



# BENSON TECH ALUMNI TEXT

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The Official Newsletter of the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA), August 2016 Edition

## Benson Tech celebrates 100 years



As students, we spent four years at Benson Tech and then went on with the rest of our lives — more school, possibly military service, jobs, annual birthdays, marriages, children, holidays, summer vacations, and/or just living. As we Benson students and then graduates, came and went — and usually with no thought about it — Benson Tech was having annual birthdays, and it is now 100 years old!

Accordingly Benson's Centennial will be observed in a variety of special events through the 2016-17 school year. (See the companion article re the specifics of the date). Students, teachers and the Benson Community are actively planning and working on these events. Expect some Centennial features at Tech Show this coming February. Exhibits in many of the display cases in Benson's hallways will assume a Centennial theme. Some recognition of the Centennial will occur at the October 21st Football Homecoming. And, of course, the 2017 graduating class has already been designated as the Centennial Class.

The BPHSAA is planning a special Grand Reunion over

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Plans to rebuild/renovate Benson Tech are still under consideration as part of the Portland Public Schools' (PPS) School Improvement Bond program.

## PPS bond and Benson Tech rebuild update

There has been a lot of work that has gone into the process of planning a rebuilt/renovated Benson Polytechnic High School building. Since March, Portland Public Schools (PPS) initiated a Master Planning Committee composed of teachers, students, alumni and concerned Benson advocates. PPS administration and a selected architectural firm led the discussions. This process culminated in a proposed \$257 million plan based on a "ground-up" rebuild that could take two years.

The initial bond measure that PPS was to propose was \$750 million. Three high schools — Benson, Lincoln and Madison — were originally targeted for rebuilding. Lincoln came in at \$205 million for a 7-8 story "ground-up" rebuild and \$157 million for a Madison renovation.

The challenge for PPS was the optics on spending more than \$600 million on three high schools. Couple this with the latest publicized reports of how PPS mishandled lead in the schools; years of neglect; the seismic risk of schools built before the 50s; and the range of asbestos, leaky roofs, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) work, and PPS has a daunting task to rebuild Portland's schools.

However, as of July 5, the PPS Bond Subcommittee was inclined to do a minor renovation of Benson Tech while undertaking a completely new Lincoln and a fully renovated Madison. At the July 25 PPS Board Meeting, Benson Tech advocates asked for a compromise among the planners for the three high schools to allow for a reduced plan, but would rebuild all three,

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**Benson celebrates 100 years,**  
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the June 9-11, 2017 weekend for all Benson graduates and all current and former teachers to observe the Benson milestone. (See the article to the right for more details).

The August 2016 annual Benson Community Picnic will be sort of a birthday party for Benson Tech as well as being another annual gathering of Benson alumni, incoming freshmen and their parents, Benson teachers and staff, and Benson friends and supporters with a birthday cake and a birthday card for all attendee's to sign.

So, happy birthday Benson, and many, many, many more to come — why not another 100?

### Why 2016-2017?

Many people have asked why Benson Tech is observing its Centennial during the 2016-17 school year. The answer is both simple and complicated, and revolves around the question of: 100 years after what?

In April 1915, Simon Benson gave the PPS \$100,000. The district renamed its Portland School of Trades after Benson in September 1915. The first group of students to graduate from the newly named Benson Polytechnic High School did so in January 1916. Ground was broken on what is now the Benson Tech building in May 1916, and the cornerstone of the main building was placed in December 1916. The doors of the new building opened for students in September 1917. And, so on...

School year 2016-17 was selected several years ago from among those significant beginning dates in Benson Tech's founding — as a good time to reflect on Benson's significant achievements over the past century, and to dream and plan for the next 100 years.

So, now you know.



## June 2017 Grand Centennial Reunion for Benson Tech graduation classes

Mark your calendars now and contact your classmates!

In observance of Benson Tech's Centennial, a Grand Reunion of Benson graduates from every class is being planned for June 9-11, 2017, by the BPHSAA. Over the past 100 years, almost 30,000 students have graduated from Benson Tech. For pretty obvious reasons, we cannot have all of them back to help celebrate the Centennial, but the BPHSAA is hoping to bring back hundreds of graduates from as many classes as possible over a long weekend of events.

With an eye to appealing to a variety of interests, the following events are being planned: a *"meet and greet"* on Friday night (June 9), *tours of Benson, a picnic, and dinner* on Saturday (June 10), a brunch *cruise* on a Portland Spirit ship, a *golf tournament and cruise-in at Colwood Golf Course, and afternoon social hours* on Sunday (June 11), with the idea being for graduates to pick and choose among the various venues, but most importantly to come and celebrate. Some attention will be given, in response to several requests, to facilitating career networking at these events. More details about these (and possible other events) will be available on the BPHSAA website this fall and through the winter and spring as well through emails, social media and mailings.

Several classes have expressed interest in holding their own individual class reunions in 2017 in conjunction with the Grand Reunion, and we are reaching out to other classes to consider the same. Special arrangements will be made at each event to facilitate classmates being together, as well as to mingle with all other graduates. Any class that has not done so is encouraged to be in touch to explore mutual planning of their class reunion and the Grand Reunion.

We are planning this Grand Reunion as a reunion of Benson Tech teachers as well, and we are reaching out to encourage any teacher or staff member who has ever worked at the school to join the graduates. For many graduates, the highlight of a reunion (and Tech Show) is seeing and visiting with former teachers. We would like this Grand Reunion to provide that experience as well.

A small group of alumni (headed by Dale Bajema) has been working on the above plans since this past February. If you are willing to help a little or a lot — in the planning or during the events — and have some ideas to further improve the celebration, please contact us at either [dalebajema@comcast.net](mailto:dalebajema@comcast.net) and/or [www.bensontechalumni.org](http://www.bensontechalumni.org).

## Updating Benson Tech's Five-Year Plan

While the Benson Master Planning Committee (MPC) was developing a plan to modernize Benson (see front cover article), Benson's teachers and staff completed the third year of Benson Tech's own internal Five-Year Plan. As the past school year ended, Benson Tech's Site Council updated the last two years of the Plan, 2016-17 and 2017-18. (The updated plan will be posted on the Benson Tech and the BPHSAA websites in September.)

Notable school year 2015-16 "action items" that were completed include establishing AVID (Advancement Via Individual Development) and a new computer science program, expanding the architecture program, pushed the graduation rate towards 90%, planning the addition of an engineering class in the coming year, opening a health and wellness center at the school, monitoring the progress of the football program (and a decision to return to varsity play in 2016-17), establishing an "entrepreneurs" club, getting school staff and supporters substantively involved in the MPC process, and starting the planning for the observance of Benson Tech's Centennial.

The Benson Five-Year Plan was developed In 2013 by the Benson Site Council which is made up of Benson's teachers, students, parents and community representatives. It felt a multi-year plan was needed to guide, prioritize, and coordinate the many efforts to strengthen and improve Benson Polytechnic High School. It set forth annual action items for five years through the 2017-18 school year to improve curriculum, add new programs, strengthen athletics, improve relations with parents (including their increased involvement with the school), increase interaction with its business and education partners, and plan the longer-term modernization of Benson Tech.

During the coming year, the Site Council will explore how its planning efforts might take an even longer view of combining the year-by-year actions with efforts extending beyond 2018 to rebuild and modernize Benson Tech to meet the requirements of the coming decades.



## Benson Tech Foundation update

The Benson Tech Foundation is open for donations and has supported Benson Tech programs this past school year, including:

- The Foundation had Oregon State University offer to pay for a day visit to the campus in Corvallis for 40 students, initiated by Foundation President Rob Johns. Part of the bus cost was funded by the Foundation.
- A number of Benson Students had qualified for a Skills USA competition and airline fare/travel expenses were needed to be covered for the out of state competition and the Foundation contributed to that with a challenge to other Benson advocates to step up as well.
- In late December 2015, a gift to the manufacturing program was made by a father and son alumni through their family foundation, which was passed directly to the manufacturing program instructor for the maintenance needs/costs that are needed to run this program.

If you have a thought or desire to give to your old "major" to help maintain/further the programs that made your Benson Tech experience special and life-changing or you want to designate your United Way contributions to Benson Tech or through your employer matching program, please reach out to Rob Johns, foundation president, [robjohns@comcast.net](mailto:robjohns@comcast.net) or 503-314-0041.

The Benson Tech Foundation is an IRS qualified 501c3.

# Benson Tech enrollment and programs continue to grow

With 300 entering freshmen this fall, plus additional entering sophomores, Benson Tech will have about 1,000 students. The number has increased from the 850 enrollment cap dictated by the 2010 High School Design decisions (as a result of many diligent efforts from Benson Tech's staff and alumni). With additional students, the number of teachers and CTE programs has increased as well.

The school will have seven new teachers this fall — several of whom graduated from Benson Tech and have now come back to teach. (It should be noted that with the new teachers, the diversity of Benson Tech's staff is beginning to mirror that of the students.)

With additional staff and teachers, an engineering program will be started this fall, the computer science and architecture programs will be expanded, and the arts program will begin evolving into an eventual CTE major.

Student interest in the Health Occupations programs has so increased that additional classes have been added, with five instructors now teaching in those programs. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Development) will also



expand to include juniors this fall — it is a well-proven elective class designed to promote school and career success.

During the 2016-17 school year, it is expected that the Benson House constructed by students over the past several years will be sold and work will begin on another. In another construction endeavor, the Tech-Geometry classes will increase the number of small houses that its students build and that are given to the City of Portland as shelters for the homeless.

The oft-documented statistics that show that offering hands-on

career training contributes to high school success continues to be borne out at Benson Tech with its roughly 90% graduation rate — among the top tier in Portland and Oregon — and a drop-out rate close to 1%.

A larger enrollment also means more students to participate in sports and other extracurricular programs. More players and last year's solid junior varsity program is allowing Benson Tech's football team to return to varsity play as an independent team this fall.

To support the return to varsity play, a new Benson Tech Football Boosters Club is being organized. (Interested parties should call the head coach, Devarieous Sly-Clay, at 503-754-9588).

It is expected that a group of parents of students of color called PASS (Partnership for Academically Successful Students) may evolve into a nucleus for greater parent involvement and support of Benson Tech. As this newsletter goes to press, the group is considering a parent dance/social event this fall.

## Some facts about Benson Tech...

- **#34 out of 326** Oregon high schools ranked in the 2016 U.S. News & World Report's 2016 High School Rankings, and **#1 of the 13** Portland high schools included in the list.
- 29% Advanced Placement® participation
- 72% math proficiency and 85% English proficiency
- The student body makeup is 56% male and 44% female, with a total minority enrollment of 71%



## BPHSAA's advocacy role clarified

With the increasing opportunities to fund CTE and STEM education and to eventually modernize Benson Tech, the BPHSAA has clarified how it will advocate for the school. The association's by-laws specify that one of the group's missions is to support Benson Tech. Since its inception, the BPHSAA has "lobbied" PPS, participated in district groups, met with state legislators and officials, etc., though not in any election efforts.

If the BPHSAA was a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization — which it is not — it would be circumscribed in its involvement and interaction with governmental entities. As a fraternal organization, BPHSAA has considerable legal latitude. Nonetheless, the BPHSAA Board of Directors decided it would be prudent to define and clarify how would it would engage with government entities and participate in electoral matters

At its July meeting, the BPHSAA Board of Directors, after discussions in several meetings, adopted the following resolution:

"Be it resolved, consistent with its by-laws and stated mission to support Benson Polytechnic High School, the BPHSAA and its officers *may* publicly support local, state, and federal measures, rules, and/or legislation concerning education, school levies, school bonds and grants and may otherwise seek money, other resources, policies, and rules on behalf of Benson Tech from Portland Public School District and its elected and non-elected officials; *however*, it *may not* spend Association money to do so (beyond limited administrative supplies) *nor* endorse or support partisan efforts or individuals running for public office or seeking non-political appointment."

With that resolution, the BPHSAA believes there will be less potential future misunderstanding of its proper role as it increases its efforts for Benson Tech in a variety of ways, including lobbying PPS and the Oregon Legislature, seeking grants and partners, and endorsing non-partisan ballot measures.

## PPS bond and Benson Tech rebuild, continued from front cover

which did not get to a vote. On July 25, the PPS School Board Bond subcommittee proposed postponing the bond vote from November 2016 to May of 2017 (much to the surprise of the Benson, Lincoln and Madison communities). Rob Johns, BPHSAA chair, spoke on Channel 6 news advocating not to wait to renovate Benson Tech. Currently, there are meetings being planned to bring this back for a vote to put the bond measure on the November ballot, but it is not clear as to the extent of Benson Tech funding.

Benson Tech alumni and advocates have given much personal time to attend meetings of the Master Planning Committee and meet at PPS Board meetings to reinforce the message that among the three schools, Benson Tech is the highest risk for seismic collapse, and simply is the oldest school. The PPS School Bond subcommittee at one point evaluated a number of options around Benson Tech's cost, and it is still subject to more public discussion.

Of importance to keep in mind, the Portland Business Alliance publicly endorsed and published an endorsement of a rebuild of Benson Tech.

If you have questions, please contact Rob Johns, [robjohns@comcast.net](mailto:robjohns@comcast.net)



**Benson Polytechnic High  
School Alumni Association**

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