



Dawson



The 82nd Airborne Division drops into Holland  
photo from *Saga of the All American* by Buck Dawson



William F. "Buck" Dawson,  
Class of 1939.

Blair Letters

V-E DAY

Dear Mom:

The past few days have been the busiest in my life. Never before has so much happened in so short a time. Never again in a lifetime will experience be so vital. I have met the Russians --- been in on the last bridgehead in Europe (Elbe River) --- watched an entire army, 160,000 men, surrender to our Division --- see why Germany never ran out of oil and gas --- and what is most important, I saw why we fight and why Victory must follow Peace. In short, I was first man into a concentration camp. You, I, everyone is a criminal if we ever let it happen again. No human in the world can live and die like that again. That is why every man, woman, and child in the United States must see and suffer a small part of the pain and guilt for these crimes to humanity. Peace brings no automatic return to the good old days. It brings hard work, sacrifice, and social responsibility for our fellowmen until all shall be free and able to make for themselves.

I'm sorry I haven't written this week but I've written you and as many others as I could reach through LIFE, LOOK, OUTDOOR LIFE, W.L.S., NEWSWEEK, TIME, and any other channel that could get the truth to the most, to those who need it far more than you who have suffered and sacrificed and felt your social debt as others should have.

I'm safe and well and I hope a better man, if not a more successful man for the war in Europe.

Your very, very loving and devoted son,

BILL

“

“Reading those letters took the better part of my summer and led me down a path paved by Blair that changed the way I look at duty, service, honor and loyalty.”

—Ann Williams, Director of Timken Library

”

## The Story of Blair Athletics for the Past 25 Years

BY DEAN OF CAMPUS LIFE **CAROLYN-CONFORTI BROWSE '79**

"Life is about every day...We have to live it now."

—Marty Ball '56

In the past 25 years of sports at Blair, or the past 175, many constants exist: Bus rides are still long and filled with music and excited chatter; students join fall teams in greater numbers as everyone wishes to be on a field competing on Peddie Day; veteran and rookie coaches alike sit in the dining room comparing strategies to get the best from their players; and navy and white are always sharp-looking colors. Another constant is that Blair produces and supports sports heroes, but not just the ones you will find on the list that follows. My favorite sports heroes include **Todd Smith '90**; Olympic champion and friend to Blair, Julie Foudy; Arthur Ashe Courage Award winner **Shamila Kobestani '08**; and the Blair alums all over who use the skills, discipline and self-confidence that sports develop not only to build themselves into better athletes, but also to make the world a better place. My all-time favorite sports hero, **Marty Ball '56**, sums up what Blair athletes are working to do everywhere: "I enjoy

trying to do good for other people, because this is the person I am." Now, having been at Blair for some time, I see this mantra in action from so many more than I can list in this short piece.

I first met Marty when he traveled to Blair for a reunion a few years back. I heard, not from the humble Marty but from his roommate and teammate, the story of his polio diagnosis—of how Marty's classmates at Blair supported him, and how he was the manager of several sports teams. I also found out that he was part of the engineering team to invent the racing wheelchair, and traveled all over the world mentoring wheelchair athletes, enabling and inspiring thousands of paralyzed athletes all over the globe to compete. A Special Olympics medal winner, Marty also ran a wheelchair marathon on every continent (except Antarctica, I presume).

I mention Marty all the time, as he represents the essence of the Blair sports spirit, which we also see in the amazing work being done by **Arek Deng-Guelly '01** and **Luol Deng '03**, who have created a nonprofit that runs after-school sports programs in Africa and provides the sole support for the South Sudan Women's National Basketball Team. There is also **Kelvin Serem '13**, who helped build the Serem-Blair School in the Kenyan village of Kibargoiyet, and so many more, such as the inspirational **Batouly Camara '15**,

**Quint Clarke '87**, **Joey McKenna '14**, **Marissa (Mezzanotte) Zadrozny '89**, **Justin Smith '97**, **Odafe Oweb '18** or **Hudson Taylor Parifax '05**. I urge everyone to follow **Charlie Villanueva '03**, who isn't content with using his platform as a retired NBA pro to merely sell houses; rather, he reaches out on his Instagram to educate young people on the importance of investing, as well as advocating for alopecia research. Yes, these all-stars have used their fame to better the lives of others, but I also want to celebrate Blair alums like **Courtney E. (Brennan) Stanford '95** or **Nicole (Nicusanti) Tipton '93**, and all those who are coaching their towns' recreational and travel teams, making sure that athletes of the future understand the Blair way to give back—as taught to them by the likes of coaches **Robert Dalling Sr. '29**, Rick Stowell, Marty Miller, Joe Mantegna, Jan and Tom Hutchinson, Daniel Hazen and **Stacey (Gorski) Spring '95**, among others.

"It's the small victories, Carolyn, the personal ones; those are worth everything."

—Coach Diane Brennan





And, finally, I want to shout out to all the Blair athletes lucky enough to have had their “small moments” as described by Julie Foudy. Lucky me, my first Blair coaches included Diane Brennan, who taught us to pay attention to the beauty of the personal victories. As a coach, those memories can bring me to tears: the game-winning catch of *Ana Greik '13*,

the first ever and only career game-winning hit by *Dana Cavanaugh '03*, the recovered fumble to seal the victory at Peddie by substitute center *Brendan Schaffer '07*, and so many more moments. I am so impressed with the sports achievements of those listed here, but I am even prouder of the lives our Blair athletes are leading, helping their “teammates” everywhere. ■

“The beauty of sports is found in the small moments.”

—Julie Foudy

## Blair's Athletic Highlights, 1998-2023

BY ATHLETIC DIRECTOR **PAUL CLAVEL '88**



**1998:** **John Giacche '98** becomes Blair's first four-time national prep wrestling champion; field hockey wins state championship

**1999:** Football has undefeated season and earns Big 3 championship

**2000:** PGA golfer **Chris Nallen '00** earns Rolex First Team All-American honors, as well as the *New Jersey Herald's* Male Athlete of the Year

**2001:** Boys' cross country earns back-to-back New Jersey prep A state and Mid-Atlantic Prep League (MAPL) titles; the team would go on to win five consecutive MAPL championships from 2000 to 2004

**2002:** Boys' golf wins first New Jersey Prep championship

**2003:** **Luol Deng '03** and **Charlie Villanueva '03** rank second and third in the ESPN Top 100 high school basketball players nationally, behind first-ranked LeBron James

**2004:** Softball wins first MAPL championship

**2005:** Three Blair basketball stars are playing in the NBA (**Royal Ivey '00** with the Atlanta Hawks; **Charlie Villanueva '03** with the Toronto Raptors; and **Luol Deng '03** with the Chicago Bulls); Blair wrestling has three finalists in the NCAA championships (**Steve Mocco '01**, **Zack Esposito '02** and **Mark Perry '03**) and finished with a total of five All-Americans



**2006:** *Bob Novogratz '55* is featured as part of the Lehigh Valley All-Time Football Team; girls' track relay team, comprising *Winnie (Adrien) Lizardo Orbe '06*, *Kait (Surdoval) Deane '08*, *Katherine Newman '06* and *Sachi Oiwa '06*, breaks the 4 x 400 relay record at Penn Relays

**2007:** *Christine (Geiser) Nalty '03* wins NCAA Division 1 title in crew for Yale

**2008:** Boys' and girls' crew win back-to-back MAPL titles; *Christina Giambrone '06* makes the top 20 Division 1 home runs

**2009:** Hardwick Hall, the Sloane Tennis Center, track and Hampshire Field are built and dedicated; softball wins the prep A state championship

**2010:** Girls' tennis wins their first New Jersey prep and MAPL championships

**2011:** *Dion Lewis '09* gets drafted to the Philadelphia Eagles; boys' tennis and girls' basketball win their first New Jersey prep state championships; ESPN sports writer and talk show host Tony Kornheiser of "Pardon the Interruption" speaks to the Blair community

**2012:** *Temí Fagbenle '11* competes for Great Britain in the 2012 Summer Olympics in London; girls' cross country wins their first MAPL championship

**2013:** Blair defeats Peddie for the Kelley-Potter Cup for the fourth time in a row, resulting in the most consecutive Blair wins in the history of the Buc-Falcon rivalry

**2014:** Girls' golf wins their fourth consecutive New Jersey prep state championship; girls' skiing wins their first state championship

**2015:** Baseball wins fourth consecutive New Jersey prep championship





**2016:** Blair names the inaugural class of the School's Athletic Hall of Fame; **Dion Lewis '09** wins Super Bowl with the New England Patriots; the WNBA drafts **Temí Fagbenle '11** to Minnesota Lynx

**2017:** Boys' soccer wins first MAPL championship

**2018:** Blair athletics records a total of nine MAPL championships during the 2017-2018 school year, the most in school history; performance gym's basketball court is dedicated to Coach Joe Mantegna and his wife, Shelly

**2019:** J. Li Golf Training Center is built and dedicated; the winter sports complex is completed; three-time Olympic Gold medalist and espnW writer Julie Foudy speaks to the community; Blair wrestling earns 40th national prep championship and 16th No. 1 USA ranking in program history

**2020:** Peddie Day goes virtual for the first time in the history of the rivalry due to pandemic

**2021:** The Shipyard, the student-named outdoor basketball and pickle ball courts, is built; the Crew Training Center opens; Hardwick Hall's Athletic History Wall is dedicated to **Tony Maltese Jr. '55**; the Baltimore Ravens select **Odafe Oweh '18** in the first round of the NFL draft

**2022:** **David Ojabo '19** is drafted by the Baltimore Ravens; girls' soccer wins MAPL championship; field hockey team wins NJISAA prep A state championship for the first time since 1998

**2023:** Girls' basketball wins 12th consecutive MAPL championship and 10th consecutive state title; boys' basketball wins fifth consecutive MAPL championship; wrestling wins 41st national prep title



## Thirty Years of Blair Squash

BY DIRECTOR OF SQUASH PROGRAMS JAMES MOORE, HON. '93



Blair's **Gabriel Ramirez '22** displays perfect backhand form in a home match against Pingry in January 2023.



Squash coach Jim Moore joins the team in a moment of solidarity before a match. (Left to right): **Lucy Zhang '20**, **Zoë Reinert '20**, **Kate Setteducate '19**, Coach Moore and **Clio Bersani '18**.

It was a Sunday in March 1993, and the lights were on in newly built Tracy Hall but no one was allowed in. The walls of the three original courts—four more were added in 2008—were blinding white, as yet unmarked by black balls. The floors, quartersawn unvarnished maple, smelled as if they had just been planed, and the shavings swept away. The building was ready for its intended purpose, the HVAC system humming away, but it was empty because the town of Blairstown had not yet granted us a certificate of occupancy. At home in Hillside House, I took a call from Assistant Headmaster *Dennis Wm. Peachey '62*.

"Jimmy," he said. Dennis was the only person in my life who has ever called me "Jimmy." "Jimmy, get your stuff and meet me at the courts."

"But, Dennis," I said. "We're not allowed..."

"Just get over there."

Ten minutes later, Dennis and his son, *Derek '93*, current Trustee and, at the time, my advisee and English student, were waiting for me. "Go ahead," Dennis said to me, pointing at Derek. "Teach him how to play squash."

And, so, in violation of the law, Derek and I stepped onto what is now the Schmeelk Court, and, thus, the Blair Academy squash program was born.

Over those past 30 years, squash has become part of the fabric of Blair Academy, not only as an opportunity for new players to learn the game—and a competitive program that has, at times, featured some of the best players in the country—but also as something to do for a few hours with a few friends on a Sunday afternoon or in that liminal space between dinner and study hall. Squash is a popular component of the Headmasters' Societies Games in February. There's a Blair Squash Facebook page for those of us old enough to still use that platform and a Blair Squash Instagram account for everyone else; it is a testament to the squash community we've developed among students, alumni, parents and friends that every post garners lots of "likes" and not a few comments.

I am often asked who is Blair's best-ever squash player, which is like the "What's your favorite book?" question I get once someone learns that I teach English. And, as I do with the book



Head boys' varsity coach and former professional squash player Doug Compton gathers the team for a pep talk before a match.

question, I have to hedge a bit, because there's no clear answer. I can bring up names like **Briggs Johnson '97**, ranked No. 3 in the United States his senior year, and his classmate, **Laura Inkeles '97**, who was among the top 20; they both went on to distinguished college squash careers, Briggs at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and Laura at Bowdoin College. **Darrius Campbell '13** was named to the all-NESCAC first team his senior year at Bates College, as I believe **Emilie (Slack) Rendall '02** was when she played for Colby College. Recently, **Omar Ali '20** and **Youssif Mostafa '22** provided us with perhaps our strongest one-two punch ever and now play at the top of the

lineups at Dickinson College and Colby, respectively. A few years ago, Briggs asked me if Darrius would have beaten him when they were each at their best; I said I wouldn't hazard a guess, but that I would have loved to referee that match.

More important than the quality of play, of course, is the quality of character, and it is a measure of our program's emphasis on fair play, dignity and leadership that we have produced perhaps more than our share of college captains. In addition to Briggs at Hobart and Emilie at Colby, **Andrew McCann '98** (Navy), **Tyler Horton '99** (MIT), **Henry Clutsam '01** (Hobart), **Alison Crevi '07** (Colby), **Andrew**

**Litvin '14** (Williams), **Aya Sobhy '17** (Dickinson), **Griffin Fitzgerald '17** (Fordham), **Clio Bersani '18** (Bowdoin), **Luigi Pasquariello '18** (Connecticut College), and **Adham Sobhy '18** (Bowdoin) have all led varsity college teams. Among the club team ranks—non-varsity teams that represent their college or university—there are almost as many captains, including **Emma Moore '12** (University of Rochester), **Kendall Fitzgerald '16** (Cal-Berkeley), **Rose Mascarenhas '18** (University of Richmond) and, currently, **Kate Setteducate '19** (Boston College).

Finally, our program has produced alumni who, after college, have stayed in



the game as administrators, instructors and team coaches. **Manuela Perez '12** is a program manager at the Squash and Education Alliance, the umbrella organization that oversees urban squash programs around the world. **Eric Katerman '98**, who played college squash at Williams, is the coach of the Cal-Berkeley men's team when he's not directing big data projects. Henry Clutsam was a teaching professional at clubs in Montreal and Cincinnati for a decade and a half, as well as one of the U.S. Junior team coaches. **Emma Moore '12** directed the squash programs at independent schools in Connecticut and Georgia for five years, during which she actually coached against—and, on occasion, beat—her former team.

It is easy, in a piece like this, to list too many names and, at the same time, run out of room before you tell the whole story. But how can I conclude without noting that **Adam Berk '95** was the first Blair player recruited to play at a college (U.S. Naval Academy)? Adam did so for two years before transferring to Cornell and, eventually, founding Grubhub. It's important to mention that Boston College's women boasted three Blair alums—**Kate Setteducate '19**, **Alexa Setteducate '19** and **Abbey Arturi '17**—in their starting lineup for two years running. Associate Head of School **Ryan M. Pagotto '97**, whom I finally convinced to play his senior year, set the standard for players at the No. 7 spot on the ladder, winning 14 matches for one of the best teams we've ever had. Parents and alumni, like current Trustee Robin Scheman P'10 '14 and Maura Fitzgerald P'16 '17, who coordinated and raised the Blair Squash Endowment; **Robert Neff '49**, whose son **Will '08** served as captain; **Bob Kiley '51**; **Peter McKinney '52**; and, most recently, David and Constance Kan P'24, have lent essential support to the program, not only in the early days, but even now as we continue to build on our decades of success. And I haven't even mentioned the coaches who've served, from former Assistant Headmaster David Low who, in his retirement, still plays a

couple of days a week on the Williams College courts, to Doug Compton, my consigliere, a former professional player who teaches English as superbly as he coaches squash. The list goes on, and I'm sure I'll remember someone else important as soon as this piece is published.

In the fall of 1990, a few weeks after I joined the faculty, Blair's 15th Head of School and current Trustee Chan Hardwick sent me to Valley Forge to meet with **John C. Bogle '47**, then Chairman of the Blair Board and such a keen squash player that he wielded a racquet in the full-page portrait of him that had appeared in a recent issue of *Fortune*. I didn't know enough about Jack to be intimidated by his vast office, but when he came out from behind his desk, which may have been constructed of timbers from a Royal Navy man-o'-war, and boomed, "So you're our new squash coach," I looked behind me to see if he was talking to someone else. I recovered quickly enough to say a few good things, but when I told him that we needed three international courts instead of the narrower North American hardball courts, Jack's face clouded.

"What's wrong with North American courts?" he demanded. "Well, nothing," I said. "Except no one's going to be playing hardball in five years. The colleges are shifting to the international game, and we need to as well." Jack thought about this for a bit, and the conversation moved on to what kind of league we might form and where we might get our players. He dismissed me, and I headed back to Blair.

A few days later, Dennis Peachey called me in and said Jack wanted to talk with me. We called from Dennis' office.

"You can have your international courts," Jack said. I thanked him profusely. "But one thing," he warned. "You better get this right. These things are expensive."

The last time I saw Jack at the courts was before a match probably five or six years ago. Between the kids warming up on the courts and fans—yes, we have fans—in the bleachers, there were probably 100 people in Tracy Hall. "Well," he said, looking around. "This turned out to be a pretty good investment, didn't it?" ■



# Looking for Class Notes & In Memoriam?

## **Blair Mourns the Loss of Rev. Kelley & Dr. Clarke**

As 2022 came to a close and the new year began, it was with great sadness that Blair learned of the passing of 14th Head of School Rev. James R. Kelley, Hon. '51 '89, and longtime science department chair Dr. Rick Clarke. Our community mourns the loss of these two transformative leaders who set a standard for academic, athletic and artistic excellence, as well as a deep commitment to community and care, that continues at Blair to this day.

Our deepest condolences go out to the Kelley and Clarke families, and the next issue of the *Blair Bulletin* will pay homage to both men and their families' impact on students, parents, alumni and colleagues during their storied tenures. While this special anniversary issue of the magazine did not allow for us to include fitting tributes, we are grateful to the many community members who have reached out with fond recollections and anecdotes about how the Rev. Kelley and Dr. Clarke shaped not only Blair as an institution, but also so many members of the Blair family. We'd love to share your memories in our next edition as we fully memorialize their lives and legacies; please send them to [bulletin@blair.edu](mailto:bulletin@blair.edu).

To read Class Notes and In Memoriam for this issue of the *Bulletin*, scan the QR code below or visit [www.blair.edu/class-notes](http://www.blair.edu/class-notes).







# THANK YOU

The only way to know where we're going is to know where we've been. For that direction, a most sincere thank-you is extended to the staff of Blair's Timken Library. The School archives are meticulously maintained by *(pictured left to right)* Timken Library Director Ann Williams and assistants Kate Skeffington and Christina Williams, and this demisemiseptcentennial issue would not have been possible without their guidance and knowledge. It is a joy to witness their passion for history—Blair history in particular—and the School is fortunate to have them as they opened a window into our past.





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## Mark your calendars!

Save the date for Alumni Weekend, where we will celebrate Blair's 175th anniversary on June 9-11, 2023.

*All members of the  
Blair family are welcome.*

