



Urban Times

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❑ FROM: SEPTEMBER 2006

Page 2: Herron High opens with a full roster



Members of the Herron faculty include (front, l-r) Greg Lineweaver, English/language; Courtney Williams, biology; Kristina Aliff, special education coordinator; Janet McNeal, curriculum director. Standing (l-r) are Rex Bolinger, CEO; Tod Hurst, Latin teacher and athletic director; Trevor Renwick, art; Deborah Cooney, social studies; Jim Lyst, math; and Allison Hampton, music.

❑ For a closer look at the Herron High School curriculum and teaching staff, see the website at www.herronhighschool.org.

From September 2006:

It's a full roster of students for the very first day of Herron High

EIGHT DAYS REMAINED BEFORE the students would arrive, while a cadre of teachers sat behind a circle of desks seemingly deep within the bowels of Harrison Center for Arts, enthusiastically planning for the big event:

The very first bell calling students to Herron High School.

The students would indeed arrive soon – 102 of them, two more than the organizers of the newly founded charter school had hoped. One hundred and two freshmen – ostensibly eager to become pioneers, the building blocks of a new urban educational experiment.

The teachers are experiencing those very emotions as they prepare the curriculum for the liberal arts charter school that will employ classical methodology revolving around classic art and literature.

“For me, it’s the opportunity to get it right from the beginning,” said Greg Lineweaver, a nine-year teacher most recently at Plainfield High School and one of a small minority of teachers who is certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

Social studies teacher Deborah Cooney is equally excited about the vast diversity of Herron High School’s first freshman class.

The Woodruff Place resident, whose teaching credentials would merit a feature story of their own, has spent the last three years teaching humanities to middle school students at the Hasten Hebrew Academy of Indianapolis, and before that spent 11 years as a teacher and director of technology training at Park Tudor School.

“The diversity – that’s the really exciting thing for me,” she said, pointing to the fact that Herron students are coming not only from the Indianapolis Public Schools, but also from private schools, home schools and the suburbs.

“For the faculty, this is a rare opportunity – a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to build a school from nothing,” Cooney said.



The Harrison Center for the Arts in the Old Northside.



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Deborah Cooney

Nothing but an idea was what Board President Joanna Taft began with a couple of years ago when she first proposed the idea of a charter school to help fill a void in the historic Downtown neighborhoods now peppered with young families.

Her idea was to locate the new charter school in the soon-to-be-vacated Herron School of Art. That is still the plan; the art school has done its part by moving into shiny new facilities on the IUPUI campus. But construction and renovation timelines being what they are, the Herron School of Art campus is not nearly ready for the high school's launch.

So, the first Herron High School class will ring the bell in 3,000 square feet of space on the lower level of the Harrison Center, where Taft is conveniently the executive director of the Harrison Center for the Arts

The historic building, which houses not only a church and several not-for-profit organizations but also 17 artist studios and three art galleries, is just a block east of the high school's future permanent home. The high school will use five permanent classrooms and office space which have been created in the northeast corner of the Harrison Center – by a team of volunteers from Speedway's Rolls-Royce plant – in space that was once the church fellowship hall.

And what the subterranean space lacks in direct sunlight it more than makes up for in what realtors value most. Location, location, location.

"Look at the whole community," Cooney said, pointing to the surrounding environment that includes historic churches, cultural organizations and a vibrant arts community – field trip opportunities all. "Building a community is an exciting thing."

Rex Bolinger, the veteran school principal who is the charter school's chief executive officer, said that the "wealth of opportunities and partnerships" with a myriad of nearby resources was always part of the plan.

The plan, Bolinger continued, has worked remarkably well.

"I could never envision how well this came together," he said. That assessment would apply to the partnerships, including one with Marian College, and to the Harrison Center remodeling that will serve the high

Harrison Center space will eventually go to artists

FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS, THE HARRISON Center space now serving as the temporary home of Herron High School had been leased to the Herron School of Art.

Joanna Taft, executive director of the Harrison Center for the Arts, said that when the art school relocated into its new quarters on the IUPUI campus last May, her organization began plans to turn the space into new artists' studios.

"AXIS Architecture designed the new studio space," Taft reported, "creating much larger studios than what we currently offer."

The larger studio design proved very convenient, Taft said, when it was realized that Herron High School would need a temporary location.

"Each of the five studios can hold more than 20 students," said Taft, who is also president of the school's board of directors.

The largest area, now serving the high school's administrative team, will become the Harrison Center's fourth art gallery when the school moves into its permanent home on the former Herron School of Art campus.

Taft said current Harrison Center residents will get the first chance to move into the new studio spaces when they become available. ■

school this coming year.

And it applies to the surprising fact – from the outside looking in – that Bolinger and his newly created team found more than their goal of 100 students ostensibly eager to study Latin and logic and rhetoric.

"I always expected to fill the roster," Bolinger said, although gauging response was tougher when there was no building to show parents.

"It started to get easier when the faculty came together," Bolinger said, "and teachers were able to meet people at their houses."

The six teachers – a group Bolinger is unabashedly proud of – will teach the freshman class this year. Herron High School will grow by one class a year until this year's class becomes seniors in the 2009-10

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school year.

Lineweaver believes he speaks for his colleagues when he said, “One of the things about the faculty is that we really believe this will work – that this is going to be a great thing.

“We have faith in the administration,” he continued, “faith in the people behind it, faith in the community and faith in the students. It is easier to feel confident when you believe it is going to work.”

Lineweaver has faith, too, in the charter school system that features much less bureaucracy than in the public schools where he has happily taught in the past nine years.

“It’s about the ability to move quickly, to respond immediately,” he said. And, looking at Herron’s size, “to know your students well enough. This is right, this is exciting.”

Cooney, who will teach world history and ancient civilizations to this first class, said she was skeptical when she first saw that Herron High School’s goal was for 100 percent of its students to attend college.

“But our students don’t want to fall through the cracks,” she said. “They want to go to college. And, as things have emerged, I see the pathways for that to happen.” ■

- Bill Brooks