

Brookdale land-sale plan resolved, college still needs a student center

By PETER F. BURNHAM

Over the past several weeks, there has been much discussion about Brookdale Community College's plan to sell a 5.8-acre parcel in the downtown Lincroft section of Middletown Township. The college's intention was to raise funds to enable a tax-free down payment on the bonding necessary to construct a new Student Life Center on the Lincroft campus.

To the satisfaction of all concerned parties, we hope, particularly the local residents of the town and the thousands of students who will benefit from the new center, an agreement was reached late last week between the college's board of trustees, Middletown officials, state representatives and the Monmouth County Board of Freeholders to preserve the site as "open space," and still identify sources for the \$1.5 million the college would have realized from the sale.

The experience was difficult for many people on all sides of the issue. It was disheartening when the matter became the subject of political accusations, and when people with relatively little understanding of the facts decided to engage in public declarations about the matter. To the great credit of residents of the area, and to key Middletown officials, the dialogue about this project enabled the matter to be resolved in an effective fashion for all parties.

The college is particularly appreciative of the efforts of Freeholder Director Harry Larrison and all the freeholders, who continuously work to make Brookdale the premier community college in the state and in the nation. There was great support as well from state officials, including Sen. Joseph Kyrillos and Assemblymen Joseph Azzolina and Samuel Thompson, all of whom have pledged to assist in identifying funds to support Brookdale's effort to create a first-class facility for its students, staff and the entire community.

Unfortunately, what has been lost in this discussion is the importance of the proposed Student Life Center to Brookdale's future and the continued vitality of Monmouth County. Over the past five years, Brookdale has attracted an increasing number of traditional students, right out of high school, who look to the college to provide them with the full college life experience. This includes opportunities for socialization and participation in the clubs and organizations that this Student Center will support. We envision an environment that will become a gathering place, not only for students but also for the entire community, with entertainers, lecturers, special forums and programs providing the

protect its land and its legacy. The acquisition of additional acreage two years ago along Phalanx Road was intended to ensure there would be no encroachment on campus land. In the past, arrangements with Middletown and the local school district have enabled contiguous functions to operate together in a constructive use of the entire site. The college maintains a close and mutually respectful relationship with its adjacent "neighbor," the county's beautiful Thompson Park.

The controversial site in question was separated from the campus and zoned commercial. The use to the college was virtually nonexistent. As evidenced by the interest in the land through bidding,

it was considered quite valuable. The resolution achieved last week will, however, assure that the property will not be sold for development. Yet to be determined will be the ultimate use of the

site as parkland or simply open space. The respective organizations and entities contributing to its acquisition will ultimately resolve that.

Brookdale's goals are to provide the very best teaching, learning and community development environment for the citizens of Monmouth County and the state. Ultimately, the entire community will benefit from the presence of a new Student Life Center and all that it will offer. Most importantly, the center will become another important step in encouraging one of our most precious assets, the young people of this community, to "stay local" and attend a high-quality, affordable college that provides them with a comprehensive learning experience and the opportunity to experience a broad spectrum of student life.

□ Peter F. Burnham is president of Brookdale Community College, Middletown.

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richness, diversity and fulfillment of a complete collegiate experience.

The new Student Life Center will contain improved food services for busy commuter students needing to catch a quick bite before class. It will provide social and learning environments in an informal setting where the stimulation and enthusiasm of the full college experience can be shared and more broadly experienced. The center will be the "social heart" of this beautiful campus, which engages nearly 30,000 people each week in learning, growing and thriving in our community within a community.

Brookdale has been and will continue to be a very special place that captures and preserves the rustic and natural settings of the original Brookdale farm. The corncrib of the farm sits at the very center of the campus as a tribute to the legacy of its rich history. As stipulated by the college trustees, the architecture of all buildings, both new and renovated, represents the rural and agrarian nature of the environment.

Brookdale has sought to preserve and