



# Fireside

A magazine for alumni and friends of Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School

## Meeting the Needs of Every Student

more on page 5

## The Future of BT's Campus

more on page 14

## Social Emotional Learning

more on page 17





This issue of *Fireside* highlights the many ways in which the BT community embraced the “challenge” aspect of the school’s mission, overcoming disappointment and fear caused by the pandemic, to realize a semester of learning marked by ingenuity, innovation, and fun. At BT a learner’s mindset is a given, but we often rely on our tried and true practices to guide our ways. The complexity of this year’s problems presented new opportunities to refocus on our learner’s mindset to set priorities, test and rework solutions, and seek out joy in even the smallest of victories.

This mindset enabled us to set ourselves apart in our ability to provide continuous in-person instruction on campus; enrich education through virtual collaborations and new technologies; celebrate long-standing traditions like Homecoming, Grandparents and Special Friends Week, and the Holiday Program; and introduced some fun new activities like pep rallies on the football field and the BT Santa Stop. And cherished memories like sledding on the

Lower School playground were still made (although I hope we are done with the cold and snow for this school year!).

Our success in providing an exceptional educational experience in the midst of a pandemic has allowed us to stay on course with many of our strategic plan initiatives that will impact BT’s future and solidify our position as the leader in global education in Nebraska. We have an amazing community of students, families, faculty, staff, trustees, and alumni who have been instrumental in helping chart this course and keeping us moving forward. Thank you for all that you do to help BT fulfill its mission of knowing, inspiring, and challenging every student, mind, and heart!

Sincerely,

Kristi N. Gibbs, Ed.D.  
Head of School

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*Fireside* is published for alumni, parents, and friends of Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School. Send story ideas and comments to Brownell Talbot, attn: Renae Mackender, 400 N. Happy Hollow Blvd., Omaha, NE 68132; email [renae.mackender@brownell.edu](mailto:renae.mackender@brownell.edu).

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# WHAT'S HAPPENING — ON CAMPUS? —



## 1. Raider Pride Shines During Homecoming Week

Like so many things in 2020, this year's Homecoming was unlike any other in memory.

The Chili Supper became a virtual event with most families dining on chili prepared by BTPA at home. Seniors were invited to dine and watch the presentation on the east lawn.

The Unity Walk took place on a beautiful September Friday followed by a pep rally on Skutt Field!

Although spectators were limited at the Homecoming game, BT

still honored traditions with the crowning of Homecoming king and queen during halftime.

Upper School students moved the Homecoming Dance to the courtyard under white lights where fresh air and space to social distance made for a perfect and safe end to Homecoming Week.

## 2. BT Garden Bears Fruits of Students' Labor

With an added focus on maximizing classroom time spent outdoors, the BT garden has become a source of learning and nourishment for BT students age 3 through grade 12!



### 3. Santa Stops by BT

Because Santa made fewer in-person appearances this year, the school wanted to create a safe place for BT families to visit with him before the holidays. BT's Santa Stop included one-on-one conversations with Saint Nick in front of the chapel and cute cookie decorating kits from Crum Cakes Bakery for families to take home.

### 4. Paying Tribute to RBG

Halloween provided the perfect opportunity for several of BT's Lower School teachers to honor Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg following her passing in September.

### 5. Election Talk with Megan Hunt

In November, Senator Megan Hunt, who represents the eighth legislative district in Omaha, joined a Zoom session with fifth grade students to serve as a guest expert for their elections project!

# MEETING THE NEEDS

of every student



School life during a pandemic is anything but predictable. Through many months of planning, BT was able to start the school year early, giving families the choice to learn in person or online. Both educational paths come with a unique set of challenges, and the school has demonstrated flexibility and ingenuity to make sure each experience meets the needs of the BT community.

For students, while the learning is as inspiring and challenging as ever, the mechanics of the school day are very different from a normal year. Families are asked to complete home health checks and take temperatures before arriving on campus. Students line up at entrances every morning to confirm their home health check has been performed. Once in classrooms, desks are socially distanced by at least six feet and all students, faculty, and staff wear masks at all times, except during lunch, which is also socially distanced with students facing the same direction as they eat, and during designated mask breaks outside. Transitions between classes are minimized, with Lower School students having classes like music, art, and science in their home rooms and Middle and Upper School students following a four-block schedule.

The BT community has worked hard to ensure that social distancing does not mean emotional distancing. Pep rallies have taken place on Skutt Field, the Homecoming dance was moved to the courtyard, and student ambassadors welcome a new student before their first day with Zoom lunch meetups. Faculty and staff formed community circles to promote cross-department socializing online that previously took place in teacher work rooms. And, when the stands were closed to everyone except immediate family, athletic competitions were streamed live so Raider fans could cheer on student athletes.

## NEW ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

BT's faculty have done an amazing job ensuring each student feels known and supported during a time marked by uncertainty and constant change. Although not an ideal teaching setting, all BT teachers have become adept at teaching simultaneously to students in the classroom and students remoting into class from home. To support this effort, BT created new positions including a full-time substitute teacher who works across all grades levels, a multi-age classroom teacher for grades 1-3, and a full-time facilities employee

dedicated to sanitizing high-touch surfaces multiple times a day. The school also had to reassign roles for some faculty and staff to better support teachers and students in a learning environment where some students are in-person and some are online.

Fourth grade teacher Cassie Grant went from being a full-time classroom teacher last year to a hybrid of a part-time math teacher and a liaison for distance learning families and teachers. In this role, she converts classroom materials to digital formats, keeps schedules for every student in distance learning, manages all communications with families regarding distance learning, gathers materials for families to pick up, and provides as much assistance as she can to Lower School teachers.

“I know what teachers are going through but I am not living it fully, so I really want to support them in any way I can,” said Grant. “This position requires being comfortable with inconsistency and adapting to it. It would be a lot harder of a job if BT teachers weren’t so amazing and committed to working together to make this hybrid in-person and online teaching and learning work for families.”

Learning and curriculum coordinator Angie Vetter fulfills a role similar to Grant for Middle and Upper School. Vetter spends a good portion of her day working with teachers on new technologies the school implemented to teach distance learners and students in the classroom simultaneously. She is also instrumental in making sure distance learning students feel engaged with their classes and that in-person

students are better positioned to engage their classmates who are learning from home.

“Our students have had experience with both learning environments,” said Vetter. “Because they understand the challenges of learning at home, they are giving grace and compassion to their peers who are distance learning and helping ensure those students feel involved.”

When not working on implementing technology, Vetter spends a lot of time researching new ways to provide variety in distance learning opportunities to prevent monotony that can sometimes happen in the distance learning space.

“My favorite part about all of this is the shift I’ve witnessed with our faculty and staff,” Vetter added. “As a group we consistently have shown a desire to learn and grow and a willingness to try something new and different. The experience has moved our teaching staff from amazing educators to phenomenal.”

**Know a student who would benefit from phenomenal teachers in a small school setting? Visit [brownell.edu/advantages](http://brownell.edu/advantages) to connect with BT’s Admissions Office.**



Distance learning teacher setup



BT Ambassadors welcoming a new student



Homecoming dance in the courtyard

# Grandparents and



Long a fixture in BT's Lower School, Grandparents and Special Friends Day is an annual event marked by many traditions and rites of passage for BT's youngest students. Historically, the focus of the day was in-classroom performances by Early Years students and an ensemble production of students in kindergarten - grade 4, both iterations filled with fun songs and dances to delight attendees. The day also included the special treat of classroom visits for grandparents and special friends to see where the majority of their child's learning takes place. The pandemic resulted in many events and celebrations having to be abbreviated or skipped altogether. Luckily, administrators, faculty, and staff collaborated to reimagine the day into a full week of events, extending the audience from just Lower School families to encompass all grade levels.

In a normal year, the classroom visits consisted of activities like donuts and coffee

at students' desks. This year, grandparents and special friends were still welcomed into classrooms, this time via video conferencing software that enabled teachers to expand the experiences that were shared. Guests could attend an Early Years French class, art class with fifth graders, an eighth grade biology class, the Lower School Halloween parade, and more. There was even a "Day in the Life of an Upper School Student" video that students from BT's Digital Media class produced and starred in.

"It was unlike any other Grandparents and Special Friends event I have been a part of at BT," said Assistant Head of School Jason Smith. "And in many ways, it was a more robust experience for our guests. They were able to witness firsthand the learning that happens at BT, the ways in which our teachers know and inspire our students, and the amazing ways the children in their lives contribute to our school environment."



# Special Friends Week



## CONNECTING GENERATIONS

BT celebrates grandparents and special friends and the connections they have with BT students, in part, because it helps children become more aware of the strength, support, and guidance older people can offer. It also gives grandparents an opportunity to show love for the children in their lives.

After witnessing the powerful impact a BT education can have, many grandparents and special friends choose to make a gift to The BT Fund. It is a form of gift-giving that will make a lifelong difference to the recipient. If you would like to make a gift in honor of a BT student, email Vice President of Advancement Shannon Gilroy at [shannon.gilroy@brownell.edu](mailto:shannon.gilroy@brownell.edu).

# Champions of Change

In a school year marked by change, one's tendency may be to hold on tightly to the status quo - why choose more change when so much has been thrust upon you? For the most enterprising, the disruption to the status quo that the pandemic caused was an opportunity to rethink not just a lesson or a course, but an entire way of doing things. Given scientists are prone to taking calculated risks, it makes sense that BT's Science Department was keen to use this year to implement big changes that ultimately will benefit students' understanding of science for the rest of their lives.

This year the Science Department moved to a "physics first" model in Middle School, in which the traditional order of science courses is reversed so that students learn physics before chemistry and biology. Now sixth graders will learn physics through earth science, seventh graders will learn chemistry through environmental science, and eighth graders will learn biology through ecology. The physics first model is generally more popular in high schools, but as Science Department Chair and physics teacher Meg Harms points out, physics is a foundational science.

"We recognize how passionate BT families are about science, so we needed to give the students that foundation first to prepare them with the skills to do well down the road. In the old model, we spent a portion of Upper School science classes learning basics that, with the new model, will be carried forward from Middle School. This allows Upper School students the opportunity to learn a whole

new set of data and dig deeper into the real science."

Physics serves as the foundational science because it studies the most basic phenomena. For instance, if students are going to study things that move in biology and chemistry, it makes sense that they first study motion itself in physics. Harms recognizes that buying into this change requires a mindshift.

"It's the science most parents and students are afraid of," says Harms. "But physics also makes the most sense to kids. You throw a ball up, it comes down. Physics is all about making predictions, testing, and determining what went wrong. It's about understanding the laws of science."

"Even though I teach biology, I love that they will take physics first. The concepts you need to know (for biology), you learn in physics," says biology teacher Jay Sauer. "Learning the fundamentals first helps you see the thread and the story inside science."

Another key change the Science Department made this year was changing teachers' course loads so that Upper School science teachers now also teach Middle School science. This restructuring allows teachers to be very focused on the development of key skills to make sure students are successful going into Upper School science.

Previously a Middle School student at BT could conceivably have the same science teacher in sixth grade through eighth. Now students are exposed to different mindsets and methods of



## Meet BT's MIDDLE AND UPPER SCHOOL Science Teachers

different teachers, which helps expand their understanding and interest in the various areas of science.

As if changing the curriculum and teaching structures weren't enough, the Science Department has also handled changes brought on by the pandemic masterfully. The teachers have been synchronously teaching to students in the classroom and those who are distance learning at home. So much of science is dependent on participation in labs, so they quickly identified the tools they needed to allow students to have those experiences in their homes. The school invested in simulated lab and assessment software that provides a fairly comparable virtual experience to what happens in the classroom.

"We have also been providing students with videos of ourselves conducting experiments so that they can see it done in a real environment and recognize that we make mistakes and we spill stuff too," says chemistry teacher Kari Newman. "It helps reinforce science's healthy attitude toward failure. All scientists experience challenges. It doesn't mean the experiment wasn't worthwhile, as long as you apply that knowledge to your next attempt."

Taking their own advice, the teachers have done the groundwork, experimented with the factors that create true understanding of science, and applied that knowledge to strengthen the quality of learning and give BT students an edge in their pursuits of becoming real scientists.



**Meg Harms**  
*Physics*

B.S.E. and M.S. in  
Civil Engineering and Materials  
Science, Princeton University

In addition to teaching sixth and seventh grade science, physics, and physics with calculus, Mrs. Harms is the department chair and a senior class sponsor.

*Fun fact:* Mrs. Harms loves physics because it was in her first physics class that math made sense to her for the first time.



**Kari Newman**  
*Chemistry*

B.S. in Chemistry, Centre College;  
M.S. in Oceanography,  
Florida State University;  
M.Ed. in Science Education,  
North Carolina State University

*Fun fact:* In 2015 Mrs. Newman won the highly coveted Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching, which is awarded annually to one science teacher and one math teacher per state.



**Jay Sauer**  
*Biology*

B.S. in Biochemistry,  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln;  
M.S. in Education,  
University of Nebraska Omaha

*Fun fact:* Mr. Sauer is a certified Nebraska Master Naturalist and leads the care and cultivation of BT's garden.

# BT FUND

For the fifth year in a row, Brownell Talbot's faculty, staff, and Board of Trustees have demonstrated their commitment to the school and its mission with 100% participation in The BT Fund! Current families are also well on their way to record participation this school year. This year's BT Fund division chairs share why they make BT one of their philanthropic priorities.

Visit [brownell.edu/BTfund](http://brownell.edu/BTfund) to participate in BT's giving movement and make a gift to The BT Fund! Email your "why" and a photo from your years at BT to [renae.mackender@brownell.edu](mailto:renae.mackender@brownell.edu) and BT will share it on social media.

*What's Your Why?*



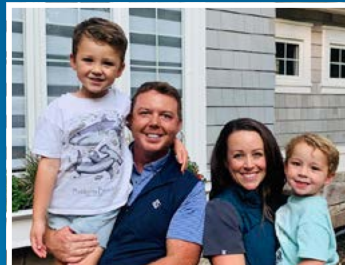
"One of the many reasons that we contribute to The BT Fund every year is to honor the many incredible teachers our kids have been lucky enough to have."

**Casie and Vernon Schlueter, parents of Sophia, '25, Vollen, and Ronan, '29**



"We believe that the Brownell Talbot experience is a gift for our sons. A gift that includes the best teachers and community, a beautiful campus, access to a wide variety of sports, arts, and activities, and a focus on social emotional development."

**Angeline and Peter Larson, parents of Nils, '37 and Anders, '35**



"BT has gone above and beyond (as they always do) to create a safe learning environment for our sons while also creating opportunities to smile."

**Chrissy and Chase Pruitt, parents of Maverick, '35, and Maxwell, '33**



"We love BT because our family feels at home here. If every family makes a gift, it will mean that we can continue to sustain our extraordinary school while also strengthening our collective commitment to the BT community we love so much."

**Ka'ai and Rob Li, parents of Lia, '24, and Royce, '32**



"We participate in The BT Fund because we know it is important to do our part to support the many resources it takes to run a school as special as BT."

**Valerie and Casey Garrigan, parents of Liam, '25, Declan, '30, and Aiden, '27**



"Giving to The BT Fund sends a message that we not only support the school, but that we support one another. BT is a community, a second family really, and we can't think of a better place to support."

**Erica (Aaron), '97, and Steffon Bradford, parents of Olivia, '31, and Isaiah**



"We support The BT Fund because we know that excellence in education takes funding. Participating in The BT Fund is our family's opportunity to give back to a school that has given us so much."

**Robin and Doug Clark, parents of Molly, '22, and Jacob, '19**



"Our child's education is the most important investment we can make towards his future. We know Ahaan will be prepared for the world, thanks to the outstanding faculty guiding him through his educational journey."

**Priyanka Borah and Vikas Gulati, parents of Ahaan, '26**

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# Save the Date for



## FRIDAY, MAY 7 AND SATURDAY, MAY 8

Masked in mystery and draped in decadence, a masquerade is nothing short of magical. Dating back to the 15th century in Venice, Italy, masquerades were popular during the beginning of the Renaissance movement when art, beauty, and the imagination reigned. Equal parts refined and revelrous, there's something truly enchanting about a masquerade - an opportunity to wear a mask and transform into someone else, even for just a weekend!

Inspired by the art, beauty, and imagination of Brownell Talbot, this year's gala will be a truly historic event. Masquerade will feature an online auction paired with two in-person events: an intimate masquerade ball on Friday, May 7 and an outdoor adults-only carnival on Saturday, May 8. Holding two events on gala weekend will give the school the opportunity to control crowd size while also ensuring every member of the BT community has a chance to participate, whether in person or from a distance.

Guided by the leadership of co-chairs Sheila Christ and Fred Vakili (parents to Leila, x'10, and Cameron, '27) and Fatima and Farhan Khan (parents to Emaan, '23, and Zayd, '27), the steering committee is focused on the thoughtful planning of gala to allow for the safety of our community while still raising critical dollars for BT.

Masquerade will honor Debbie and Brian Wood who have been loyal supporters of Brownell Talbot since their son, Colesun, '19, enrolled as a kindergartner. Debbie served in countless leadership positions during her time at BT including Gala co-chair in 2012, BTPA co-president in 2014, and Booster Club co-president in 2016. Brian is the President and CEO of TransWood, Inc. and Debbie is very active in the Omaha community with leadership volunteer roles at many notable organizations.

Masquerade promises to be a unique and memorable weekend for the BT community! Visit [brownell.edu/gala](http://brownell.edu/gala) for more details and to purchase tickets.

Purchase tickets  
at [brownell.edu/gala](http://brownell.edu/gala)

### GALA LEADERSHIP

#### HONORARY CHAIRS

Debbie and Brian Wood

#### CO-CHAIRS

Sheila Christ and Fred Vakili  
Fatima and Farhan Khan

#### STEERING COMMITTEE

##### ADVERTISING

Amy Farha-Neary

##### DECORATIONS

Natalia Atchley, Chloe Firestone,  
Patra Pakieser, and Casie Schlueter

##### EXCEPTIONAL EVENTS

Gwenn Aspen and Kristin Saxena

##### FAMILY BASKETS

Valerie Garrigan, Kristi Gibbs,  
Angeline Larson, and Kelsey Tu

##### LIVE AUCTION

Danielle Brown and Deb Dodd

##### MAILINGS & PUBLICITY

Anna Lee Welch

##### RAFFLE

Christine and Josh Vollertsen

##### SILENT AUCTION

Kristin Barnes and Megan Harding

##### SPONSORSHIPS & UNDERWRITING

Fatima Basith, Laura Crosby, and  
Brady Gibson

##### STUDENT PROJECTS

Jenn Sherer



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# SPECIAL GIFTS

Like all nonprofits, Brownell Talbot invites the school community - both near and far - to support BT students, faculty, staff, and programs with annual tax-deductible gifts. Opportunities like The BT Fund and gala give donors the opportunity to give back to BT in meaningful ways, but there are occasions when donors come forward with a specific project or passion area in mind.

It is in these moments when passion and purpose collide and result in the funding of initiatives that benefit BT in unplanned ways. We thank our donor community for all the ways in which they give back to the school. We are grateful beyond measure!



## PERFORMANCE MOUNTAIN

Dr. Larry Widman of Performance Mountain spoke to the BT football and volleyball teams, coaches, and athletic department as a result of a gift from an athletics program supporter. In his time with the team, Dr. Widman spoke of the most common traits that have been shown to make teams successful and improve their overall mindset, commitment, and confidence.



## THEISEN POOL UPGRADES

Karen and James Nelson, grandparents of Henrik, '22, and Ingrid, '25, recently gifted the Theisen Pool with six adjustable back fins for the existing starter blocks. Adjustable fins help swimmers improve power and agility. This gift was made in honor of their late son, Jon Nelson. Their granddaughter Ingrid is a member of the swim team and their son Jeff is an assistant swim coach. The Brownell Talbot Booster Club also gifted the pool six touchpads, which are electronic timing devices used in swimming competitions.



## SAFE RETURN TO CAMPUS

As Brownell Talbot prepared to return to campus for the 2020-2021 academic year, additional safety measures needed to be addressed for the safety of students, faculty, and staff. These measures came as additional expenses to the school's budget. Through the generosity of several friends of the school, BT was able to purchase these items with limited effect on the annual budget. Some of the items include water fill stations to replace drinking fountains, air filters in classrooms, automatic flushers in urinals, additional cleaning supplies for every classroom in addition to campus-wide supplies, personal protective equipment, face shields for faculty, and multiple thermometers for temperature checks.

# The Future of BT'S CAMPUS

Whether it is a cozy nook to read or a dynamic space to collaborate, research shows that school facilities can have a significant impact on student health, behavior, engagement, and learning and teacher recruitment, retention, and commitment.

It is a truth that informed BT's decision to include Learning Environments as an actionable initiative under Pillar #1: The Brownell Talbot Experience of the 2019-2023 strategic plan. The task with that initiative is to "define and become the standard of excellence in learning environments, facilities, equipment, campus safety, and technologies within global education."

The first step in tackling this was to create a campus master plan to function as a roadmap for making physical, functional, and financial decisions with regard to BT's facilities. The school began the campus master plan process in February 2020, conducting campus tours, visioning sessions with students, faculty and staff, and parents, and in-depth data collection of how the school community currently uses campus. In January 2021, the campus master plan was unveiled to the BT community and met with enthusiastic support. The plan visibly reflects a world class educational experience, physically prioritizes a sense of community, and is designed with a forward-thinking world view.

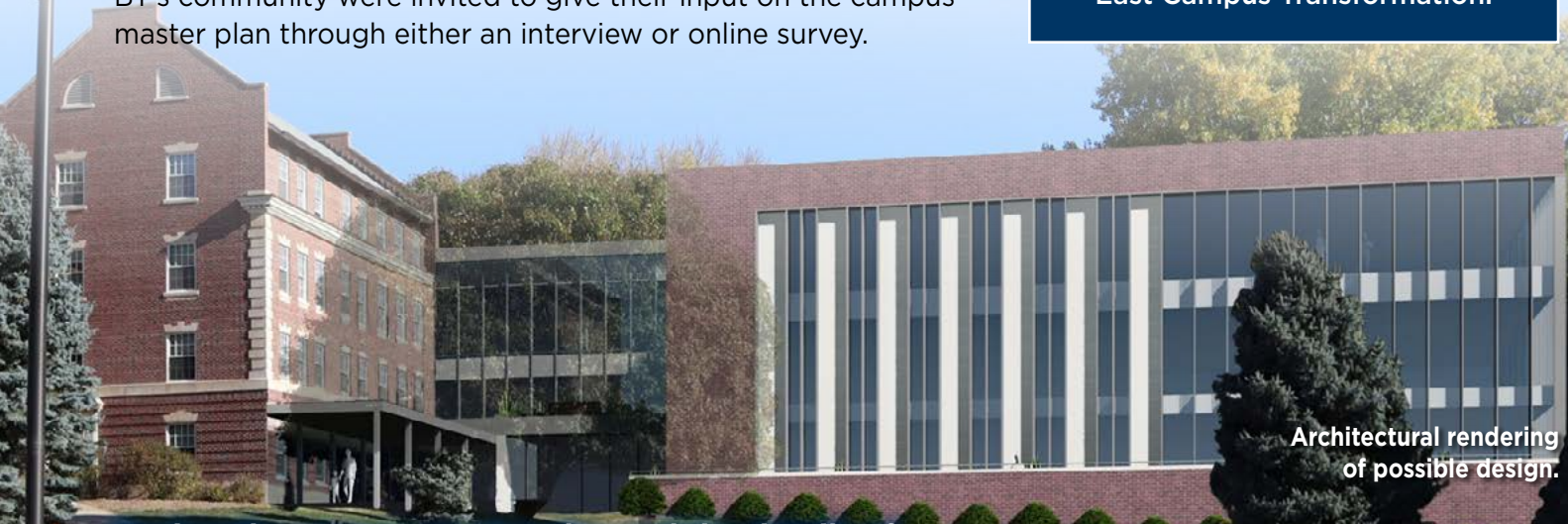
The school is currently concluding a planning study to test the feasibility of funding phase 1 of BT's campus master plan, which aims to transform the eastern portion of campus and fund critical endowment priorities. During the planning study, all members of BT's community were invited to give their input on the campus master plan through either an interview or online survey.



Architectural rendering of possible design.

## ▶ NEXT STEPS

The next step in realizing the vision set forth in BT's campus master plan is to analyze the information gathered during the planning study. This data will play a significant role in determining how quickly the school can move forward with implementing BT's East Campus Transformation.



Architectural rendering of possible design.

Review the campus master plan and the details of Phase 1: East Campus Transformation at [brownell.edu/masterplan](https://brownell.edu/masterplan).

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MISSION

# BT'S LEGACY

**Andrew Massey, '21**  
(Peter, '81, and Michelle Massey)

**Jonathan Massey, '23**  
(Peter, '81, and Michelle Massey)

**Corbett Lanum, '26**  
(Nicole, '98, and Wade Lanum)

**Jack Cohen, '23**  
(Mike, '87, and Karen Cohen)

**Leah Hamilton, '28**  
(Rebecca Hamilton, '90)

**Olivia Bradford, '31**  
(Erica, '97, and Steffon Bradford)

**Ben Lanum, '31**  
(Nicole, '98, and Wade Lanum)

## NOT PICTURED

Nathan Brown, '23 (Chuck, x'95, and Danielle Brown)

Eva Cohen, '26 (Mike, '87, and Karen Cohen)

Kimbo Hawkins, '34 (Kim, x'98, and Amy Hawkins)

Victoria Molai, '33 (Annie Linberg, '04, and Nabil Molai)

Isabella Molai, '35 (Annie Linberg, '04, and Nabil Molai)

Kaitlyn Scott, '21 (W. David, '81, and Lori Scott)



# STUDENTS

**Dylan Scott, '23**  
(W. David, '81, and Lori Scott)

**Riley Hawkins, '22**  
(Kim, x'98, and Amy Hawkins)

**Amelia Bell, '25**  
(Belinda Beavers, '87, and Shelby Bell)

**Addison Hawkins, '27**  
(Kim, x'98, and Amy Hawkins)

**Sonu Saxena, '27**  
(Shikhar, x'99, and Kristin Saxena)

**Dexter Clark, '26**  
(David, x'74, and Kate Clark)

**Miranda Clark, '29**  
(David, x'74, and Kate Clark)

**Shaan Saxena, '29**  
(Shikhar, x'99, and Kristin Saxena)

**Lia Saxena, '33**  
(Shikhar, x'99, and Kristin Saxena)

**Noli Marsh, '28**  
(Krystin, '96, and Joel Marsh)

**Sai Saxena, '31**  
(Shikhar, x'99, and Kristin Saxena)

# SEL Social Emotional Learning IN A COLLEGE PREP ENVIRONMENT

In any given school year, students are exposed to a variety of stressors. Some are normal and help students perform well - think deadlines and tests. However, it is not uncommon for high-achieving students to experience excessive stress. Brownell Talbot's counseling department is adept at helping students recognize and address these, so they were well-positioned when the COVID-19 pandemic provided a new baseline stressor as students work to maintain or improve upon their school performance while worrying about the health of their loved ones and themselves.

BT's counseling curriculum begins in Early Years in which students focus on naming emotions and learning how to handle them. Throughout Lower and Middle School it centers on understanding what social emotional learning is and the tools students can use to manage their emotions. As they get older, Middle and Upper School students' learning shifts to regulating emotions, fostering mutual respect and trust with their peers and adults, and embracing the support of the people in their lives.

At first glance, it may seem incongruent that a school that emphasizes academic rigor would devote classroom time across all grades to social emotional learning. However, in addition to emotional intelligence being key in developing healthy, well-adjusted humans, it is also a skillset sought after by colleges.

Director of College Counseling and Guidance Brianna Vander Vorst shared, "even elite colleges focus on emotions. They recognize that in a competitive and academically rigorous environment, students have to be happy and healthy to succeed. When students don't manage their emotional health and are intensely focused on academics, they let go of coping skills like sleeping and eating, which then create or compound academic problems."

This fall, BT juniors were feeling the weight of the pandemic, academic pressures, and the uncertainty of the college application process when they asked Vander Vorst and fellow counselor Jamie Beaner for additional strategies to manage stress. Vander Vorst and Beaner invited Julie Buscher-Brummer, '85, of Arbor Family Counseling to campus to meet with the junior class and dive deeper into these strategies.

"I am thankful I work in an environment where students are given a chance to build these skills in a safe environment," said Vander Vorst, "and I'm proud that they have the courage to share their fears and worries with peers and trusted adults who are in their corner."

As the pandemic has proven, there is no way to tell what the future may hold and what stressors it may bring, but BT students are better prepared to manage and overcome these challenges because of the work they have done with BT's counseling department.

*Catch up with Julie Buscher-Brummer, '85, on the facing page.*

**BT has partnered with Arbor Family Counseling to offer additional social emotional support for BT families during the pandemic. The partnership is intended to open the door to problem resolution for many different issues including, but not limited to, stress, managing change, and anxiety and depression.**

**Thanks to the generosity of a friend of the school, all students and families are eligible to participate in this program for free during the current academic year.**

# Alumni Spotlight

Julie Buscher-Brummer, Class of 1985



I work for Arbor Family Counseling, and I have been a counselor at Clarkson College for the last eight years. I recently came to BT to talk to the junior class about managing their current stress. It was so much fun to come back onto campus where I had so many positive memories. It was great to see the students and all their potential!

## **What led you to this career?**

My mom was a therapist and my dad has the biggest heart. I started working with adolescents first. I then worked with other populations like the homeless and healthcare professionals and now college students.

## **How has the pandemic changed your work life?**

The pandemic has impacted my work by not being able to meet with people face to face as much. In the spring all my counseling and presentations were done over Zoom or the phone. I have been meeting with a lot of people regarding their difficulties dealing with the pandemic, and I have been doing a lot more presentations about stress management.

## **Has working in healthcare during the pandemic taught you any life lessons?**

The life lesson that the pandemic has taught me is to be grateful and present in the moment.

## **What BT teacher or experience had the biggest impact on you?**

It is hard to say which teacher or activity had the greatest impact on me from BT because there were so many great moments and teachers. I feel so fortunate to be able to look back and remember so many wonderful teachers and memories.

## **Last book you read?**

The Buddha Mind. It's a fascinating look into the neuroscience of mindfulness and happiness.

## **What's on your bucket list?**

Scuba diving in Australia.

## **What advice would you give to current BT students?**

I would tell current BT students to come back and visit your teachers after you graduate. You might not realize now how important they are to you.

## **How did BT help prepare you for what you are doing now?**

BT helped prepare me to be a counselor because I never felt restricted - I never felt there was a limit on whatever it was I wanted to do or achieve as long as I was willing to put in the energy and the time. I try to help the students at Clarkson see the same thing in themselves. We are only limited by our own thinking.

## **What do you do for fun? How do you de-stress?**

I have ridden horses since I could walk and I still spend a lot of time with horses. I love paddle boarding and anything around the water. I love to play sports with my boys and spend time with my family. I also practice yoga and mindfulness to help balance daily stress. And I love to travel but lately that's been hard so I had to do more yoga, HA!

# ALUMNI NEWS AND NOTES

The Alumni News and Notes section of *Fireside* celebrates your recent accomplishments.

Share information about births, weddings, anniversaries, career moves, retirements, and life-changing experiences! We publish alumni submissions and any other news we receive from friends, employers, and media sources.

**Neely, '69, and Mary Kountze** are pleased to announce the birth of their first grandchild.

**Reid Rise, '16**, graduated from the Peter Kiewit Institute of UNO with a degree in computer engineering. He is working for Lockheed Martin as an embedded systems engineer.

**Eros Shreve, '15**, earned a bachelor's degree in international fashion buying management with first degree honors in 2019 and is now pursuing a master's degree in public policy at The Hertie School in Berlin, Germany.

**Lauren Zimmerman, '15**, is the lead graduate student (PhD track) at the University of Nebraska Omaha's Department of Homeland Security National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center (NCITE). Zimmerman has been working in the lab since May 2017, aiding Dr. Gina Lignon's research on terrorism.

**Chris Ames, '12**, started a new position as marketing coordinator for City+Ventures.

**TJ Kotouc, x'12**, married Corinne Delius on November 28, 2020.

**Caty (Adderton) Moser, '06**, and husband Matt, welcomed their second son, Theodore "Theo" Adderton Moser. Caty shared, "His big brother, Liam (3), is very smitten and we are very grateful for our growing family."

**Andrew Hrvol, '06**, is a new board member for the Gift of Adoption - Illinois Chapter in Chicago. Hrvol works for KPMG US as a Senior Associate, Human Capital Advisory.

**Congratulations to Healey, '03**, and Rachel Cypher on the birth of their son, Theo James.

**Melitta (Anderson) Riley, '03**, and her husband welcomed daughter Olivia Marie Riley on October 27, 2020.

**Congratulations to Nick, '02**, and Kassie Mayo on the birth of their son, Theodore Jason Oluwamayowa Mayo, on October 14. Nick and Kassie shared that "...Eloise has loved every minute of being a big sister and Teddy is a very happy, chubby baby!" Kenny, '02, and Kristina (Brown) Vakoc, '02, are Teddy's godparents.



**Jason Seiple, '01**, shared this recent update, "After nine years with Spirit Airlines, I have now joined Swissport, a worldwide airport services provider, and moved to the Dallas/Ft. Worth, Texas area as general manager of Ground Handling and Fueling Operations at DFW, overseeing the ground operations of customers such as Qatar Airways, Japan Air Lines, UPS, and several others."

Congratulations to **Matt Drake, '01**, and **Ben Turner, '01**! Matt and Ben started and co-captain a virtual cycling team, the "Zwift Crushin Daddies." Their team finished 8th in the inaugural season of the Zwift Racing League's America's-West Division C.

**Robert Weber, '99**, recently published his book, *Blood, Flesh, and Tears*.

## FRIENDS

**Jan Lund**, former BT French teacher, recently published her novel, *Sari and Cass*.

## ALUMNI ON CAMPUS



**Linda Liu, '13**, assisted with virtual mock interviews for the Class of 2021.



**Wellesley Michael, '14**, zoomed into the third grade recently to talk about her role as a field manager for a local campaign.



**Leigh Gustafson, '12, Haley Mathews '12, and Julie Rose Zukaitis, x'12**, went for a walk around the neighborhood while home for the holidays and stopped by the BT sign to say hi!

## IN MEMORIAM

### ALUMNI

Carolyn Kreycik Engler, '49  
*D. September 15, 2020*

Tracy (Schairer) Boetel, '85, Survived by husband Geody Boetel, '85  
*D. August 2020*

Sally (Davis) Morehouse, '57  
*D. July 8, 2020*

### FRIENDS

Peggy Naro, BT kindergarten teacher from 1994 to 1999. Survived by daughter Amanda Naro, x'03 and son Mike Naro, x'00.  
*D. December 17, 2020*

Robert Krohn, BT Foundation Board member in the 1990s. Survived by son Rob Krohn, '87.  
*D. December 12, 2020*

Sherolyn (Sherry) Pelton, BT English and music teacher and Fine Arts Department chair from the mid-70s to mid-80s. Survived by daughter, Theresa Pelton, '80, and son, Marc Pelton, '86.  
*D. December 2020*

Kathy Abel, survived by husband Dr. Robert Abel, former BT Headmaster, and step-daughter Laura Abel, '83.  
*D. November 28, 2020*

H. David Neely, survived by wife Nancee (Peterson) Neely, '50.  
*D. November 17, 2020*

Jody Fike, survived by son John Helme, '81  
*D. November 11, 2020*

Leo "Jace" Anderson, survived by daughter Katie (Anderson) McCarville, '05.  
*D. October 9, 2020*

Randy Harrach, survived by daughter Hannah Harrach, '18, and wife Sheri Harrach, former BT English teacher.  
*D. August 1, 2020*

Alan Simon, survived by granddaughters Talia Simon, '12, and Ellie Simon, x'18 and daughter-in-law Stacy Simon, former member BT Board of Trustees.  
*D. July 11, 2020*

Bruce Simon. During their time as BT parents, Stacy, a past Brownell Talbot Board of Trustee member, and Bruce had a longstanding tradition of supporting BT students, specifically the BT Booster Club. Among his many survivors are his daughters Talia Simon, '12 and Ellie Simon, x'18; and wife, Stacy.  
*D. February 17, 2021*

Tony Seina, survived by wife, Mary (Donahoo) Seina, x'59, and daughter, Mimi Gleason Post, x'86.  
*D. July 6, 2020*

# A Page in Time

On May 13, 1999, the school held a groundbreaking ceremony to kick off the construction of the new addition to Worthington Hall, major renovations to the existing Worthington Hall and Swanson Auditorium, and the addition of the fifth and sixth grade and Lower School classrooms. The 2000-2001 school year was an exciting time for the students, faculty and staff, and families to be the first to experience the updates. A formal dedication ceremony was held on April 19, 2001.



## LET'S CONNECT!

### *Feeling social?*

Follow us on Instagram @BrownellTalbotSchool and on Facebook @BrownellTalbotAlumni

### *Looking to network?*

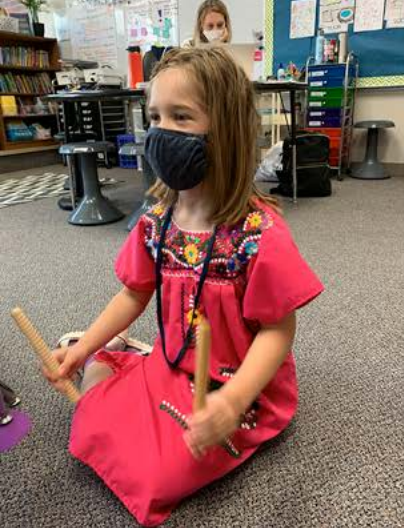
Join the Brownell Talbot College Preparatory School Alumni group on LinkedIn.

### *New contact information?*

Is your mail going to your parents' address? It's time to update the school at [brownell.edu/hello](http://brownell.edu/hello).

### *Help us connect with lost alumni.*

Visit [brownell.edu/lost-alumni](http://brownell.edu/lost-alumni)



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by purchasing raffle tickets  
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**Drawing takes place at gala on May 8.  
Need not be present to win!**

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