

North American Academies Refuse to Die

by Bonnie Dwyer

Members in North America are concerned about their Adventist academies; not just what the enrollment is or isn't, what the teachers are saying, or what the students are doing. Across the United States, members are also concerned about academy property. Population fluctuations being what they are, several conferences have been forced to close or consolidate schools. That leaves the conference with property that generates no income, but demands upkeep. Two academies that were closed and put up for sale—Dakota Adventist Academy in South Dakota and Laurelwood in Oregon—have reopened, and in a unique situation in Southern California, a conference is fighting City Hall to retain the campus of Lynwood Academy, which the local school district would like to convert into a public high school. A look at academies in South Dakota, Michigan, Oregon, and Southern California reveals the diverse ways North American Adventists are facing the challenge of maintaining Adventist secondary schools.

Dakota Adventist Academy Reopens

Alumni of Dakota Adventist Academy helped the conference raise nearly \$300,000 to reopen the doors of the school that was closed in 1987. Larry Unterseher was

Bonnie Dwyer, before assuming her present responsibility of raising an infant son, was the public information officer of the city of Brea, California. As its news editor, she has frequently written for *Spectrum*.

chosen to be the new principal, and he quickly put together a staff of 19 teachers. Enrollment is about 25 percent larger than anticipated.

New conference president Don Sheldon said, "We need to shout the good news! There have been so many miracles to reopen the school. Principal Unterseher's getting a staff together so quickly is a miracle. The fact that the school staff alone pledged \$10,000 for the academy operation is more good news."

To help put the school back into operation, \$294,000 was raised by July, 1988 through Project Dakota Adventist Academy-88. A project newsletter suggested that the Dakota academy would be one of the few, if not the only, academy in North America to open its doors in the fall with a total projected operating deficit in hand. An operating committee of 27 members (mostly laypersons) was established to help govern the school.

Vern Vliet, chair of the finance committee, said students who need financial aid have all been funded by private Adventist donors, to the tune of \$76,725. An active development committee involved the alumni in raising funds matched by a special General Conference fund for the support of Adventist academies. In the future, the development committee of the academy intends to invite the local community to contribute financially to Dakota Adventist Academy.

Due to the expertise of a former alumni president who is also an engineer, Roger Hinger, heating and sewer maintenance, which had been anticipated to cost thousands of dollars, cost only several hundred dollars.

Great Lakes Academy Arises from Adelpian and Cedar Lake

Some residents of Holly, Michigan, were most upset when the State Department of Corrections put an option on the

site of the former Adelpian Academy, but the property went back on the market following some bitter public hearings in Holly. When the property (valued at \$6.3 million) is finally sold, the conference constituency will be given a voice in how the money is used, says Michigan Conference president Glenn Aufderhar. There has been some discussion about using the funds to build a new gymnasium at Great Lakes Academy, a school created in 1986 from the consolidation of Adelpian and Cedar Lake Academies.

Aufderhar plays down the troubles caused by the state's considering turning the former Adelpian Academy into a prison. Great Lakes Academy is a stronger academic institution than its predecessors, he feels. After years of the conference having to make up losses in operating the two academies, a \$50,000 gain in operating costs was posted by the new consolidated academy in just its first year of existence. Not surprisingly, the conference administration is pleased with the decision to combine the two academies. "Obviously, if we had our choice we would like to have both schools full of students. But we don't have that," the conference president says. It required five transition committees to make the consolidation work. The bankruptcy of Harris Pine Mills did not help the financial picture during the transition process. Enrollment in the fall of 1988 was 255, down from 320 in the fall of 1987, but the school, based on projections from the elementary schools, had anticipated and budgeted for a smaller student body.

Oregon Conference Sells Laurelwood Campus

“After more than a year of negotiations, the former campus of Laurelwood Adventist Academy has been passed from conference to private ownership. The \$1.5 million deal was assured in early August (1988) when Malcolm Moreno, president of Laurelwood Academy, Inc., and Oregon President Don Jacobsen signed the final papers,” according to the *North Pacific Union Gleaner*.

Laurelwood Academy, Inc., now financially and administratively independent of the conference, draws its support from alumni of the school who did not want to see the campus close, when the conference shut the school down after the 1985 school year. Ruth Moreno, treasurer of the organization, says it has been difficult getting support for the project. But school did open in the fall of 1988, and 25 students enrolled.

“We offer a mainstream Seventh-day Adventist education,” she says. “We are not an offshoot organization. We want to provide a good spiritual background for the students in accordance to what Sister White recommended.”

John Boyd was acting principal in 1988, while a search was made for someone to assume that position. Six other faculty members were hired, including the resident hall deans. Mrs. Moreno reported that the school hoped to be able to offer a full vocational program in 1989, concentrating on auto body repair, construction, drafting, welding, and art.

Southern California Fights to Keep Lynwood

The Southern California Conference retained eminent domain specialist Ken Holland of Musick, Peeler, and Garret in 1988 to assist in its efforts to retain Lynwood Academy. Both the Appellate and Supreme courts of California have denied requests for interim injunctions, which means the church will have to go to trial with the school district.

In attempts to pursue the legal and legislative avenues available, a lobbyist in Sacramento was also retained to write and lobby for a bill that would grant protection from eminent domain laws to churches and church-owned properties. According to a report given to church members in the *Pacific Union Recorder*, “Although the bill was passed unanimously in the Senate Judiciary Committee and in the Senate, the constitutional issues were deleted from the bill when it reached

the Assembly Judiciary Committee.

“This legislative committee believed that the constitutional guarantees for the church were already in place, and that additional protection was unnecessary. They then sent the bill, minus the constitutional issues, to a special Conference Committee to help resolve differences and to study future legislation. The proposed future legislation would assure that the Southern California Conference would receive a higher purchase price for the property than had originally been offered.” This legislation was placed on the 1989 legislative calendar. In January 1989, the conference was still waiting for a trial date to be set.

Meanwhile, the academy continues to operate.

However, Lorenzo Paytee, conference vice-president for administration, says that uncertainty over the future of the school has affected enrollment. In the 1988-1989 school year it was 135, down from 156 the previous year. The grade school enrollment in Lynwood, by contrast, has remained constant at 250.

The efforts of alumni in the Dakotas, Oregon, and Southern California demonstrate the importance many Adventists place on the education they received in church school. But the actions of members and conference officials in Michigan to consolidate their academies can also be interpreted as a commitment to preserve Adventist education. In different places, different means of preservation are required.