

Program: Preserving and Repurposing the Naval Armory

Speaker: John Watson, Classical School Board President, and Janet McNeal, President of Schools,
The Indianapolis Classical Schools

Introduced by: Jerry Kurlander

Guests: Shannon Dawson, Jane DeVoe, Ray Duncan, Stephen Jacob, Robin Knop Karen Lahoff, Ivey
Long, Janet McNeal, John Watson

Attendance: 108

Scribe: The Mutter Marines, Jim and Carol

Editor: Jim Willson

The Herron School of Indianapolis Classical Schools at 16th & Pennsylvania streets was established over eight years ago as a Charter high school and has been rated #2 in Indiana with a 99% graduation rate. (See www.indianapolisclassicalschoools.org/). The Herron School was founded on the belief that a classical liberal arts education, where students are steeped in great historical thought and invention, is the best preparation for a future life of leadership and service. Latin and the Socratic method are taught. Math and science are also emphasized in the curriculum. It operates on an “intentionally-diverse, college preparatory” model. The school has close to 900 students and has reached capacity. Because of its success the demand for student seats has kept increasing, so they looked at the vacant Heslar Naval Armory (2916 West 30th St.) for expansion. Mr. Watson was the developer who initially turned the buildings at 16th and Pennsylvania Streets into the productive school they are today and took on the challenge of repurposing the Heslar Naval Armory as a second school in the Indianapolis Classical Schools community. The new school is named for the neighborhood: the Riverside High School. It will open on the 13th of August with 135 students in freshman and sophomore years of school. Please see the invitation below for an open house on the 11th of August.

Students come from Middle schools all over central Indiana. Admittance is on a “first come, first served” basis. One-third of the entry students are reading at third and fourth grade levels. The school has programs for Special Education, remedial math and reading, and for those with learning disabilities. There is NO TUITION. They operate off the \$6,000 per student provided by the State (which pays for about 80% of the costs) plus donations. (It’s not unusual for a public high school in Indiana to operate at \$13,000 per student.)

Teachers are not paid as much as in a traditional school, but they believe in what the school is doing and enjoy contributing to its success, as well as to the success of their students. They know they’re making a difference! Their expectations about what their students can do are different. Students learn their opinions matter; they gain self-confidence, they change how they view their potential and life skills. There are many built in support systems for the students: they have advisory teachers for 3 years plus a college placement advisor their senior year. They are overstaffed in counseling -- by design. Teachers and staff work hard to help students get scholarships to college.

HESLAR ARMORY

The Armory was built from 1936-38 as part of a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project. It is an Art Modern structure designed by Ben Bacon and is on the National Register of Historic Places because it includes many historically significant elements. During World War II the inland location was ideal when generals and admirals seeking to avoid the constant surveillance on the coasts, gathered regularly at the armory in Indianapolis to plan their Atlantic and Pacific campaigns, including elements

of the pivotal Battle of Normandy that began June 6, 1944. Throughout World War II, the Indianapolis Naval Reserve Armory remained a vital facility where radioman and yeoman recruits trained for sea duty. (For additional history see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heslar_Naval_Armory) The Armory had a swimming pool that was taken out during the 1970s.

To turn the Armory into a high school complete with science labs, a gymnasium, a choir room, etc., a \$10M renovation project was needed and fully funded through tax credits, tax increment funding (TIF), and donations. There are no luxuries. The mess hall and gymnasium were decorated with 12by-15-foot (3.7 by 4.6 m) murals depicting famous naval battles and events. Those have been preserved along with other photos and artifacts. A terrazzo tile floor was found under carpeting and has been restored. Brass doors had been painted over because of the reflections from the sun making it difficult

for drivers nearby. The paint has been removed. The famous (infamous?) bar upstairs in the Armory was a popular “watering hole” for veterans for many years. Initial plans were to take it out, but after significant objections, it was turned into a “coffee bar” for the students. There is a simulated ship space built inside that may one day be turned into a museum-type space. The new Riverside High School has retained the historic fabric of the building. The drill hall has been turned into a gymnasium. There are amazing acoustics on the upper floor on the rounded side of the building which will be used as a choir room. Five science classrooms are well outfitted.

The public is invited to an Armory Reunion and Celebration on Saturday, 11 August at 10 a.m.



Janet McNeal & John Watson

ARMORY REUNION & CELEBRATION

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11

10:00 AM - NOON • HESLAR NAVAL ARMORY

*Join us for a celebration of the Armory's 80th Anniversary,
the legacy of those who served in the building,
and its future as the home of Riverside High School!*



*Enjoy self-guided tours of the
renovated building and meet or
reconnect with others who love it*

RSVP

On the web: ArmoryReunion.Eventbrite.com
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