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JPDS is growing Second campus planned for D.C.

COVER STORY

by Phil Jacobs
Editor

The Jewish Primary Day School of the Nation's Capital is in expansion mode. The District's only Jewish day school is adding a second campus just one mile south of its current site to accommodate a growing student body.

The add-on campus — which will house an early childhood learning center consisting of pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first grade classes — will enable JPDS to handle an expected 30 percent increase in enrollment in coming years.

The site was purchased for \$3.9 million, thanks largely to a \$3 million challenge gift from an anonymous donor, the school announced Monday.

The expansion was authorized in May by the JPDS board of trustees, which voted to keep pace with current and anticipated demand by admitting three kindergarten classes per year.

"Growth was the soundest way to fulfill all three of our goals," said Janine Goodman, president of the board. "We wanted to provide more students with a superb general and Jewish education, ensure financial sustainability into the future, and continue to serve and grow as a pillar of the D.C. and Jewish communities."

In a 2010 survey, current and prospective JPDS parents said they preferred a second campus that was within a 10-minute drive from the current school, which is located at 6045 16th St., N.W. Led by trustee and D.C. real estate broker Steven Himmelfarb, JPDS found a suitable building only five minutes away at 4715 16th St., N.W.

"It was a needle in a haystack," Himmelfarb said. "There aren't a lot of buildings zoned for schools for sale in our immediate area. But this one is a bulls-eye."

(Combined, the two locations are expected to accommodate phased-in growth of the student body from the current 273 to an estimated 350 in the next five to seven years.

The building even has Jewish roots. It was



This 1923 house will soon be part of JPDS.

Photo courtesy of JPDS

built in the 1920's by Paul and Anetta Himmelfarb, Steven Himmelfarb's Russian immigrant great-grandparents and the great-great-grandparents of JPDS third-grader Sami Himmelfarb. "The house was a meeting place for the Jewish community," Steven Himmelfarb explained. "My great-grandfather and great-grandmother would smile to know this building will again be a focal point for Jewish life in the city."

The \$3 million anonymous gift consists of \$1 million in cash plus \$2 million that is available to match other donations.

"The anonymous donor wants to invest in our school and at the same time encourage broader support from parents, grandparents, alumni parents and community leaders committed to Jewish life in D.C.," said former JPDS president Orit Frenkel, who helped secure the challenge gift.

Head of School Naomi Reem said that JPDS anticipates occupying the space after

the coming termination of the current tenant's lease in December 2013. "Expansion to serve the needs of the community in the District fits perfectly with our mission," Reem said. "The board has been committed to this course of action for some time, and we are thrilled to have found just the building that allows us to implement it."

Steve Rackitt, CEO of the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, was elated when reached Monday.

"It's wonderful news for the community and for Jewish life in the district," he said. "JPDS did the research indicating a significant potential for growth. To be able to accommodate that growth is exciting news. It also shows that there are younger Jewish families moving into the District or because of JPDS staying in the District. And for an anonymous donor to show faith in the institution and the community to put forth a major gift and challenge to the community

is also a step forward in a direction that will cause us to continue to grow."

The acquisition has "been a long time coming," Reem said, adding: "The building we got is exactly what we've needed. We're fired up, and we're energized by the situation and we're so gratified to our anonymous donor."

The new site, which dates back to 1923, has hardwood floors, sturdy construction and, in general, a "grand feeling to it," she said. "It's beyond our wildest dreams."

JPDS, a nondenominational community school serving students from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade, is in its 24th year.

"We want to keep it a small school," Reem added, "with a strong sense of community, and a school where people still know one another. We're part of a renaissance of Jewish life in the District. This is not just good for JPDS, it's good for the entire community."