
BETHESDA-CHEVY CHASE HIGH SCHOOL

While Washington is often looked upon as an area of transients, with residents coming and going, particularly in the suburbs, many families in our town have sent two generations to Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School.

The high school began in 1926 when the ninth grade was added to an eight-grade school on Wilson Lane in the semi-rural community of Bethesda. In 1928, with more grades added, it moved to a new building in the Leland section of Chevy Chase where the community center stands today. At that time, there were only two other high schools in southern Montgomery County—Rockville and Takoma-Silver Spring. The first graduating class in 1929 had 12 members from Bethesda, Chevy Chase, Somerset, and Kensington.

The original two-story building on the Leland site fronted on 44th Street, with the main entrance and administration in the middle and classrooms extending on either side to Willow Lane and Elm Street. Behind this wing was a facility which included a gymnasium and auditorium. When the huge folding doors behind the stage were opened, spectators could sit in the auditorium and watch basketball and other indoor events in the gymnasium. Below the gym at the Elm Street end were areas for vocational courses such as mechanical drawing, wood and sheet metal work, and automotive repair. Outdoor activities were conducted at the east end of the property.

As population increased in the area, B-CC outgrew that school building. A new one was built on the old Watkins farm and opened in 1936, at about the time

East-West Highway was completed, linking Bethesda with Silver Spring.

Only three high school grades were moved to the new school building. The Leland site became a junior high school, with grades 7, 8, and 9. In 1963, a new five-story junior high building was constructed at the east end of the site. It was designed for 800 students, with 28 classrooms, a gymnasium, and a cafeteria. The earlier structure was demolished, and an area for outdoor activities—including tennis courts for the neighborhood—was established in that space. In 1979, the 9th grade was moved to B-CC, and at the end of the 1980-81 school year the school was closed because of declining enrollment. The student body was merged into what became Westland Intermediate School at 5501 Massachusetts Avenue. The Leland building was razed in 1988 to make way for the new Leland Community Center.

Over the years, as professionals and government officials filled the area and sent their children to B-CC, the high school earned a national reputation for academic excellence which it maintains today.

During World War II, students were trained to do civilian jobs for companies short-staffed by the war effort. Students also helped the Red Cross and grew a victory garden on the school's front lawn. After the war, at the instigation of Principal Thomas Pyle and a few B-CC teachers, Montgomery College opened at B-CC in September 1946 with nearly 200 students, many of them returning servicemen. Their classes were held in the



Homes on 44th Street and the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School were new in 1929.

PHOTO BY M. AND R.B. WARREN; COURTESY, MRS. WILLIAM C. O'BRIEN

evening at B-CC until the College moved to its Takoma Park campus in 1950.

Over the years, B-CC has had more than its share of Merit Scholars and Rhodes Scholars. Its graduates have gone to all the best colleges all over the country and have won many thousands of dollars of scholarship money. Its faculty has been outstanding. Its more than 30 sports teams—the Battlin' Barons and Baronettes—have more than held their own. Its school spirit has rarely wavered. And the school has changed in recent years—remarkably.

B-CC has become cosmopolitan, and as buildings have been added so have innovative programs to deal with a diverse student body. With changing demographics, B-CC had become by 1989 an urban school with about 40% minority enrollment.

While most of these students are blacks or Hispanics born in this country, a growing number are either the children of diplomats and other foreign nationals working here or refugees from such countries as El Salvador, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The flags of more than 60 nations hang in the B-CC halls, in honor of almost 300 students. And nearly 100 foreign and American students belong to the school's international club.

There is a special intensive program that gives English language training to students of limited English proficiency. Teachers in the program provide a supportive environment that fosters academic achievement as well as sound study skills, and thus helps these students move into the mainstream.

There are now 11 advanced placement courses at B-CC, and courses are given in French, German, Spanish, Latin, Russian, and Chinese. Very few high schools in the country give courses in Russian or Chinese. And B-CC was one of 30 schools throughout the United States chosen to be the first ever to participate in a Soviet-American student exchange. In 1989, when the program began, 11 students from B-CC went to study at Moscow School #45 for four weeks, after 15 Soviet students spent three weeks studying at B-CC.

There are dozens of student clubs and organizations including S.A.D.D.—Students Against Drunk Driv-



Leland Junior High School's Elm Street entrance in June 1981

PHOTO BY TOWN OF CHEVY CHASE

ing—and S.H.O.P.—Students Helping Other People. The school's Recreation Club, under the enthusiastic guidance of History teacher Ed Mullaney, draws all segments of the student body into a myriad of activities and is one of only two such clubs in Montgomery County affiliated with the County Recreation Department. B-CC student publications have won national awards. B-CC music groups have traveled as far as England and New England, New Orleans and Montreal, to perform. And some of the school's brightest students have won the Superbowl of the TV program "It's Academic"—emerging first among secondary schools in the Washington-Baltimore area five times in 12 years in this battle of wits and knowledge.

Despite its variety, despite the fact that many of its students have lost as much as five years of schooling because of disruption in such home countries as Vietnam, the vast majority of B-CC graduates—currently 85%—continue school after they get their diplomas. Principal Nancy Powell attributes this high percentage to the school's inspiring tradition of academic excellence and achievement.

A school publication sums up B-CC as follows: "A comprehensive public senior high school, B-CC has a long tradition of challenging academics and innovative programs. A professional staff of 113 aided by 57 supporting services personnel teaches an international student body that strongly identifies with the local community." The description is headlined: "TRADITION, DIVERSITY, EXCELLENCE."

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