



BENSON TECH

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The Official Newsletter of the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA), September 2020 Edition

November PPS bond to include Benson Tech modernization

This November's ballot in Portland, Oregon, will include a \$1.2 billion bond measure for further improving Portland Public Schools (PPS) buildings, including finishing modernization of Benson Tech. An approved bond measure in 2017 that provided for the rebuilding of Lincoln, Madison, Benson High Schools and Kellogg Middle School fell short of enough money for the actual rebuilding of Benson Tech for several reasons. While further planning and design for Benson Tech has been done with the 2017 bond money, passage of this 2020 bond measure will improve PPS' financial situation for district-wide improvement of its high school buildings.

In broad terms, the proposed \$1.2 billion bond measure includes three parts:

1. Renovate Jefferson High School, plan for the modernization of Cleveland and Wilson High Schools, and finish reconstruction of Benson that will be starting in the summer of 2021.
2. Make a variety of health and safety projects among many of PPS' public school buildings.
3. Make improvements in PPS education for people with disabilities.

For more information about Benson Tech's modernization, visit the [school's page](#) in the [School Building Improvement Bond section](#) of the PPS website. The animated flythrough of the design for Benson Tech's campus linked there is especially interesting.



Above: Design visualization of updated Benson Tech entrance (Image from Portland Public Schools [PPS] Informational Flyer, 2019)

Benson Tech modernization remains on schedule

The modernization of the Benson Tech campus buildings remains on schedule, according to the Portland Public Schools (PPS) School Modernization Team, even while COVID-19 has changed so many things in 2020. Upgrading and preservation of historic parts and reconstruction of the rest will begin in the summer of 2021. The modernization is expected to take three school years and is expected to be ready for 1,700 students for the start of the 2024 School Year. During construction, Benson's classes will be held at the former Marshall High School in SE Portland beginning in the fall of 2021.

The Benson Tech Campus Master Plan was formalized by the PPS Board of Education in December 2019. The district's School Modernization team has continued to work with Bassetti Architects in developing more detailed plans and acquiring permits and approvals (including an OK from Portland's Historic Building Commission), and a construction firm, Andersen Construction, has been hired to work with the architect. An assessment of conditions of parts of the old building to be saved has been done, as well as inventories completed of equipment to be abandoned and new equipment to be purchased before the move. (For those interested, descriptions and floor plans of the modernized Benson Tech can be found in the August 2019 Alumni Newsletter and on [PPS' webpage](#).)

As discussed in the companion article in this newsletter, "November PPS bond" located to the left, the proposed bond measure will contain funds to finish the Benson Tech modernization. Should the bond measure fail, the PPS Board of Education is "on record" to use a "Full Faith and Credit Bond" to complete the Benson Tech modernization that was approved by the voters in May 2017. Pragmatically and realistically, a lot is at stake in doing otherwise given the investment of money and public involvement in the design work that has been completed to date.

(continued on Page 2)

November PPS bond,
continued from front cover

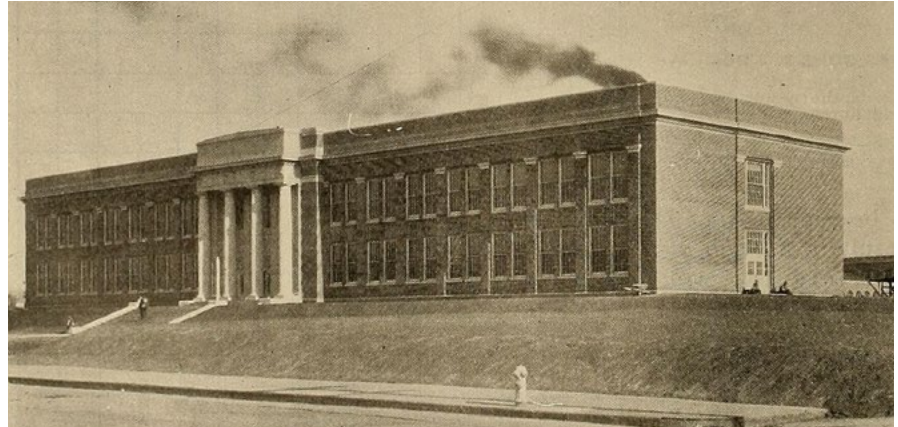
In the event that the 2020 bond measure does not pass, PPS has indicated that it will complete the Benson Tech Modernization by a "Full Faith and Credit Bond." The BPHSAA and individual members have been active participants in the planning and design work to date, and we encourage Benson Tech alumni in Portland to vote for the bond measure to continue to move Benson's modernization forward.

Editor's Note

As noted throughout this newsletter, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected so many activities.

The BPHSAA Board of Directors has continued to meet virtually each month and remains committed to keeping the Benson Tech alumni electronically informed during these unusual times through newsletters like this one and the BPHSAA website.

*Thanks are due to **Rob Johns**, **Rachael Lizio Katzen Kuryunny**, and **Max Baker** for their articles, as well as the one from **Sig Unander** (Simon Benson's great-grandson). And a very special thanks to **Connie Mar**, our ever-dependable newsletter designer.
-Dale Bajema, Editor*



Above: Benson Tech in 1917 (image from *The Journal of Electricity*).

Benson Tech modernization, *continued from front cover*

In anticipation of Benson Tech's students arriving in the fall of 2021, needed changes and additions at the former Marshall High School will be made this coming spring. While Marshall's campus does not include shops and technical environments like Benson Tech, the school's existing career technical education (CTE) and multipurpose spaces will be upgraded and brand new equipment acquired to meet most of Benson Tech's interim instructional needs related to health occupations, digital communications and some of its construction and manufacturing programs. An auxiliary building is being built for the automotive shop and other programs that use heavier pieces of equipment.

During the three years at Marshall, Benson Tech's academic programs and athletic programs will benefit from the upgrades at Marshall since its closure as a high school in 2012. (Franklin, Grant and Madison students, in turn, used the building while their schools were recently modernized.) Given Marshall High School's non-central city location, PPS is making plans to provide special transportation from more distant parts of Portland, such as the Roosevelt and Wilson areas. It should also be mentioned for Tech Show fans, preliminary thought has already been given to continue Benson's Tech Show traditions while at Marshall High.

Curtis Wilson, Benson Tech's principal, has just recently obtained approval from PPS for a designated vice principal of construction to handle the details around the transfer of equipment, readiness for Marshall opening in the fall of 2021 to Benson Tech students, and continued construction/school move details. This vice principal of construction will be Dan Malone, who recently retired as vice principal of Roosevelt High School. Dan has experience with the same architect, Bassetti Architects, from when Roosevelt went through its renovation, so he brings both the student and functional aspects of a school construction environment to support the Benson Tech renovation. A North Portland native, Dan is a 1977 graduate of Central Catholic and went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the University of Portland Bachelors before going straight into teaching/coaching at Roosevelt. Dan was also a strong guide for a young Curtis Wilson, serving as his track coach while Curtis was attending Roosevelt High School.

Benson Tech starts school year online

Benson Tech is starting the 2020 school year online, as will the rest of Portland Public Schools (PPS). This fall, Benson Tech has 1,063 students (256 of which are 9th graders).

Following the State of Oregon's guidance regarding the SARS-CoV-2 virus (causing COVID-19 disease) pandemic, PPS has decided almost all of its classes will be virtual until the end of the first quarter on November 5, 2020. A decision will be made in October whether it will be safe to resume in-person learning this fall or wait until the beginning of the Spring second semester in January. All sports are being postponed until late December.

As part of this online learning, Benson Tech and other PPS high schools will have four class periods instead of eight per day, thus intensifying learning so that a year's material can be covered in one semester. Periods 1-4 are being taught this fall; periods 5-8 will be covered in the second semester. The State of Oregon has mandated usual comprehensive testing for the 2020 school year. (This past spring during the initial COVID-19 closing, teachers were allowed to simply award a "complete/incomplete.") There will be no change in graduation requirements for the Class of 2021.

While the virtual teaching of academic subjects will be somewhat difficult online; hands-on career technical education (CTE) is even more so. The State of Oregon and PPS officials are exploring whether it may be safe to have some limited small group in-school instruction for some CTE classes, especially when it is possible to socially distance in large shop areas. Such classes would be voluntary for both the students and teachers, since it does introduce risk of exposure. In the meantime, PPS is putting together CTE learning kits to assist Benson Tech's and other CTE teachers to conduct classes online.

In the meantime, Benson Tech teachers and Principal Curtis Wilson are continuing to enhance, deepen, and improve the virtual CTE teaching efforts they started this past spring. This is important because many of Benson Tech's students selected the school for the hands-on CTE curriculum and experience. CTE experiences also allow students to learn skills used to gain apprenticeships and trade jobs directly out of high school — a path alternative to or in conjunction with higher education.

A state-wide athletic schedule is being developed for all high school sports. At this time, the expectation is that fall sports will begin on Feb. 22, 2021; winter sports on Dec. 28, 2020; and spring sports will begin on April 19, 2021 and end on June 26. With the schedules likely to



Above: Benson Tech students learning in the virtual classroom for fall term 2020.

overlap, many athletes may have to decide in which sports they will participate this year. As more details are known, the BPHSAA will post information on its [webpage](#).

Earlier in the summer, PPS had thought it would be safe to resume in-person instruction in a hybrid manner with half of the students attending school Monday and Tuesday, deep cleaning the school on Wednesday, and the other half of the students attending Thursday and Friday. Classrooms could be configured to hold roughly 8-10 students at a time with other safety measures taken elsewhere in the school building. By early August, the State of Oregon concluded with the incidence of the virus well above the accepted guidelines, in-person instruction would not be wise. You can find more about school opening plans on the "[Planning for the 2020-2021 School Year](#)" page located in the Oregon Department of Education Health Safety and Wellness section on the State of Oregon website.

As with so many things during this pandemic, as evidence and data accumulate, and more is known, there may be further changes in Benson Tech's 2020-21 school year.

2020 Benson Tech Alumni scholarship recipients announced

Four Benson Tech seniors were awarded \$2,300 scholarships from the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Scholarship Fund this past spring to continue their education after graduation: **John Anthony** and **Nathaly Jiminez** (both computer engineering majors), **Alexandra Frision** (health occupations), and **Brandon Torres-Celis** (Automotive).

The BPHSAA and all former graduates salute you and wish you great success!

These scholarships were funded by the annual earnings of a growing collection of money contributed by Benson Tech alumni and safely invested in the Oregon Community Foundation. From the beginning, the fund's objective has been to help Benson Tech graduates go to community colleges and/or focused technical

training programs. More than 100 Benson seniors have been so assisted.

Since 1991, when the fund was set up by the Classes of 1939, 1940 and 1941, hundreds of former Benson Tech alumni have contributed in small and large amounts. A few classes have donated at their reunions as a class. As the fund has grown, larger scholarships have been made possible. Please consider contributing to the success of Benson Tech graduates and making a contribution (\$25 or more) online on the [Scholarship Fund](#) page of the BPHSAA website or by check to The Oregon Community Foundation, 1221 SW Yamhill St., Suite 100, Portland Oregon 97205 (note in the memo line – Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Scholarship Fund).

The Simon Benson Fund

By Sig Unander (Great-grandson of Simon Benson)

Benson Polytechnic High School ... Portland's iconic "Benson Bubbler" fountains ... the Simon Benson House ... Benson State Park ... these treasured public assets exemplify the vision and generosity of their namesake, a poor Norwegian immigrant who dared to dream big.

Simon Benson's life was a cross-section of Oregon's economic development. Starting as a small independent logger, he revolutionized the Northwest timber industry, pioneering steam powered logging and perfecting huge seagoing log rafts. He led the movement to build good roads and served as the first Chair of the Oregon State Highway Commission. Benson was honored as Oregon Citizen of the Year at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco.

Although Benson never completed elementary school, he placed a high value on academic education and career training in trade crafts. He envisioned a public school in Portland that would provide both. In 1917, he donated funds for and founded Benson Polytechnic High School.

A quarter century after Benson's death in 1942, his grandson, former State Treasurer Sig Unander, Sr., established the Simon Benson Fund, Inc. The Fund was incorporated on March 9, 1965 as a nonprofit corporation to operate "exclusively for charitable and educational pur-

poses within the State of Oregon." Its bylaws authorized the funding of academic scholarships and other charitable functions, in keeping with the value that Benson placed on education and opportunity.

The Fund's board decided that its assets — including donations and investment income — should be used primarily to finance annual awards of college and university scholarships to deserving Benson Tech High School seniors upon their graduation. A tradition evolved in which awards were made to the recipients as part of a school graduation assembly every spring.

One exception to the policy of providing funds for scholarships for Benson Tech students was made during the restoration of the Simon Benson House in 1999. Funds were donated that financed the installation of a Benson Bubbler fountain by the house at its new home on the Portland State University campus.

Through the years the Simon Benson Fund's asset portfolio, managed by a private investment firm, grew significantly, enhancing its mission of helping talented Benson Tech seniors finance their higher education with scholarship awards in memory of the school's founder. In 2007, responsibility for managing the Fund's assets and granting annual awards was assumed by the Oregon Community Foundation, a large nonprofit corporation headquartered in Portland.



Above: Simon Benson with an iconic Benson Bubbler fountain. (Image from the Oregon Historical Society.)



Images from Portland Public Schools, Benson Tech Football and Benson Athletics (Flickr and Twitter)

A message from TechPride Volunteers and the Benson Tech Boosters

By Elizabeth O'Malley, Karen Peters, Lisa Yanase, Amber Johnson, and Wendy Farber

The Tech Pride Volunteers and Benson Tech Boosters are a group of parents, guardians, family members, friends and alumni who come together to help support the Benson Tech community. You can get involved by joining our email list at TechPrideVolunteers@gmail.com, where we'll share occasional updates and volunteer opportunities. Our goal is to make it possible for everyone to support Benson Tech in a way that works for them.

The three pillars of our community of volunteers are supporting are:

Student Life: We (usually) help with dances/student activities, partner with a local non-profit to supply free food to students week, and staff tables during various school events. We would love ideas about how we can build community remotely for the things that make high school fun.

Faculty and Staff: We provide treats and meals during conferences, teacher appreciation week, and other activities. We would love ideas about how to support these essential workers as they navigate a whole new way to practice their craft.

Student Athletes through Benson TechBoosters (a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) organization): In our first year (2019–2020), the Benson TechBoosters raised more than \$6,000 through fundraising events, concessions, and spirit gear sales. Proceeds are distributed to teams for extra training gear and other support. Even if we can't

get together in person during the pandemic and Benson Tech's closure, we can still raise money for our student athletes for when they return just by taking a few minutes to register for:

- Amazon Smiles – Remember to log in under Amazon Smiles each time you shop
- Fred Meyer Community Reward points – Select “Benson TechBoosters” and then do your usual shopping.

These reward programs will send 0.5% of your purchases straight to the TechBoosters account, which are disbursed to our teams quarterly. Please to sign up for these awards programs to raise funds without spending an extra penny!

In this year of innovation it's important to keep our community strong to maintain the Benson Tech legacy. To that end, we welcome your time, energy, and ideas! Please feel free to reach out to us at TechPrideVolunteers@gmail.com with any questions, ideas, or new ways you'd like to get involved. We especially need help with website development.

The BPHSAA appreciates the efforts of the Tech Pride Volunteers and Benson Tech Boosters. We support their efforts and encourage our alumni to get involved. More information can be found at the following websites:

- Tech Pride Volunteers Building Community – techpridevolunteers.org
- Benson TechBoosters – bensontechboosters.org (email at bensontechboosters@gmail.com)

Update on COVID-19 impacts on BPHSAA events and activities

All 2020 BPHSAA-sanctioned events have been postponed or canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to hosting alumni gatherings once it is safe to do so. For up-to-date information regarding class reunions and BPHSAA events, please check both the [BPHSAA website](#) and class-specific Facebook pages.

Is your class planning a reunion in 2021 (rescheduled or otherwise)? If so, please contact info@bensontechalumni.com with the details, including the date, location, ticket price, and organizer contact information.

The BPHSAA can help you to spread the word about your event through our alumni emails and social media accounts, and will even post an announcement on our webpage!

Attention members of Benson Tech Class of 1971:

Gene Nelson recently contacted the BPHSAA to see if any of his classmates are interested in, or are already in the process of planning, a 50th reunion. If so, please reach out to Gene directly at Benson.Tech71@gmail.com, and be sure to keep the BPHSAA in the loop!

Summer 2020 BPHSAA milestones



Left: Bob Golden (Class of 1937) enjoys some Benson Tech “swag” from the BPHSAA to mark his 101st birthday. **Above:** Bud Lewis (Class of 1939) in June in Duniway Park in SW Portland, working to reach his goal of raising \$100,000 for the Sunshine Division by walking 100 laps in time for his 100th birthday. Bud’s effort was featured in *The Oregonian*. (Image captured from [OregonLive YouTube video](#).)

Thanks to outreach from a thoughtful employee of Regency Park Assisted Living Community, BPHSAA Chair **Rob Johns** was able to take part in the July 8th socially distanced parade celebrating **Bob Goldman’s** (Class of 1937) 101st birthday.

We were also thrilled to learn that **Bud Lewis** (Class of 1939) recently turned 100. Read the [Oregonian article](#) about Bud and his “100 Laps to 100 Years” birthday fundraising initiative for the Sunshine Division.

Are you (or another Benson Tech graduate) celebrating a notable milestone? The BPHSAA would like to know about the triple-digit birthdays, extraordinary educational achievements, and significant professional accomplishments of our alumni. We even may (with your permission) include news of your milestone in a future edition of the Alumni Text newsletter! Please email info@BensonTech-Alumni.org with relevant details, and be sure to include your name and class year.

Thank you, Benson Tech health workers!

Through these trying times of COVID-19, now more than ever, it’s important for all of us to recognize the front-line health workers. The BPHSAA wishes to thank all of them, and we especially salute the Benson Tech health occupation graduates who are now serving in these dangerous conditions.

The Benson Tech Health Occupations Program has provided valuable introductory preparation for hundreds of Benson Tech students interested in a career in the many facets of health and medical care. Many of those graduating from the program have gone on to careers as doctors, dentists, medical technicians, nurses, and hospital and clinic workers. While we don’t know who all of you are by name, we especially appreciate your efforts during this COVID-19 pandemic.



Above: Health Occupations Program demo at Tech Show 2015.

Benson Tech Graduation 2020: A special experience

By Max Baker (Class of 1990 and parent of Class of 2020 graduate)

As soon as it became clear the school year would finish out virtually, I started wondering what my senior's graduation experience would be and spent a few minutes mourning the loss of what it might have been.

I remember feeling bored and irritated going through the drudgery of a graduation practice; then at graduation itself, the three hours of waiting, walking, sitting, waiting, speeches, entertainment; and finally, your one minute walking the stage to receive your diploma and smile at the crowd, wondering where your people might be sitting, then sitting and waiting some more...

But still — the pomp and circumstance impressed upon me that finishing high school and getting that diploma was a big deal.

But from my son's point of view? He didn't really care. I was more excited when the cap and gown arrived than he was.

Principal Curtis Wilson sent several emails and voicemails to parents. "Distribution of Diploma Day" was on Monday June 8 in the Horseshoe Parking Lot. Instructions about how to drive through, or walk through, were given. We were in the 11:00 am to 12:00 pm slot based on last name.

We were to drive into the student parking lot and around, forming a line. Any family in the vehicle would stay there at all times. No group photos. If walking, only two family members could accompany the student. Everyone in masks and physically distanced.

That morning, completely out of character, I got out the iron and ironing board. I reminisced as I carefully pressed his gown and the stole identifying his major. For me, high school had meant forming a solid group of friends, many of whom are still close. It was silly notes, it was hard work, it was goofing off. It was making friends across race/ethnicity lines, and across majors: I had automotive friends, I had MENSA friends, I had jock friends. It was trying to figure out who I was. We all were.

My son's dad helped him with his cap and gown. A poignant moment for our family. My son was a good sport and let us all fawn and take photos with my parents on the front lawn, before we headed off to the school,

blasting pomp and circumstance over the speakers, with all our windows down.

When we arrived, we were Car #6. In front of us was my son's friend, so they both got out and talked together until it was their turn. We were given a piece of paper to write down my son's name and major. We drove past the helium-inflated 2020 balloons, and a masked and distanced cheering staff with congratulatory signs.

We turned into the Horseshoe.

The kids were fascinated by the blue and orange taped Xs on the brick as we drove by, considering them decoration for the festivities. Then Steve Naganuma took our paper and announced our son's name over the loudspeaker. He exited the car and waved to the principal and other staff in black gowns and masks, headed to the elegantly cloth-draped table with a lovely bright and cheerful floral display to pick up an empty diploma case (diploma and transcripts to be mailed separately). He moved his cap tassel from the right to the left, then walked over to the small photo tent where someone took his picture against a grey backdrop — as we inched our minivan along the parking lot and cheered.

Then my son got back in the minivan, and we drove out of the Horseshoe. It was, quite literally, about

three minutes long — and then it was over.

Then we were done. No all-night graduation party (let's all acknowledge that this was the adults' way of keeping us from doing bad stuff while we were all pumped up with newfound freedom). Instead, we headed to Burgerville to get some lunch we could eat at home.

Later in June, we had my son's graduation party and made him dress up again and took photos in front of the school.

Perhaps it wasn't what I remembered from my own graduation experience, but it was a special few hours getting ready and being together, and in that short ceremony, the staff honored my son's accomplishment in a way that he appreciated. I hope other students and parents felt it was special, too.

My sincere thanks to the principal and staff who were there at the school all day, rain or shine, to make those few minutes, no matter how brief, special for all the graduates. Congratulations, Benson Tech Class of 2020!



Above: Second-generation Benson Tech graduate (Class of 2020) enjoys a moment with his grandparents, Ansel and Susan Johnson, on graduation day, June 8.