

ASHLANDS BUY CASCADE!

“The Old School is my mission,” says Brooke Ashland, gazing out her living room window at the Cascade Christian campus.

“I’ve been looking at that school for 20 years,
and I’d like it to stay there so
I can look at it for another 20 years.”

Brooke will have her wish now that the Cascade Christian Board and the FBC Ministries Board have approved the sale of the 7.57 acre campus to Brooke and Mel Ashland. The Ashlands plan to make Jacksonville and the Old School building the headquarters for their two firms, Cutler Investment Group, LLC and Ashland Partners and Co. LLP. (See related article, page __.) Cascade will defer its \$1.85 million Measure 37 Claim against the City of Jacksonville until closing, and the Ashlands have no desire to pursue one.

“I’ve always liked the school,” Brooke emphasizes. “I have always thought it was a fantastic property. They used to have tennis courts where they put in the parking lots. I’d take my kids there to practice. I sent my daughter Hilary there when it was the Waldorf School.”

The Ashlands plan to work with historians on their adaptive reuse plan for the facility. “We want to work with people who are experts in this field. We want input from the community, from people who know the history, know the environment. We’ve already talked to some people with old yearbooks and pictures. We’d love to put some of these images on the walls.”

Ashland Partners made a “trial run” in the facility last August, renting the space for a week for their annual employee training conference. “Our employees loved it,” says Mel.

The large classroom spaces fit in with the Ashland Partners’ plans. “Everyone can have a locker, although we might modify them so they’re ‘double-wide.’ Our employees can come to work in the morning and sit at any desk. Right



now we move people from their cubicles every four to five months. We try to get them out of a ‘my little corner of the world’ mentality.”

The gym is conceived as a multi-purpose space. “We only need it for training three weeks a year in January and August, so we would like to see it available for community use. We would like to see someone running events there. It will be set up with top of the line audio-visual equipment. “The gym could be used as a large group room and the annex classrooms could be break out rooms. It would be perfect for executive retreats. The types of people who would be coming to Jacksonville would help the whole community.”

While school cafeterias are not always the source of fond memories, Brooke loves the one at the Old School. “The cafeteria is great! Food is such a part of our culture and nutrition is so important. We want to use it to have lunch available to our employees. Whatever is left over, they can

take home at the end of the day. That's a high value service with today's busy lifestyles."

Other plans include rebuilding the bell tower, turning the old music room into a traditional German restaurant, and creating space for child care. "We have so many young people working for us, as well as moving into the community, we'd like to see the north side classrooms possibly turned into an early childhood education center.

"The site itself needs trails and plantings. It's been 100 years since anyone planted a tree or a flower there. What's still there needs maintenance. We want to keep the ball fields and even add a small amphitheater. Part of the field might be turned into a community garden. We would also like to work with the city to develop an active park at the corner of Hueners and E streets, perhaps adding a pavilion, possibly some barbecue grills, and public bathrooms."

Brooke acknowledges that the project will be a handful, but laughs "I've been looking for a non-traditional environment for our headquarters for a long time. Our move to Jacksonville will enable us to compete in a 21st Century global economy."

She is emphatic about one thing, however. "The Old School should be the gem on the hill. What Jacksonville must hold on to is its history—that's the number one thing. It should keep the integrity of its history intact."

Part of Brooke Ashland's motivation is to have more of a focus locally. "I've lived in the community for 20 years," Brooke states. "Sons Matthew and Erich (Patten) grew up here. Both were student body presidents at Jacksonville Elementary. Today, both serve as the investment professionals of the firm. Matthew and his family recently relocated back to Jacksonville after living for seven years in Shanghai. Although we have clients everywhere, we're moving Cutler Investment Group's headquarters here. We're doing community outreach through our 'Lunch and Learn' series. We hope the people of Jacksonville can benefit from our experiences."

She continues, "When we're traveling, people will talk about where they're going for the weekend—to the mountains, to their cabin, etc. I say, we're going home. It's where we like to be. It's an art show every time you look out the window. And from here we can see the Old School."

