



Montgomery Blair High School — where Takoma Park and Silver Spring come together

Ten years ago this fall Montgomery Blair High School students first entered their new building on University Blvd. and Colesville Avenue. They left behind a sprawling but overcrowded campus on Wayne Avenue that had been home since 1935.

Convincing the county to build a new school was a decade-long struggle. It helped that Blair was the one place where Takoma Park and Silver Spring shared a common identity. In the end, that helped win the day.

In the beginning

Blair was not the first local high school, but it is a direct descendant of Takoma Park Silver Spring High School, which opened in 1925 just over the border in Takoma Park.

Drawing students from both communities into what became a combined junior and senior high, it quickly outgrew the space. By 1935, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders had left for a building of their own on Wayne Avenue in Silver Spring. It was “miles from anywhere.”

The students voted to name their new school after Montgomery Blair. He was a prestigious Civil War politician who along with his father and brother exerted immense political influence. Not incidentally the Blairs owned most of what became downtown Silver Spring.

The Wayne Avenue school was the sixth county high school (and the first in the lower county). When the 1936 Silverlogue yearbook was published, the frontispiece proclaimed “Montgomery Blair” instead of “Takoma Park Silver Spring.”

War years

By 1942, America was headed into World War II. Blair students were among the first to respond to the country’s request to organize “Victory Corps.” *Life* magazine’s November 9, 1942 issue ran a full page photo of the Blair students both male and female formed in ranks in front of the school.

The Corps spent an hour a day on military drills and took classes that included metal work and airplane riveting.

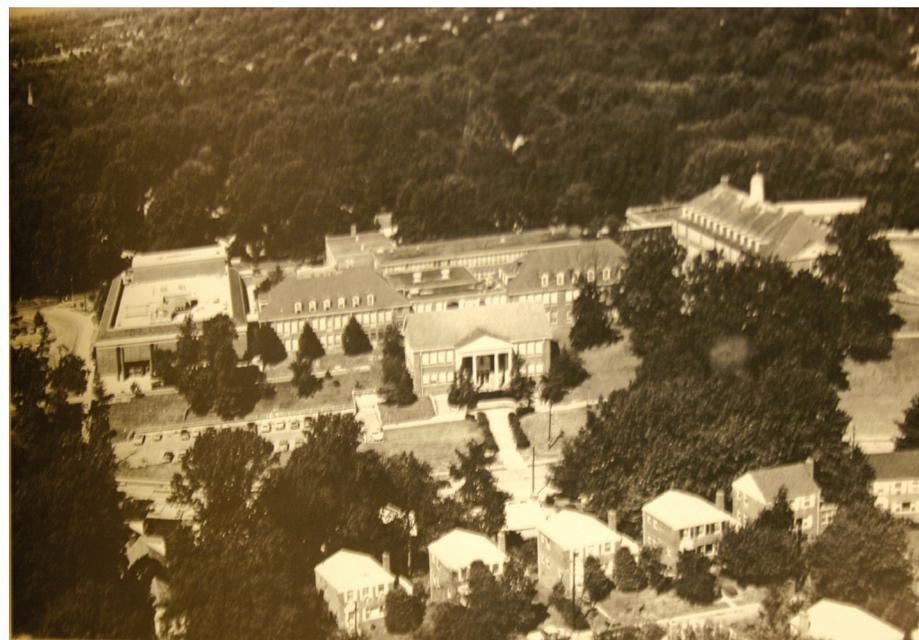
Arnold Ostrom (class of ‘45) recalls that the students took over as janitors and cafeteria workers so the adults could go overseas. Many boys left school early so they could enlist, and the rest worried that the war would be over before they could join up.

Once the war was won, the students of the 1950s turned to more traditional high school concerns. Elizabeth Stickley, librarian from 1935-1970, collected



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BLAIR MEDIA CENTER

First High School: Takoma Park Silver Spring (above) opened in 1925 with 86 students. Located on Philadelphia and Chicago Avenues, it was turned into a combination junior-senior high in 1929. When the tenth through twelfth grade transferred to the new Blair High School in fall 1935, it remained a junior high until it was demolished in the 1970s.



Blair on Wayne: A bird’s eye view of the Wayne Avenue campus gives a sense of how the many additions created a sprawled effect. The front portico is now the entrance to Silver Spring International Middle School, while the rear building houses Sligo Creek Elementary.



Blair at Four Corners: Blair’s distinctive steeple entrance under construction at the intersection of University and Colesville in 1997.

scrapbooks full of articles from the county newspaper. Student writers chronicled academic achievements, homecoming queens, even wedding announcements and of course, sports victories.

These were the glory years for sports. The high water mark was 1955 when both the football team and basketball team went undefeated. Over the next nine years the basketball team went on to five state champions, and the football team had similar success. The most satisfying wins were over arch-rival Bethesda Chevy Chase, with 3000 spectators on hand.

Change

But the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* was slowly altering the landscape at Blair. In the fall of 1955, Montgomery County ordered all public schools to admit black students. (Carver, the sole high school for blacks in the county, eventually became the School Board headquarters).

Ten blacks quietly entered the ranks at Blair, three of whom graduated in spring 1956. They increased to 19 of 2759 students in 1962.

Against this background, post-war prosperity was bringing more residents to the area, especially Silver Spring. Blair found itself trying to stay ahead of the burgeoning enrollment. New additions opened on a regular basis: 1949, 1954, 1960, and 1969. The 600 students in 1946 jumped to 1900 by 1956 and 2200 by 1993.

During the Sixties, the new arrivals were often minorities from around the world: Cuba, Vietnam, El Salvador, West Africa. The non-white enrollment tripled between 1968 and 1970. Blair was the first urban high school in the county, according to the *Washington Post*.

By 1985, Montgomery County was forced to address the imbalance and tried to find ways to draw whites back into Blair.

In June 1985, they took the unpopular action of closing Northwood High School (on University). Few of the white students were willing to switch to Blair.

A new Math-Science-Computer Magnet program debuted at Blair in fall 1985, bringing 80 new students. The Communications Arts Program (CAP) followed two years later.

Too many students

But a bigger problem was looming. Blair was running out of space even to build additions. Portables began to take over nearly all the open ground.

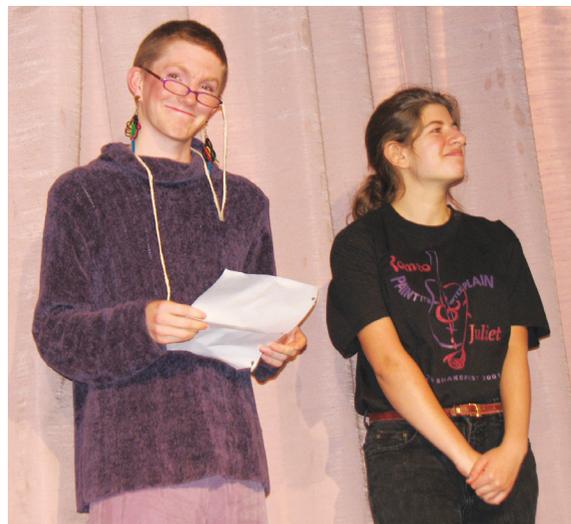
The search for solutions began in 1988. Proposals included adding 33 classrooms

Lumina, continued

Raye in their Dallas days.

As Minton steps down from the podium and returns to his seat, the long awaited moment arrives as Raye stands and makes her way to the front of the room.

"It was the poetry that got me." She smiles over at Minton. "It has been an amazing journey. Thank you." Then she turns and addressed her audience. "I can't tell you how much it



Picket, an old friend that flew in from Canada, who sings an old song about "restless love" for Raye.

Then, after the small amount of technical difficulties that seem to accompany every slide show, Ron Murphy starts a montage of photos of Lumina performances, both new and old. Several songs accompany the photos, but it is hard to hear over the cheers, laughter and aahs of the audience as each new photo flashes on the screen.

As the last picture fades and the waves of applause start, "the time warp" song, and old favorite of most Lumina fans, starts. Raye and several others jump on the

stage and dance, for the most part, along with the music, laughing and hugging all the while.

The night truly proved, as Lily Felsenthal described in her speech, how "...all over Takoma Park kids are divided into two categories, Lumina kids and non Lumina kids." The night and the performances proved just how special the Lumina kids are, and just how loyal they are to their director, whether she be onstage or off.

Lumina students created a hilarious (transgendered) impersonation of Jillian Raye and David Minton



Romeo woos two Juliets in a spoof of a Jillian Raye Shakespeare adaptation, that, of course, included a space alien

means to me to know all of you...to work with you."

Raye's speech is everything it should be, and the audience plays along, as expected. It is sweet, with a touch of sadness, and indeed, there are a couple tissues dabbing at eyes by the time Raye concludes.

After incredible applause, the performance concludes with Karen Lee



Jillian with husband and creative partner David Minton

More photos online: www.takoma.com

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