



**BENSON TECH**

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The Official Newsletter of the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA), January 2021 Edition

## All Benson Tech applicants accepted

This past November, about 290 students applied for the 300 freshman class openings Benson Tech will have this fall at its interim Marshall High School location. The “good news” is that all of the applying eighth graders will get in...as well as about 25 sophomores applying to transfer into Benson Tech from other schools. Those numbers will keep the school’s probable 2020-21 enrollment only slightly lower than the 1,000 students that it has had in the last few years.

As the long-awaited Benson Tech modernization occurs beginning this fall, there is likely to be some abnormal fluctuations in the school’s enrollment. Each of the Portland Public Schools (PPS) high schools undergoing renovation — Roosevelt, Franklin, Grant, and Madison — saw some drops in their enrollment, largely due to transportation issues, as the buildings were modernized, with student enrollment increasing thereafter.

The 290 applicant number is definitely down from the 400+ applicants that Benson Tech has had in recent years. As noted earlier, this is partly due to a disruption of normal high school activities association with construction activities at the high school or attending school “out of

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## Benson Tech modernization on schedule

Despite the complications of American life associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, construction to modernize Benson Tech will begin in this fall as scheduled. Master Planning and Design was essentially completed in 2020. Funds for the actual construction were secured with the successful passage of Portland Public Schools (PPS) bond measure in November of 2020.

While Benson Tech classes are still online due to the pandemic, planning and inventorying is underway to physically move needed Benson Tech equipment over the summer of 2021 from the Benson Tech campus to the former Marshall High School in SE Portland. During the three years of construction, Benson Tech students, teachers and staff will be located at the Marshall High School building. Benson Tech classes activities and sports will begin at Marshall this fall.

Plans are also underway this spring to provide special transportation of students to the Marshall campus from the more distant parts of the city, like the neighborhoods around Roosevelt and Wilson.

### **Design Completed**

During late 2020, the Bassetti Architects design team completed design development and are now working on construction documents necessary for permitting. They are working with the earlier selected contractor, Anderson Construction, in this design effort and to review bid estimates leading to a construction start this fall. The Design Advisory Group (DAG), which included a number of alumni, Benson Tech teachers and staff, worked with Bassetti

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## Benson Tech's first principal had many firsts

*By Roger Edwards (Class of 1963)*

For now and for years to come, alumni returning to Benson Tech should recall their former days there as students immediately upon entering the main entrance. There will be differences for certain, but the general layout will be much as it was: the dark varnished showcase straight ahead, the main office entrance on the right, and the mysterious door to the left. There is a portrait of Simon Benson. Most graduates will nod at the geared Benson Tech seal in the center case and might remember the two plaques to the sides. It was during or after the 1950s that these additions were made. The reign of Principal Leon Minear, 1953-1960, was when the Benson seal grew its teeth. The plaque on the right honors Simon Benson and could have come to the lobby at anytime. The left plaque, however, is for Charles Cleveland, the first principal for Benson Tech and for the Portland School of Trades besides. The plaque recognizes his tenure from 1912 to 1946, a reign unlikely to be equaled.

While there are few if any graduates of Benson Tech still living who knew Principal Cleveland, we all owe him a debt. He was instrumental in the making of what Benson Tech has become. Even as the construction of the original buildings was underway, he was at work planning the curriculum for the first classes in the fall of 1917. There was to be an introductory, preparatory rotation for different trades along with academic classes. From this survey, students could make a reasoned selection of the trade he found most interesting, and choose from either a three year or four year course of instruction. The initial vocational training options were blacksmithing, drawing, electrical construction, machine shop, plumbing and gas fitting, tool room operation, and wood shop.

Mr. Cleveland was born in Astoria during 1884 and completed his preparatory education there before graduating from the University of Oregon. He taught high school in Prineville for a time and then undertook further course work in New York. After several years of practical work in electrical engineering and construction he was named the head of the electrical department at the Portland School of Trades and became principal there the following year. He married in that same year. His foresight

as a school administrator quickly became apparent when he organized a band at the trade school in 1914. The school was renamed the Benson School of Trades in 1915 after Simon Benson's gift to Portland Public Schools, and so began Mr. Cleveland's official role as Benson principal.

Money matters also attracted his attention. With the end of World War I, Portlanders were wondering about the nature of this new high school. The first Tech Show was organized in 1919 as a fundraiser for Benson Tech athletics and proved to be a good idea. In 1925, a student candy stand was established to provide retail experience and add to the student body savings account. Starting in 1926, this account was further bolstered by deposits from the Cashiers Club — home room students who solicited donations from their classmates. The annual senior class-play raised money for the senior prom. Money from this student account contributed to the purchase of a radio transmitter in 1923, a state-of-the-art Westinghouse movie projector in 1932, the

Kimball pipe organ in 1937, and more than \$8,000 worth of war bonds in 1942. Construction of the auditorium was completed in 1931 and the pipe organ was a prized feature there until 1995. Do they still show movies in the auditorium during lunch periods?

The hazards of vocational training led to the addition of a first-aid course to the Benson Tech curriculum in 1929. It was the first of its kind among Portland high schools. Students completing this class were designated first responders to shop accidents. A fire brigade was also given this distinction soon afterwards. Throughout his career, Mr. Cleveland was a strong advocate of special interest clubs. The were thespians, astronomers, fencers, choirs, radio technicians, riflemen, skiers, and chess players among the many groups that came and went over the years. The Benson Creed published in the January 1947 Poly Tech states in part, "... I will some time in my school career join some worthy school club or organization, giving it my full support as long as I am a member thereof."

It was ill health that compelled Mr. Cleveland's retirement after the 1946 school year. He died at his home on December 13, 1947. His plaque in the front lobby is well deserved. Do give it a nod of appreciation on your next visit to the building.



## Being a Techman during virtual learning

By Parker Myrus (Class of 2023)

*Editor's note: The BPHSAA Board of Directors asked Parker Myrus—a Benson Tech sophomore and vice president of his class—who participated in its November meeting, to write candidly about his experiences “attending” Benson Tech while all classes were being taught on line this past fall.*

Let me start off by saying the challenges of virtual learning abound almost as frequently as the headaches! Let me be clear that this is no fault of the teachers but rather the system's approach on the whole.

We switched platforms for assigning work at the beginning of this school year (from last spring) from Google Classroom to Canvas and there have been a lot of challenges in that aspect mostly by students who are unable to find or turn in work. Teachers have to learn, use, and teach this new platform simultaneously. The most common problem I have experienced in not being able to find an assignment or simply forgetting it was assigned as you don't have a piece of papers sitting on your desk to remind you that you have to do it. I have found a to-do list a necessity!

Another challenge I have found is asking questions that last year would take 30 seconds now take three-five emails



**Above:** Parker Myrus, Benson Tech vice president of the sophomore class, at his desk for another day in the virtual classroom.

and two days to get answered. It's not all bad. I do have a lot more free time and there's no commute to school. School also starts an hour later than last year. I have to hand it to the Benson staff; there were only 50 Fs out of the 1,000+ Benson students at the end of the first fall grading period. There is also a lot more flexibility on how and when we work. I was also on the golf team last year, and with fall sports being postponed, it is a part of high school that I miss.

## Benson Tech starting second semester of 2020-2021 school year online

Benson Tech and all other Portland Public Schools (PPS) high schools will start the second semester of the 2020-21 school year in a “comprehensive distant learning mode” (online, pursuant to the State of Oregon's current COVID-19 guidelines).

COVID-19 infection rates and cases remained alarmingly high in Portland and Oregon at the beginning of 2021 and are anticipated unlikely to moderate for another month. Though some of Oregon's school districts have decided to resume in-school instruction, especially at the elementary school level, PPS and some of the other larger school districts are waiting for local COVID-19



conditions to meet Oregon's advisory metrics and for school staff to get vaccinated. Oregon Governor Kate Brown recently increased the vaccination priority of school teachers and staff.

In the meantime, a few exceptions are being made by PPS to allow in-person instruction for small numbers of high school seniors needing to make up credits to graduate this June.

It is hoped by all that conditions will change and in-person instruction at Benson Tech will resume later in the second semester. For the latest news, check the [Coronavirus Resources section](#) of the PPS website, as well as [www.benson-techalumni.org](http://www.benson-techalumni.org).



# Athletics delayed again by COVID 19

All of Benson Techs athletics, as well as Portland's high schools and the rest of Oregon's, have been pushed back further in the 2020-21 school year. As of this time, fall sports will start this year's athletic competition on March 1, followed by spring sports on April 12, and winter sports on May 17. These statewide dates were set by the Oregon School Activities Association on December 7, 2020, pursuant to guidelines issued by Governor Kate Brown and the Oregon Health Authority. Based on these dates, there will only be time for six weeks of completion for each sport.

Football practices are scheduled to start February 8, with practice for soccer, volleyball and cross-country on February 22. There does remain some question about the volleyball competition, as it is an indoor sport where the transmission of the

COVID-19 virus appears to be higher than outdoors. Stay tuned.

The "spring sports" baseball, softball, golf, tennis, and track and field practices are anticipated to start April



5 with competition beginning April 12. It will be the "winter sports" that will be played so out of season this school year. Practice for basketball, swimming and wrestling are scheduled to begin May 10, with contests starting May 17.

Prior to the fall 2020 spike in Covid 19 cases state-wide, practice for winter sports were to have started December 28, and followed by fall sports on February 22nd and spring sports on April 19. Those dates would have allowed a longer schedule in all of the sports. Some non-contract conditioning of most of the teams did occur in the early fall before COVID-19 cases began to rise.

It is hoped now in January 2021 that COVID-19 infections will level off and diminish to allow this new even shorter sport schedule to be accomplished.

## Support Benson Tech athletes with Tech Pride Volunteers and Benson TechBoosters

*Excerpted and reprinted from September 2020 Alumni Text*

The Tech Pride Volunteers and Benson Tech Boosters are a group of parents, guardians, family members, friends and alumni who come together to help support the Benson Tech community. You can get involved by joining our email list at [TechPrideVolunteers@gmail.com](mailto:TechPrideVolunteers@gmail.com). Our goal is to make it possible for everyone to support Benson Tech in a way that works for them. The three pillars our community of volunteers are supporting are:

**Student Life:** We (usually) help with dances/student activities, partner with a local non-profit to supply free food to students week, and staff tables during various school events. We would love ideas about how we can build community remotely for the things that make high school fun.

**Faculty and Staff:** We provide treats and meals during conferences, teacher appreciation week, and other activities. We would love ideas about how to support these essential workers as they navigate a whole new way to practice their craft.

**Student Athletes through Benson TechBoosters** (a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization): In our first year (2019–2020), the Benson TechBoosters raised more than

\$6,000. Proceeds are distributed to teams for extra training gear and other support. Even if we can't get together in person during the pandemic and Benson Tech's closure, we can still raise money for our student athletes for when they return just by taking a few minutes to register for:

- Amazon Smiles – Remember to log in under Amazon Smiles each time you shop
- Fred Meyer Community Reward points – Select "Benson TechBoosters" and then do your usual shopping.

These reward programs will send 0.5% of your purchases straight to the TechBoosters account, which are disbursed to our teams quarterly. Sign up for these programs to raise funds without spending an extra penny!

*The BPHSAA appreciates the efforts of the Tech Pride Volunteers and Benson Tech Boosters. We support their efforts and encourage our alumni to get involved. More information can be found at the following websites:*

- *Tech Pride Volunteers Building Community* – [techpridevolunteers.org](http://techpridevolunteers.org)
- *Benson TechBoosters* – [bensontechboosters.org](http://bensontechboosters.org) (email at [bensontechboosters@gmail.com](mailto:bensontechboosters@gmail.com))



**Above:** Shop demonstration from past Benson Tech Show.

## Benson Tech graduation rates among highest for PPS for 2020

The 2019-2020 graduation rates for PPS high schools were released in January 2021 and for the second year in a row, Benson Tech's graduation rate was 92%. The PPS overall graduation rate was 83.7%, which was slightly higher than the statewide average for Oregon high schools at 82.6%.



For more information about the 2020 graduation numbers, visit the [graduation rate article](#) published in the PPS District News section in the [January 2021 edition](#).

## 2021 Tech Show a victim of the pandemic

Due the closure of PPS buildings and the State of Oregon's restrictions on social gatherings, due to COVID-19, the 2021 Tech Show has been canceled. This will be the second consecutive cancellation of what would have been the 100th Tech Show. Previously, the Benson Tech Show had been canceled only once during World War II since it commenced in 1919.

The BPHSAA is cautiously optimistic about the return of Tech Show in 2022 when the event will be held at Benson's interim location at the Marshall High School campus (as it will also be in 2023 and 2024). The Tech Show will return to its newly modernized home at Benson Tech in 2025.

PPS 2020 Graduation Rates	
Lincoln High School	95%
Grant High School	94%
Benson High School	92%
Wilson High School	92%
Cleveland High School	91%
Franklin High School	86%
Jefferson High School	84%
Madison High School	83%
Roosevelt High School	77%

## All Benson Tech applicants accepted, continued from front cover

the neighborhood" at the former Marshall High School campus. For Benson Tech, the dislocation from a central city location to the SE corner of Portland may have had a larger effect. In addition, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, there were no opportunities for prospective student to visit Benson Tech or to have face-to-face discussion with Benson staff during an initially shortened application window.

After a direct plea from the leadership of the BPHSAA to PPS administration asking to extend

the enrollment/application window and an additional Benson Tech staff effort, that window was extended and more virtual discussions were arranged. As a result, applications jumped from 100+ to almost 300. Additional "good news" is that the applications have come from all over Portland, with a broader distribution across the city than in prior years.

The BPHSAA intends to carefully track both the Benson Tech enrollment though 2020-21 and the PPS' and Benson Tech's plans

to acquaint prospective seventh- and eighth-grade students across Portland about the "Benson Experience." The BPHSAA strongly believes it is very important to keep Benson Tech's enrollment as close to 1,000 students as possible during its time at Marshall. This will put the school in a good position to be free of the past enrollment cap as it returns to a modernized Benson Tech campus, which is being built to accommodate 1,700 students.

## Benson Tech modernization, continued from front cover

and the PPS Benson Tech modernization team, albeit via online sessions throughout these later efforts, as they did in the past several years.

The modernization will include rebuilding the career and technical education (CTE) shops and learning space, a new centrally located student common/cafeteria, remodels of the gym and auditorium, and a seismic retrofit and health and safety upgrades of the historic significant buildings. The plan designed with sustainability in mind includes planting more than 40 trees and installing a solar array generating 400 + kW of power providing reusing material when possible. In greatly improving accessibility though out, and the front lawn, walks and steps will be redone. The latest architectural drawing and an animated flythrough of the new building can be seen by going to the PPS website [School Building Improvement Bond](#) section. Click “[Benson](#),” and then either “Benson Renderings” or “Benson Flythrough.”



### Construction Funds Assured

Funds to complete Benson Tech’s modernization were assured when Portland votes approved the latest PPS bond measure. In the November 3rd elections, the proposed bond measure received almost 75% of the votes cast. In addition to the funds for Benson Tech, the bond will provide money to modernize Jefferson High School, continue plans to modernize Wilson and Cleveland High Schools, replace textbooks and technology equipment, and health and safety projects across the district, and begin plans for a Center for Black Student Excellence.

While planning and actions were occurring in 2020, the actual existence of money to complete the modernization of Benson Tech had come into question. Funds to fully modernize the school were originally included in the 2017 bond measure that also had funds for Madison and Lincoln High Schools and Kellogg Middle School. However, as design for Madison and Lincoln progressed it was found that the actual construction to modernize those

two schools would cost more than the bond had provided for. To make a long story short, there was only enough money in the measure to complete the design work, but not the construction. The approved 2020 bond measure now provides the money so that construction will proceed as soon as school is out this June 2021.

### Inventory and disposition of existing school equipment underway

As plans progress to move out of Benson Tech in June to allow construction to begin this fall, all existing equipment is being inventoried. Benson Tech teachers and staff are working with Benson’s new vice principal for modernization, Dan Malone, to develop a complete inventory of Benson’s equipment. This inventory will be used to determine what will be moved over the summer to Marshall, what will be stored for eventual use in the modernized building, and what will be disposed of.

Last fall several, BPHSAA members (Rob Johns, Roger Edwards, Bob Trimble, Jeff Strachan, and Andy Payne) accompanied Malone though most of the CTE space to provide alumni input into those decisions. COVID-19 restrictions have since hampered further BPHSAA visits to the school, but Malone has virtually attended the Board’s monthly meetings since last fall.

As the inventory continues to be fine-tuned, physical clean-up of shop area and disposal of some unneeded equipment has already begun. As surplus equipment is identified, PPS and Benson Tech are making every effort to find alternative uses for it — whether it is offer it to others and/or to be recycled. Offers of some aircraft and auto equipment, etc have been made for example to other schools or museums. When it is possible to obtain monetary compensation for any of the surplus those funds will be used to offset costs of the modernization.

*Editor’s note: At this time, Benson Tech and PPS are developing a site whereby alumni and others will be able to acquire other Benson Tech surplus equipment and furnishings, including possible memorabilia. For those interested, further information will be promptly reported on the BPHSAA website, [www.bensontechalumni.org](http://www.bensontechalumni.org).*

Further background regarding the Benson Tech modernization can also be found in earlier editions of the BPHSAA Alumni Text newsletter (which can be found on the BPHSAA website under [About Us>Newsletters](#)) and on the [PPS website](#).



## Recent BPHSAA election results

At its virtual Annual Meeting on November 23, Jeff Strachan (Class of 1977) was elected to his first three-year term as a BPHSAA director. Association stalwarts Rob Johns (Class of 1977), Josh Piper (Class of 1995) and Dale Bajema (Class of 1954) were re-elected to fill three of the other director positions that came open on January 1, 2021. Lacking any other candidates, one director position will remain open into the new year. Pursuant to the BPHSAA bylaws, the Board of Directors may fill that open position during its monthly meetings if a paid member steps forward.

Also at the Annual Meeting, it was announced that the BPHSAA had \$3,847 in its accounts and currently 87 paid members. The 2020 membership was down from recent years, but understandable with the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions affecting group activities.

At its December Board of Directors meeting, Bob Trimble (Class of 1977) was elected to his second consecutive term as the BPHSAA treasurer. Rob John (chairperson), Rachael Lizio Katzen Kuryunny (vice chairperson - Class of 1997), and Max Baker (secretary - Class of 1990) are in the middle of their terms and will continue in those capacities. The Board of Directors plans to meet in 2021 at its regular time on the second Monday of every month at 5:30 p.m. — though virtually until the State of Oregon changes its COVID-19 restrictions. If you are interested in attending these meetings, email [webteam@bensontechalumni.org](mailto:webteam@bensontechalumni.org) for information on how to connect.



### 2021 BPHSAA DUES: What, How, and Why

By joining the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA), you are helping to support the BPHSAA's many outreach efforts. These initiatives include maintaining an alumni website and photo archive; disseminating information about class reunions; publishing thrice-yearly newsletters; and hosting various social events, such as the Tech Show alumni room and the annual Benson Tech Community Picnic (typically held in August). The BPHSAA also continues to advocate on behalf of the school, its students, staff, and distinct programs, serving as a visible and vocal presence within Portland Public Schools and in the city at large.

To pay your 2021 annual dues (\$20.00), please visit the BPHSAA website at [www.bensontechalumni.org](http://www.bensontechalumni.org).



## REUNION INFORMATION

### CLASS OF 1971 - 50th Reunion

Gene Nelson is planning an event to be held in the second half of 2021.

For up-to-date details, please contact Gene at [Benson.Tech71@gmail.com](mailto:Benson.Tech71@gmail.com), or visit the Benson Tech '71 page on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Benson.Tech71/>

Is your class planning a reunion, or did the pandemic force a planned event to be rescheduled?

If so, please contact [info@bensontechalumni.com](mailto:info@bensontechalumni.com) with the relevant details about your reunion, or any changes to the previously planned event, including:

- **WHAT** (the nature of the events—adults only, families welcome, etc.)
- **WHEN**
- **WHERE**
- **COST/HOW TO** purchase tickets
- **CONTACT INFO** for organizer(s)
- **EVENT WEBSITE/FACEBOOK PAGE** (if applicable)

We post announcements about upcoming reunions on the BPHSAA website ([www.bensontechalumni.org](http://www.bensontechalumni.org)) and in our newsletters.

### 2021 community picnic planning

The BPHSAA has begun initial planning for a Benson Community Picnic and, potentially, another social event later in 2021. As with so many things during the pandemic, any group gathering will have to wait until COVID-19 infections significantly subside and State of Oregon restrictions eased.

The BPHSAA directors know there is great desire among the alumni to plan get-togethers. In an effort to be both hopeful and realistic, the BPHSAA is considering possible dates and locations for a picnic in late summer or early fall, and investigating the feasibility of hosting a social event at Marshall High School in mid- to late-fall. If you are interested in assisting with these efforts, Please contact [info@bensontechalumni.org](mailto:info@bensontechalumni.org).