

Innovative New School and Residential Campus Meets Distinct Needs of Autism Community

Toni Pergolin 23 March 2017



In January of 2018, as many will be making resolutions to keep in the new year, Bancroft will be following through on a resolution it made more than a decade ago. Creating a new campus for its namesake Bancroft School and pediatric residential programs that meets the distinct needs of the children the organization serves today was an imperative.

When the new campus in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey opens—recently named the Raymond & Joanne Welsh Campus—more than 260 children will begin a new era in the history of Bancroft. They will be the first to learn, grow and

progress on the campus which was designed expressly for them and those in generations to come.

The \$75 million campus project will be home to The Bancroft School, the Lindens Center for Autism pediatric residential programs, and a center for enrichment, recreation, family resources and professional development. Built on 80 acres, the campus represents the largest expansion in Bancroft history, one that the organization views as vital to its future.

“These children and their families should expect a school and facilities to meet their child’s individual needs and help them overcome their challenges, one that provides the ideal backdrop to Bancroft’s expertise in special education and therapeutic interventions and supports to enable them to live life to its fullest potential,” said Toni Pergolin, Bancroft President and CEO.

The current school and campus pediatric programs is in Haddonfield, New Jersey, where the school was started 134 years ago by Margaret Bancroft, a school teacher and ultimately a pioneer who saw potential in the children who were marked as different.



Bancroft continues this commitment today and has evolved into one of the most recognized special education and residential treatment programs in the Philadelphia/South Jersey region.

Over the years, The Bancroft School grew, residential services were provided and the organization began to provide residential and day programs for adults and provide rehabilitation to people recovering from brain injury. Today, Bancroft is a \$140 million-per-year nonprofit human services and healthcare organization providing essential services and supports for more than 2,000 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and those in need of neurological rehabilitation.

QUICK COMPARISON:

Haddonfield Campus	Mount Laurel Campus
19 Acres	80 Acres
124,000 sq ft	165,112 sq ft
224 students	264 students
66 on-campus residents	74 on-campus residents
504 employees on campus	536 employees on campus
315 parking spaces	615 parking spaces

As Bancroft staff and a volunteer committee began to dig through piles of relics in the basement of Lullworth, a historic building on its current campus, they discovered the last will & testament of Margaret Bancroft that spelled out her vision for the future.

Her vision was for The Bancroft School to continue after her death and "grow in importance and usefulness and become a model of excellence," that The Bancroft School "shall be extended, and the School enlarged and perfected by the erection of new and properly equipped buildings, the employment of skilled physicians, instructors and teachers, so that as many as may be, may receive the benefits of its instruction."

"What a find! Her words, her vision reinforced our belief in providing the best possible services and environment for the children and adolescents in our care. Beyond that, though, we were inspired by the children we serve and their families, our special education teachers, team of clinicians, direct support staff, nurses and program

leadership to think beyond, to reimagine what we can offer and who we can serve," said Pergolin.

For Bancroft, this campus represents much more than a relocation of The Bancroft School and Lindens Center for Autism. Rather, the organization and its leadership determined that the campus could play a role in the lives of families other than those whose children are enrolled in The Bancroft School.

First, the new facilities will be on par with the excellence of Bancroft's programs and the passion of its faculty and staff. Students will learn and grow in specially conceived classrooms outfitted with smart technology and software, therapy nooks and furniture to meet the individual needs of each student. Wide hallways with de-escalation and sensory nooks, enhanced music, art and dance studios, a food service teaching kitchen, vocational and life skills training environments, and tons of natural light are highlights of the school design and offering.

Students at The Bancroft School come from every county in New Jersey as well as from throughout greater Philadelphia and other states. One of the hallmarks of the school is the guiding principle that each child has his or her own distinct abilities and challenges, requiring an individualized, holistic approach combined with innovation supports to provide the best possible atmosphere for each student to learn, thrive and reach his or her fullest potential.

The Lindens Center for Autism, including the Lindens Neurobehavioral program and Campus Residences, is centered on homes specifically designed to form a neighborhood where friendship and fun can be at the forefront of progress in learning daily life skills.

In addition to more classrooms and residences for children, more space enables Bancroft to offer a diverse menu of programs in demand and often missing in the lives of children and families in the broader autism and special needs community. A campus activity center will be home to an activity pool for water safety, swim lessons and sensory activities, a gymnasium and exercise facilities, indoor play and sensory spaces, and studios for enrichment, recreation and socialization programs.

Families are core to Bancroft's holistic student-centered model, so the campus features common areas and play spaces for families to enjoy time with their children, as well as a center for family and sibling resources.

Through the Bancroft Training Institute, which already partners with several of the region's universities, Bancroft will continue its tradition of training clinical and support staff.

An on-site medical suite for the day-to-day nursing services and desensitization therapies is also envisioned as the ideal partnership opportunity for regional hospital specialists to see students and others and provide

wraparound care.

Finally, Bancroft is leaving 10 acres undeveloped for the time being to enable the next expansion or partnership opportunity to germinate.

In the fall, Bancroft School students will begin to visit their new school and those in residence and their families will tour their new bedrooms as they begin the transition to a new environment. By January, the Raymond & Joanne Welsh Campus will be home to Bancroft's pediatric programs and a pivotal regional resource where children and families feel welcomed and a part of a community.

About the author

Toni Pergolin, MA, CPA has been the chief executive officer of Bancroft since 2005, and has focused on the continued growth, diversification and sustainability projections for the organization, launching the largest expansion in Bancroft's 133-year history with the construction of the Bancroft Campus at Mount Laurel, which is set to be completed in January 2018. Prior to joining Bancroft, she worked at the University of Pennsylvania Health System for 14 years in various positions, including chief financial officer for Pennsylvania Hospital. In December of 2016, Ms. Pergolin received the Campbell Soup Extraordinary Leadership Award and was also awarded the first Corporate/Business Award by Maria's Women United.

In 2015, Ms. Pergolin received the Philadelphia Cornerstone Award by SmartCEO Magazine, was recognized as one of the Top Women in Business by SNJ Business People, and was named one of the Power 50 - SJ's Most Influential MEN and Women by SJ Biz. She was recognized as one of 25 female CEO's honored by SmartCEO with the Brava! Award for outstanding leadership in 2012. In 2011, she was named one of the Women on the Move by Main Line Today and received the Alice Paul Equality Award for advancing women's equality. In 2008, she was named one of Philadelphia's Business Journal's Women of Distinction, based on her professional accomplishments, community involvement and other achievements.