



Brookhaven Academy leadership began discussing the idea of a capital campaign way back in 2007 in preparation for an upcoming Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accreditation review. Leadership at that time realized the future of education was changing and there were issues to address, both big and small, in order to get the stamp of approval from the 11-state regional association.

In preparation for the SACS accreditation review, a joint faculty-board committee was formed and was tasked with developing plans to address issues that included upgrading curriculum, implementing innovative teaching methods by incorporating today's technology in the classroom, upgrading and enhancing campus security, and renovating and expanding the physical plant to accommodate the current challenges of providing a high quality education that best fulfills the stated mission and vision of the Brookhaven Academy Educational Foundation (BAEF).

After several years of discussion spanning several boards and administration changes, the men and women on the 2011-2013 boards realized the need to move beyond discussion into action and explored tangible ways to meet the challenges, financial and otherwise, of "raising the bar" at BA. They quickly realized the need for the guidance of a professional fund-raising group.

Under the progressive leadership of 2012 Board of Trustees President, Beck Warren, and with the highest recommendation from several other MAIS member schools that benefitted from their own capital campaigns, the board voted unanimously to contract with the J.F. Smith Group, based out of Auburn, AL, to lead an initial feasibility study which sought feedback from over 100 constituents of the BA family representing several generations of both former and current grandparents, faculty/staff, alumni and friends.

Their feedback provided thoughtful insight and was the basis for several recommendations from J.F. Smith Group that helped facilitate a move forward, not the least of which was guidance on forming a development office at BA as well as training board members, school staff and administrators on how to run a capital campaign from beginning to end. As a result, *Building on Tradition*, a Capital Campaign for Brookhaven Academy, was born.

As leadership transitioned, the campaign went public under the watch of 2013 board president, Chris Thurman. Thurman led the first meeting to announce the school's intentions to begin a year-long capital campaign with a goal of \$1.175 million to address the accreditation and feasibility study recommendations.

Many questions, and some doubt, arose when the plan was presented. Could BA really pull this off? Would it fall short of the goal? Do they really understand what is at stake? It was an ambitious undertaking. However, it was quickly apparent and it was quickly apparent that for this capital campaign to be successful and for the vision to become reality, the leader of the school had to be fully invested. No one involved over the last 12 months would argue that Head of School, Julie Wright, has been anything less than 110 percent involved and devoted to meeting the challenges of the moment.

In addition to her role leading the school, Wright spent countless hours on weekly conference calls with the J.F. Smith Group and others. Additionally, with one to two other team members, she personally solicited over 150 BA patrons for *Building on Tradition* over a 12-month period.

Jack Welch, legendary CEO of GE, once said, 'A leader's job is to look into the future and see the organization not as it is, but as it can and should be.' In discussing Wright's leadership, Thurman said, "Having worked directly with Julie over the course of the last year, it is apparent to me she has the passion, vision, and dedication necessary to move BA beyond today. Her commitment to do whatever was required to make 'Building on Tradition' a success was apparent from day one, even when it took her out of her comfort zone. She, along with her husband and family, are to be commended for the personal sacrifices that have been and continue to be made that allow her to lead BA to meet the challenges of today's educational environment. We are all fortunate to have a dedicated professional like Julie Wright for such a time as this."

"The professionalism of the J.F. Smith Group was inspiring and refreshing and we felt like we were their only client," Wright said. "The saying goes, 'You get out of it what you put in to it' and in the case of *Building on Tradition*, contracting with the J.F. Smith Group was the best decision for BA."

Now, one year later, 116 BA Patrons have committed to *Building on Tradition* in the amount of \$791,166. The total marks the most ever raised by the school during a fundraising campaign.