

Eagle Hill School is celebrating a groundbreaking on a new 37,500 square foot living and learning center on its Hardwick campus. However, this event represents so much more than the construction of a new building—it symbolizes a pattern of groundbreaking of thinking and leadership that has made Eagle Hill an international success since 1967.

Eagle Hill School is an internationally recognized leader in the field of education generally and learning (dis)abilities specifically. The parenthesis in the word “disabilities” is an example of the core groundbreaking thinking of the school. Dr. Peter J. McDonald, Headmaster, explained it this way: “we purposely use parenthesis on the word “(dis)abilities” because despite the proven neurological differences between people, the point is that our students can and will learn if they are taught properly (or differently in some cases). They are not, in fact, disabled in an objective sense—they simply learn in a manner that is in contrast or conflict with traditional teaching methods and socially constructed expectations. This viewpoint is very much in line with our school slogan: learning differently demands teaching differently.”

Eagle Hill also found itself in ground breaking territory when they structured a long-term, mutually beneficial financial agreement with the Town of Hardwick to pay for the living and learning center. In March, Eagle Hill brokered an agreement with Hardwick utilizing a provision in Massachusetts State Law that allows municipalities to “pass through” part or all of their 10M annual allowance to 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations. The net result was that Eagle Hill was able to get a bond at a reduced interest rate, saving the school significant money over the life of the loan. In recognition of the Town’s support and in the spirit of partnership, the school agreed to “donate” thirty-three percent (33%) of the total savings back to the town (Note: the town bears no financial risk whatsoever – neither in terms of liability of repaying the bond nor any negative shift in the interest rate environment). “These are very difficult economic times, and this was a wonderful opportunity for both Eagle Hill and the Town of Hardwick. We are very aware of the implications of our non-profit status, and the national discussions about Payments In Lieu Of Taxes (PILOTS). This was a natural way for us to give back to the town in lieu of taxes. I also believe this financial agreement will serve as the foundation for a stronger partnership between Eagle Hill and the Town of Hardwick for many years to come,” Dr. McDonald said.

And then there is the matter of the new living and learning center. McDonald explained, “while most schools build dormitories, we are constructing a building in which every decision was made with the unique living and learning needs of our students at the forefront of our minds.” This state-of-the-art facility has 105 single student “dormitory” rooms, 18 student bathrooms, three spacious student lounges, five faculty apartments, and four student life offices. Fully outfitted with the latest technology as well as the latest safety features, the project is due to be completed by Thanksgiving 2003. “This building embodies our vision, our mission, and our commitment to excellence,” McDonald states proudly.

It should come as no surprise that the Eagle Hill nickname is the “Pioneers.” Their pioneering spirit, thinking, and leadership have benefited thousands of students from around the globe, as well as the central Massachusetts community that they call home.