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A new name for old St. Mary's

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BURLINGTON CITY — A private school along the Delaware River, previously known as St. Mary's Hall-Doane Academy, changed its name yesterday. It will be known simply as Doane Academy.

The change was announced with much fanfare, as school trustees, elected officials, alumni, staff and students gathered for a news conference and a party. A 37-foot banner emblazoned with the new name was hung on campus in view of the motorists on the Burlington-Bristol Bridge.

"It's a bold new era for a wonderful old school," said Headmaster John McGee.

McGee said the new name is the first of several changes. The school plans to construct five new buildings, including a performance arts center, a second gymnasium, additional classrooms and a swimming pool.

The school, which has 198 students, was founded in 1837 by George Washington Doane, the second Episcopal bishop of New Jersey. Doane called the school St. Mary's Hall. At the time, it was an all-female boarding school.

In 1964, men were admitted and their section of the school was called Doane Academy. The institution is now a coeducational day school for students in prekindergarten through 12th grade.

Yesterday, students gathered for a party in the school gymnasium, where they received new shirts with the Doane Academy logo.

Fred Mirsky, president of the school's Society of Graduates, said some alumni are supportive of the name change, while others oppose it.

He said women graduates especially are having a tough time adjusting to the change, since women identify more closely with the St. Mary's name. But Mirsky said he supports the board of trustees, which made the decision.

"The board of trustees had to do what is in the best benefit of the school," Mirsky said.

Chancellor Van Sciver, a graduate and trustee, said he voted for the name change "without any reservation."

He said the new name will help the school clarify its identity. For instance, Van Sciver said some people unfamiliar with the school might mistakenly believe it to be a Roman Catholic school. He said the name Doane Academy will eliminate that confusion.

School officials said the old name was confusing, cumbersome and had a "blurry identity." They said the new name should remove any questions about whether the school was one or two institutions or whether it was an all-male or all-female school.

In addition to the name change, school officials also unveiled a master plan proposing \$30 million worth of campus improvements. McGee said he expects construction on the first phase of the project to begin in two or three years.

One of the first new buildings would be an entrance hall along the Delaware River, to be named St. Mary's Hall. Another project is a building to house English and foreign language classrooms, a computer lab, a pottery and art studio and a bookstore.

"I think it's a phenomenal plan," said Ron Sexton, a graduate and trustee. "Progress is a good thing. It is a bold goal."

McGee said the school will also reaffirm its connection to the Episcopal Church, focus on the character development of its students, increase student enrollment to 300 and better compensate its staff and faculty.

The school will fund the new construction in part with a \$400,000 donation provided by the Henry M. Rowan Family Foundation. McGee said the grant came with a condition that the school craft a bold vision for its future.

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