

HACKLEY

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By Suzy Akin

Striving for Excellence and Community on Hackley's Cross Country Trails



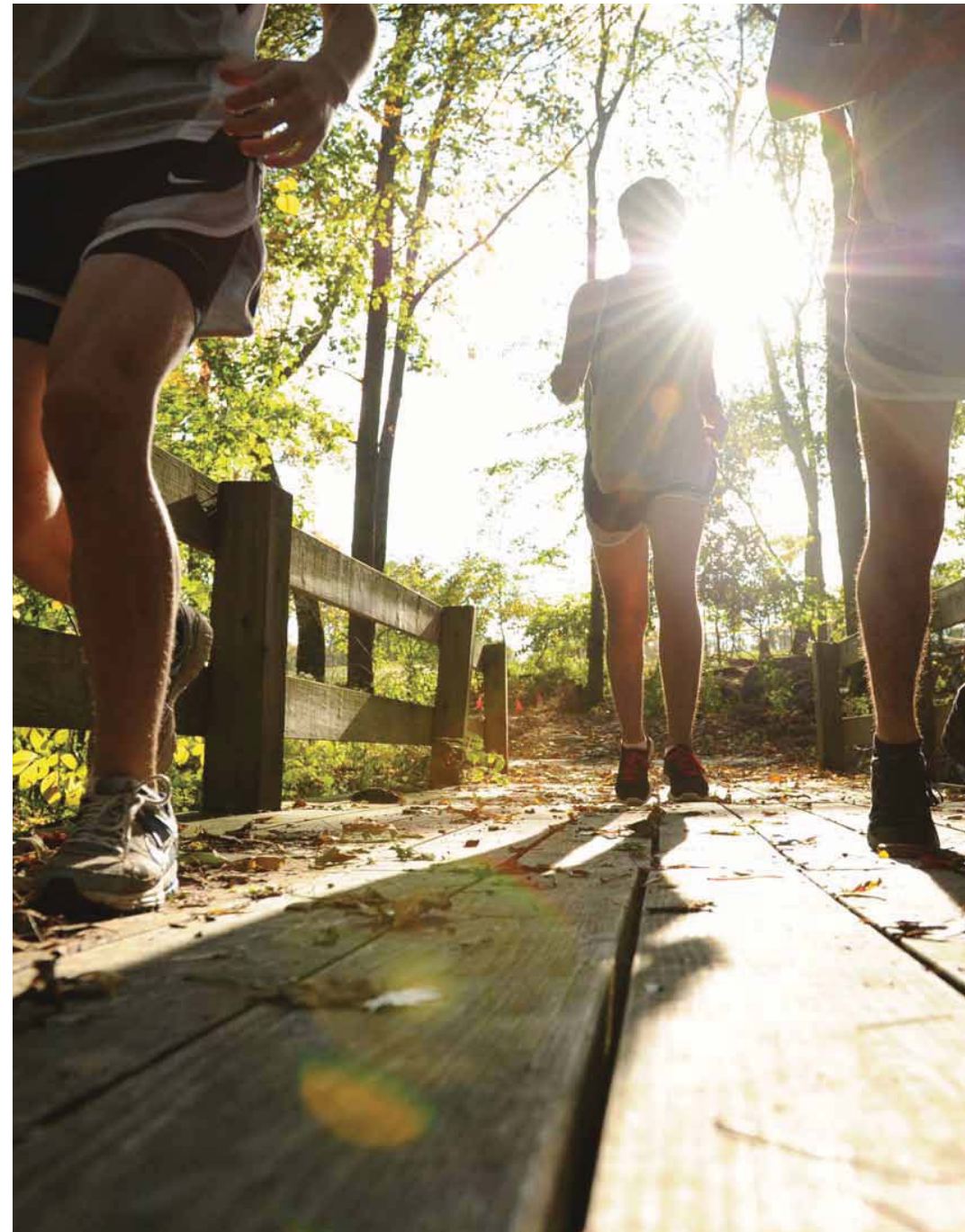
Seth Karpinski, Bob Grusky '75 and Hope Eiseman

For Bob Grusky and Hope Eiseman, the core of education is not solely intellectual. Bob reflects, "It has to do with a view of what the Greeks call *arête*, or striving for excellence in mind, body and spirit, and how all three are necessary. Education takes place in the classroom, on the playing fields, on the stage, in the concert hall, and in the hallways. It takes place in the interactions of community—between students, teachers, coaches, parents and alumni." The new Hackley cross country trails are, in many ways, the ideal symbol of that ethos—a place where students and coaches strive for *arête*, in community with their peers.

Bob, a Hackley alumnus in the Class of 1975, served from 1991 to 2009 on Hackley's Board of Trustees and helped guide the School's progress. He and Hope joined the Hackley community as parents in the Fall of 1999, and have watched their three children, Bobby '12, Kate '13 and Ally '16, grow through Lower, Middle and Upper School. Hope has been an active member of the Hackley Parents' Association, serving on its Executive Board from 2004 to 2007, including two years as Treasurer, and in many other roles. Though

their family approach to philanthropy has been to give anonymously or quietly, they agreed at Hackley's request to become more public with their decision to financially enable the creation of Hackley's redesigned Dave Allison Memorial Trails because they believe in *arête*, how it plays out in Hackley Cross Country, and its essential connection to the School's mission.

A good trail system was part of the vision for the property when Hackley purchased the 172 adjoining acres from the Rockefeller family in 1998. Walter Johnson appreciated the Rockefeller Preserve's extensive network of carriage trails. "When we first bought the property, I had a conversation with Bob Snyder [former President of Greenrock Corporation, the Rockefeller land management company, and parent of Andrea '82 and Sarah '85] in which I told him I wanted Hackley to have trails like those at the Rockefeller Preserve. Bob looked at me pityingly. 'Do you know how long it takes to establish trails like these?'" Surfaces erode, rocks continue to migrate to the surface, and the process of grooming is continual.



Enter Tom Casten. Generations of Hackley students and their families know of the Castens through the Casten Travel Program (see related story page 17). Tom is a businessman, author and activist known for his work on industrial energy recycling, and a passionate woodsman. In 2000, along with Anne Myers (parent of Charlie '95, Katherine '97, Anne '00, and Marya '03), who upon concluding her term as HPA President dedicated herself to campus landscaping, Jean Gazis (parent of Kyle '03), and Crest neighbor Glen Weeks, Tom marked a trail through Hackley's forest, organized a crew and led a hands-on effort to construct the trails that were later named in memory of Dave Allison—teacher, coach and another passionate woodsman—who died in 2004. Tom set out to establish the maximum length of trail possible with the least disturbance and the fewest trees removed. Walter Johnson recalls, "He did a great job." The Hackley community embraced the Dave Allison Memorial Trails as a place for both competition and pleasure—a great way to access the Hackley's forest. However, with the completion of Pickert Field and plans for four new fields, it became clear that Tom's trails would need to be partially rerouted to accommodate the new fields.

Since Hackley needed to reroute the trails, it made sense to bring in the best trails designer available. John Morton was chosen as the strongest designer with experience in competition trails. Walter notes, "It was good fortune and a great synergy—Bob and Hope's suggesting the idea of supporting Hackley Cross Country and running to John Gannon, the need

to do something with the trails, and the opportunity to enhance the original trails with the help of a distinguished designer." The Board of Trustees approved the project and Peter McAndrew, Hackley's chief financial officer, oversaw its progress.

These trails may go down in the next history of Hackley in the same way that Calvert Vaux' landscape design did in Walter Schneller's history—a design that reveals the inherent beauty of the landscape. Early in the project, Walter, Peter McAndrew, Varsity Cross Country coach Seth Karpinski and others set off into the woods to follow the blazes John Morton set. Seth reports, "We walked around looking for 'what's interesting about this property'; the course was designed around that. We really took advantage of the natural surroundings, the natural features of the property. For example, there's an old quarry out there—we made sure to route the course to allow discovery of that." Walter recalls, "We discovered parts of the property we didn't know existed—John plowed through the bracken and was able to see possibilities in the structure of the land—and to see it as an opportunity to show the runner different parts of the property."

But that was not entirely evident last winter when Hope and Bobby '12 bushwacked their way through the newly demarcated trail in the middle of the winter, in the snow. Even now, Bob Grusky says it was impossible for him to fully visualize what these trails would come to be. He had a clear sense, though, that these trails would benefit Hackley's program. "We had the idea—a feeling that kids' would use the trails, would participate in physical sport, and that these

"The uniform width and meandering curves embody all I remember reading the founders had in mind for the original campus: structures built beautifully to help students deal with the rigorous challenges we present in our education. I am pleased beyond measure to see this ideal incorporated into our athletic program and cannot wait to get to know these new trails the way I came to know the previous ones."

DIANNE FAHY '92, MIDDLE SCHOOL CROSS COUNTRY COACH AND MIDDLE AND UPPER SCHOOL MATH TEACHER

would be among the premiere Cross Country trails in the country." Bob and Hope thought the trails would compound on the promise coaches Seth Karpinski, Maryann Maguire, Dianne Fahy, Dawn Crainer and the others have built with the Cross Country program, and would also honor Dave Allison. "There will be more students running, they'll be more fit, and they'll have more fun. The trails would be used and enjoyed by the entire Hackley community—students, teachers, alumni, and parents."

Seth acknowledges that "In terms of aesthetics, our course is top notch," but it's also a top notch competition course. "The course was designed to offer the opportunity for great challenge." John Morton was able to analyze the terrain in terms of ascents, descents, and their sequencing. Seth recalls, "Morton asked, 'What kind of course do you want?' and I told him, 'Give me the hardest course you can make.' If you have a training facility that has an extremely technical course, it prepares you well for any course you encounter. Many people get on the Van Cortlandt course and think 'It's so hilly....' And our kids think it's a piece of cake." He continues, "There are certain loops you can omit; the Middle School will not run the same course as the High School. For the Varsity, I add in some of the really technical loops for a really challenging course."

While preserving many stretches of the trails Tom Casten laid out, Morton's design allows for multiple spectator viewpoints. "In the old days," Morton notes, "parents would watch the start of the race, and the athletes would go off, and you'd see nothing until the athletes returned to the finish and collapsed." The new trail has been designed with loops that circle the athletes back into view. More fun for the spectators, more fun for the athletes, but also

encouraging that sense of mutual support and appreciation among peers that is so much at the heart of Hackley's community.

Seth notes that the quality of Hackley's trails is paralleled only by the Rockefeller State Preserve, and it is the only 5K course at a school in the Ivy League. "For high level competition, our trail will be one of the top in the area. There's Van Cortland Park, of course—Van Cortlandt is one of the most historic running sites in the Northeast, one that every runner aspires to run; it's like Fenway or Wrigley. That's where most schools compete. But we have the facilities right here in our backyard—that really sets us apart." Seth observes, "Hackley's facilities for the running program as a whole are amazing. The fact that we have a track and Cross Country trails is unique in the Ivy League. Only Poly Prep has a track—and everyone has to travel for Cross Country."

Yet what's perhaps even more exciting than what these great facilities offer the Hackley community is the strength of the program that inspired them. As Varsity coach, Seth Karpinski contributed to the Gruskys' strong feelings about supporting this project. Hope notes, "Like Dave Allison, Seth embodies the Hackley model of 'teacher-coach.' He's a great Physics teacher and a great coach, and even stronger in the combination—you can see it in the number of kids going out for Cross Country at Hackley. He's a coach who includes every athlete, the strongest ones as well as those who never score in a race. He pushes each one equally, and wants each one to do his or her best." Seth, however, gives credit to the students themselves. "What I am most proud of is that the team is performing better than ever," Seth says. "Historically, Hackley has had incredible runners—individually—but the culture of running was not ingrained in the school."

Left: Seth Karpinski with his seniors. Right: Girls' Varsity runners.





Left: Boys' Varsity runners. **Right:** The Varsity team cheers on the Middle School team.

But now we see the numbers skyrocketing in terms of commitment to the program and enrollment. These are runners who are passionate about the sport and about each other as a team.”

For Seth, it comes back to the very core values and culture of the school—a place with the motto “United, We Help One Another.” “Unlike other team sports, no one does less than any other person. They all run the same distance, and no one sits on the bench. And on any given day, every single person has the opportunity to do something big.” Yet there is also a clear sense of collective appreciation. “We collectively celebrate personal victories, so it’s not just about ‘You finished fifth’—it’s that you ‘PR’d.’ You achieved a ‘Personal Record.’ When you focus on that, you destroy the notion of ‘hierarchy’ on the team. It becomes a group of 40 athletes, girls and boys, who want to do better.”

Seth notes that in his first year, the fastest time in competition at Van Cortlandt was a 16:30. “Last year, we had 17 guys below that time. And this year, four of our guys are the fastest in Hackley history.” This fall, Hackley Girls’ Varsity Cross Country won the 2011 Ivy League Championship, finishing in four out of the top six positions, and five Hackley Boys’ Varsity runners finished in the top 20. “There’s a pride in running I have never seen at a high school. It’s rare to have a ‘running’ school, where the runners get as much respect as the soccer or football players. The football players will come up to me to say ‘how’d the guys do?’ It’s pretty amazing. I think it’s a function of the fact that these kids have turned this program around and you can’t help but respect it.”

Seth smiles. “It’s beautiful. They take so much pride in it. Hard work shows results. What better metaphor for academic success could there be?”

In mid-October, Bob and Hope stood on the newly paved driveway overlooking the last stretch of the trails, watching the end of a Middle School invitation hosted by Hackley. Bob reflects, “For years, [Development Director] John Gannon has encouraged us to consider moving away from our pattern of anonymous giving. We were persuaded by his conviction that a willingness to give publicly helps build the culture of ‘giving back,’ not just at Hackley but in society overall.” As unfamiliar as public spotlight may be for a family with a long commitment to quiet service, one cannot help but be moved by the results. From their vantage point, they could see runners crossing the baseball field, and circling down through the woods, down in front of them, and then around a corner toward the finish. “It’s spectacular,” Bob notes. “And it fits in really well with the rest of the campus. It meshes with and showcases the school’s commitment to athletics.”

Hope notes that the plans came to realization in a way that complements the overall architecture of the school. Just as our Upper School buildings embrace the Quad, and the Upper, Middle and Lower School building come together around Akin Common, there is a sense that the trails, along with the rest of the new athletics facilities, capture the same sense of community. “Here, the athletes on the soccer and field hockey fields can see the runners on the trails, and the runners can see the fields. There is a feeling that all our athletes are training and playing in connection to each other. It’s a community, up here on the athletics hilltop.”