

**BENSON TECH**

# ALUMNI TEXT

Benson Tech sports update

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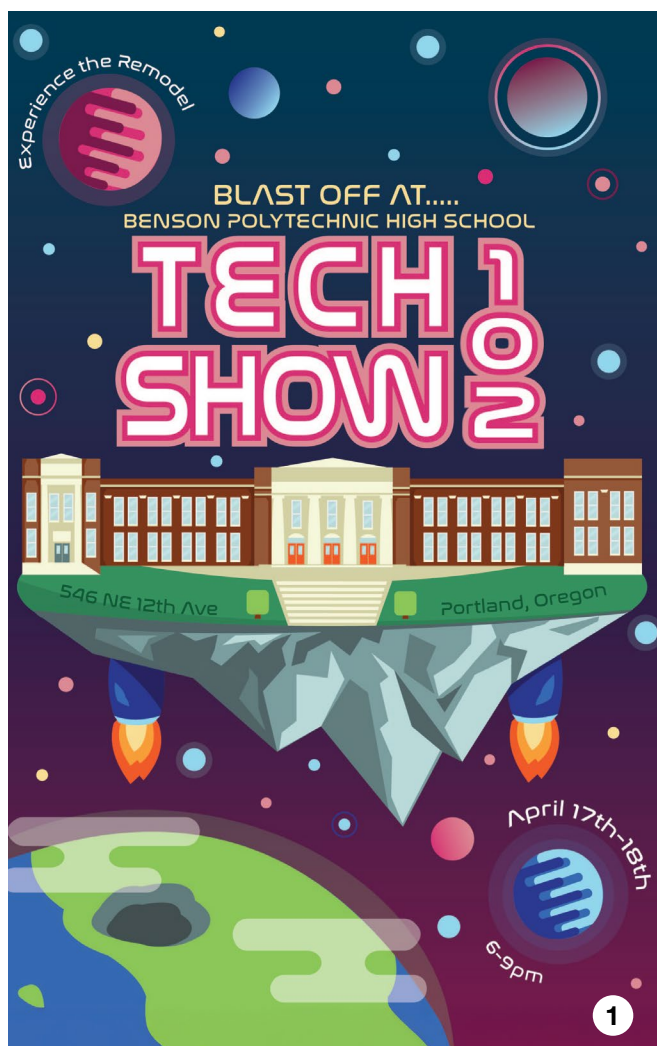
KBPS Summer Sound receives donation

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Reunion Announcements

Back Cover

The Official Newsletter of the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Association (BPHSAA), April 2025 Edition



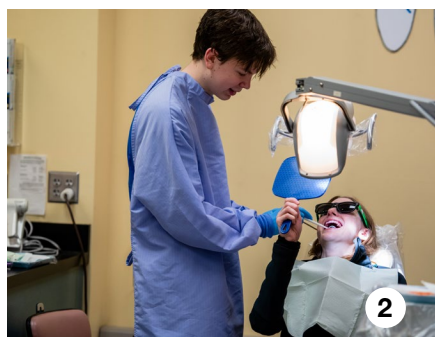
## Tech Show opens on April 17

*by Dale Bajema (Class of 1954)*

Benson Tech's 102nd Tech Show will run two days — April 17 and 18 from 6:00 – 9:00 PM. While this year's Tech Show will carry on a proud tradition, it will also showcase Benson Tech's recently modernized campus. Dedicated on September 14, 2024, the updated buildings have state-of-the-art equipment, technology and space for a 21st century career technical education (CTE). For Tech Show, the shops and labs will be open with "students strutting their stuff" and the courtyard buzzing with other CTE activities. Many clubs will be represented in the Commons, student-produced products will be on sale, and a variety of food options will be available.

Be sure to visit the new Alumni Room behind the balcony at the west end of the renovated auditorium (elevator available inside west entrance). Meet other alumni, update your contact information, and look at yearbooks.

For those curious, the first Tech Show was held May 16, 1919, for the public to see firsthand one of the country's first polytechnic high schools. It was an immediate success. With the exception of 1945 during World War II and 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic, Tech Show has been an annual event at Benson Tech. A somewhat scaled-back 100th event was celebrated during the school's sojourn on the former Marshall High School campus while the NE 12th Avenue building was being modernized from June 2021 through September 2024.



**Photo 1:** Senior Caitlin Bice designed this year's Tech Show promotional poster. **Photos 2-4:** Throughout the years, Tech Show has allowed Benson Tech students to demonstrate their know-how across the diverse range of CTE courses offered at the school. See more photos from Tech Show on Page 7. (Photos 2 and 4 courtesy of Portland Public Schools.)

## IN BRIEF | BPHSAA AND BENSON TECH NEWS

### 2024 scholarship donations exceed \$15,000

In part in response to a personal appeal from Scholarship Committee member Ken Bakke (Class of 1954), more than \$15,500 was added to the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Scholarship Fund during 2024. It is expected that three to five 2025 Benson Tech graduates will receive a needed scholarship from the 2024 fund earnings. See the list of 2024 donors below.

### More "old" Tech Peps are digitized

The BPHSAA's project to digitize all available issues of the former school newspaper, the Tech Pep, continues. Project leader Roger Edward (Class of 1963) reports that as of "press time," all of the weekly issues from the initial issue in 1920 to 1940 have been scanned. BPHSAA members who have paid their membership dues can access these archived issues on the BPHSAA website, [benson-techalumni.org](https://benson-techalumni.org) by logging in under "[Members](#)."

### HOSA news

Benson Tech's Health Occupation Students of America's (HOSA's) annual blood drive attracted 47 donors in February. Later in the month, February 20-22, three Benson Tech juniors competed at the Oregon HOSA State Leadership Conference. While they did not advance to this year's National Conference, they turned in strong performances and are likely to go back next year.

### Battle of the Books

On March 15, Benson Tech's Battle of the Books team again demonstrated its reading skills on the way to being declared champions of its region within Oregon. The competition involves answering deep and detailed questions concerning the 12 books assigned to all of the state's teams. Benson Tech's team will be attempting to win a second championship in the Oregon Battle of the Books Championship competition on April 12 in Salem. Visit [bensontechalumni.org](https://bensontechalumni.org) to see how the team did.

### Now in Orbit

This past fall, the Journalism Club initiated a 21st century student-run news source. It can be accessed at [bensonorbit.com](https://bensonorbit.com) and features articles by the Journalism Club members as they write and post them. Check the site out — the articles are well written, interesting, and occasionally provocative.



### JV football this fall

Benson Tech has been given the go-ahead to field a JV football team this coming fall. Last season's freshmen will be joined by incoming freshmen. Coach Kendall Lewis and Principal Curtis Wilson have said the prospects for the team look good. If things go well, there is a chance for a varsity team the following year. *Go Astros!!!*

### Benson Tech tightens its cell phone policy this spring

This past January, Portland Public Schools (PPS) announced a new cell phone policy for the coming 2025-2026 school year. That policy, which will be applied at all PPS K-12 schools, bans the use of cell phones within the school during school hours (Off and Away All Day). Since the start of this school year, Benson Tech's policy has been that students are not allowed to use their cell phones during class times but may use their phones at lunch and between classes. Benson Tech's policy has a set of escalating penalties for violations.

To prepare its students for the 2025-2026 district-wide cell phone policy, Benson Tech revised its existing policy on February 18 so that the first violation of a cell phone being used during class time, including in the hall, would result in the phone being taken and delivered to the main office, where the student can pick it up at the end of the day.

# THANK YOU!



Thank you to the generous donors who contributed to the Benson Polytechnic High School Alumni Scholarship Fund in 2024:

- Dale Bajema & Diana Coleman
- Bakke Properties LLC
- Alan L Batts
- Wayne De Vore
- John C. Delacy
- Cecilia Doan
- Glenn Eades
- Mitch Fearing
- Peter Fones & Leah Baker-Fones
- Kevin Freeman
- Neal Galash
- Richard Greiling
- Harlan Jencks, in honor of Benson Teachers
- Myrna Jensen
- Judith L. Seltz Charitable Foundation Trust
- Peter Koonce
- Rachael Lizio Katzen Kuryunny, in honor of Barb Olsen
- Daniel Lizio-Katzen
- Robert Malone, in honor of Steve Minor
- Constance Mar & Tanner Volz
- LeRoy E. Nelson
- Frank L.R. Olson, in honor of Robert Bonniwell and Norman Street
- Judy & David W. Osgood
- Jerald V. & Cindi Parker
- Steve Schlick
- Peter Simpson
- Jeffery Spathas, in honor of John Harlan
- Charles & Tammy Tujo
- Donald F. & Arlene K. Walton
- Michael Wiebe

## Benson Tech Foundation (BTF) update

*by Rob Johns (Class of 1977), BPHSAA Chair, BTF President*

In the absence of public funds, the Benson Tech Foundation (BTF), a qualified 501(c)(3) has provided "gap" funding. The charter of the foundation is to support the Career Technical Education (CTE) and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs at Benson Tech. The BTF has proven to be a solid program gap funder to fill last-minute and planned needs of student project and club needs. Some recent examples:

- Funding for 2023 and 2024 calendar year Robotics Club programs to allow the kids to focus on their projects and compete, instead of spending time on fundraising. This has been fruitful. Robotics Club Team 267 competed at the State Championships on March 15 and 16. The team made it to double eliminations on the 16th, but lost both final competitions largely due to a lack of performance of their matched team. However, the individual performance of the Benson Tech team placed it in the 98.89th percentile based on its unique ability to succeed in the Endgame Ascent, whereby the team programs its robot to hang its entire unit from the highest rung of a ladder.
- Funding for 2022, 2023 and 2024 for the Health Occupations Society of America (HOSA) for health occupation students to attend the National Convention and to compete at Regional Competitions.
- Funding in 2025 for the Benson Auditorium Technical Staff (BATS) for needed headphones for state-of-the-art communications during plays and musicals and school events.
- Funding in 2024 for a 3D scanner to work with the new 3D printer in Applied Arts.
- Facilitating the transfer in 2022 of two Ford Model Ts so that they can be preserved for future use at Benson Tech events.

Our donors are Benson Tech alumni. A shout-out goes to Andrew Kern and his father Mike Kern, Roger Edwards, the Judith Seltz Charitable Foundation, and a number of non-Benson Tech alums who are Friends of Benson!

We welcome donations and we welcome discussions on your passions to support specific Benson Tech programs. Please contact me at 503-314-0041 or [robjohns@com-cast.net](mailto:robjohns@com-cast.net).

## A shout-out to Dan Malone

As Benson Tech's Vice Principal for Modernization, Dan Malone has been the school's point person for the complex 2021 move to the former Marshall High School campus, liaison between the school and the Office of Modernization and the construction company during the 2021-2024 reconstruction, the 2024 move to the reconstructed Benson Tech campus, and past year of finishing up the details. Dan's quick embrace of the school and alumni's pride in the school's 100+ year history and the "Benson Experience" made that a more successful journey.

For the past four years, Dan has also been the BPHSAA's go-to-person for information about the modernization and school activities and regularly appearing at the BPHSAA Board of Directors monthly meetings. He has provided access to the Marshall campus and recently, the modernized school for meetings and Tech Show; organized special tours of the building for alumni and supporters during construction and since; and supported the BPHSAA's annual Benson Tech Community Celebration. Dan played a key role in finding and saving Benson Tech memorabilia and artifacts as well as creating the new Alumni Room.

Thank you, Dan, for going the "extra mile" for Benson Tech's alumni and the BPHSAA. We will always consider you as a Benson Techman and now an Astro!



### BENSON TECH COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

**September 13, 2025**

**12:00 to 3:00 PM at Benson Tech**  
**546 NE 12th Avenue**

*\* Alumni, families, and Benson Tech supporters  
are all welcome!*

*\* Tour the modernized campus.*

*\* Food to purchase.*

# BPHSAA TRiViA QUIZ

In this quiz, the questions are given as a homework assignment. Completing it will make you familiar with historic issues of the Tech Pep, which are now digitized and available in the "Members" section of the BPHSAA website. You must be a BPHSAA member to access this Tech Pep archive. The added difficulty of this requirement seeks to increase our membership and so increase the funding to make membership more appealing. Use the QR code below or go to the BPHSAA website ([bensontechalumni.org](https://bensontechalumni.org)) to the "Members" section to sign up! The questions:

- **Question 1:** Do you know someone suitable for the job featured in the article identified below?
- **Question 2:** How was the publication of a weekly, four-page newspaper funded?
- **Question 3:** How was Benson Tech's geared logo created?
- **Question 4:** The school is now heated with a state-of-the-art hydronics system. How was the school heated in 1925?
- **Question 5:** What was the first out-of-state university to recognize the value of a Benson Tech education?



- 
- **Answer 1:** See the article in the top left corner on Page 3 in the Sept. 28, 1920 issue.
  - **Answer 2:** The funding source appeared in the very first issue and is praised on Page 4 of the Oct 19, 1920 issue.
  - **Answer 3:** The series of events are described on Page 1 of the March 15, April 19, May 24, and June 10 issues from 1921 *Hint:* A brief outline of this sequence can also be found in the second trivia answer in the April 2023 Benson Tech Alumni Text newsletter.
  - **Answer 4:** The system is described on Page 2 of the May 22, 1925 issue.
  - **Answer 5:** See Page 1 of the issue indexed as Oct 9, 1924. The date on this issue is 1923, but the volume and number of the issue is correct for 1924 and the date on the designated letter is 1924, so it was the Tech Pep staff who erred in giving this issue a 1923 date.

## Reminder: Get your business listed in the BPHSAA Alumni Business Directory

*by Thomas Smith (Class of 1993)*

Benson Tech High School alumni, don't forget about the Benson Polytechnic Alumni Business Directory! If you're a Benson Tech graduate and own a business, this is your opportunity to connect with fellow alumni and expand your reach. The directory is a valuable resource that helps showcase alumni-owned businesses, fosters networking opportunities, and strengthens our community.

### Why Join the Directory?

- **Increase visibility** – Your business will be listed in the directory and may also be featured on the BPHSAA website.
- **Social media exposure** – Gain recognition through Benson Tech's official alumni social media channels.
- **Newsletter spotlights** – Your business could be highlighted in upcoming BPHSAA alumni newsletters.

- **Event opportunities** – We look to alumni businesses for involvement in events like the Tech Show, alumni picnics, and networking events.

### How to Get Listed

1. **Submit your business** – Fill out the form here: <https://bensontechalumni.org/AlumniBusinessDirectoryForm>.
2. **Stay engaged** – Follow us on social media and visit the Benson Alumni website (<https://bensontechalumni.org/>) for updates.

If you haven't added your business yet, now is the time! To date, we have had almost two dozen fellow alumni list their businesses in the directory, which broadens the visibility of their businesses amongst alumni without any advertising costs. Let's continue to support our fellow Benson Tech alumni and keep our network strong.



# Benson TechBoosters update

by Kelly Janes, Benson TechBoosters, President

## Ready! Set! Go Astros! Fundraiser Trophy

This year, we added a new twist to Ready! Set! Go Astros!—a class competition! The Class of 1985 took the win with \$1,756 in donations (pre-fees). We've purchased the base of a new trophy that will track the winning class each year, and we'll have it on display at our table during Tech Show—be sure to stop by and check it out!

This semester, Foundry students will design and create the top half of the trophy: an Astros figure. We expect to unveil the complete trophy in fall of 2025, and it will eventually reside in one of the display cases in the main entry hall, serving as a lasting symbol of class pride and community support.

Want to donate today? Support the [Benson TechBoosters General Fund](#) on PayPal.

Visit our homepage to donate: [bensontechboosters.org](https://bensontechboosters.org).

## Spring Fund Distribution Underway

Following a successful fall fundraising season, the TechBoosters are excited to distribute \$2,600 to Benson Tech student groups and sports teams for the Spring 2025 season. An additional \$2,600 will be allocated for both the Fall 2025 and Winter 2025 seasons from the same round of fall fundraising.

Applications for spring funds were due April 7, and funding decisions were made during our April 10 board meeting with meaningful input from school faculty. Be sure to stop by the TechBoosters table at Tech Show to find out which groups received funding (selections will be made prior to our print deadline)!

## Supporting Our Teachers

Teacher appreciation remains a cornerstone of our work. We continue to provide food and staff room supplies for our incredible faculty and administration. This year, teacher appreciation will be May 5 – 9. TechBoosters will provide several lunches as well as some extra surprises for our faculty!

Want to help? Donate to our [Teacher Appreciation Fund](#) on PayPal or sign up to receive volunteer updates on our website: [bensontechboosters.org](https://bensontechboosters.org).

## Tech Show Highlights and Ways to Engage

We've got several initiatives in motion—and some special updates just in time for Tech Show!

- **Spirit Gear Sales at Tech Show:** We'll be selling BT spirit gear at our table during Tech Show! Come grab a t-shirt and show your Benson Tech pride.

- **Sponsorship Opportunities:** We're developing new sponsorship options for local businesses and organizations. Interested? Email us at [bensontechboosters@gmail.com](mailto:bensontechboosters@gmail.com) to learn more.

At Benson TechBoosters, we believe every contribution makes an impact. Whether through donations, volunteer time, or spreading the word, your involvement helps fuel student



**Above:** TechBoosters' teacher appreciation efforts in 2024 included providing doughnuts, coffee, and other goodies for staff.

success and strengthens the already amazing Benson Tech community.

Find us online at [bensontechboosters.org](https://bensontechboosters.org) and follow us on Instagram ([BensonTechBoosters](#)). You can find our posts on Facebook in the following groups: [Benson Polytechnic High School Students, Alumni & Community](#), [Benson Polytechnic High School](#), and [Tech Pride Volunteer Community](#).

Thank you for all that you do—and Go Astros!

## HELP WANTED!

**Know an auditor?** The TechBoosters are looking to hire an auditor to review our financial landscape this summer – a requirement of our new



bylaws passed at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. We would love to hire an alumnus or locally owned business to help us with this important project. Please email us at [bensontechboosters@gmail.com](mailto:bensontechboosters@gmail.com) if you or someone you know might be interested!

# Sports update for Winter 2025

by Jessica Russell, Benson Tech Athletic Director

## Winter Sports Recap

Benson Tech had a great winter season! The swim team had record-setting participation numbers, keeping our head coach Steve Espe very busy. Five of our swimmers entered into 11 district meet events at the end of the season. Fourteen Benson Tech students wrestled for their neighborhood schools this winter, including two who made it to the state tournament: Sadat Clowers, a senior who wrestled for Cleveland, and Gabi Trimble, a junior who wrestled for Roosevelt. Benson Tech's wrestling program will resume next winter.

Both the boys' and girls' basketball programs made it to the state playoffs. The boys finished their season 14-11, ranked 21st. They fell to #12, West Salem, in the first round of the playoffs. The boys' team did not have any seniors on the team this year, so we plan to have everyone back for another great season next year.

The girls' basketball team made it to the second round after beating Central Catholic 61-43 at home. Our girls finished the season with 21 wins and only five losses. The girls were eliminated from the playoffs in the second round by West Linn, who continued on to finish fourth in the state tournament. Benson Tech's last home game of the season, though it did not end with a win, was an eventful one with live singers performing "The Star-Spangled Banner" and "Lift Every Voice and Sing"; a DJ performing during breaks in play; and (most important-

ly) high-level basketball. The girls graduated one senior, post player Taliya McKelvey.

Both head basketball coaches were recognized by their peers for their outstanding performance this season. Earl Clark, Benson Tech alumnus (Class of 1995), social studies teacher and the boys basketball head coach, as well as first-year head girls basketball coach Precious Alex were BOTH awarded PIL's Coach of the Year this season.

## Spring Sports Forecast

The spring season is in full swing! The baseball and softball teams won their home openers at Buckman Field against their non-league opponents. The girls' and boys' tennis programs continue to grow in popularity with enough athletes to fill JV and varsity teams. Sophomore Carlyta Barfield is returning, hoping for another run in the state singles tennis tournament after making it to the quarterfinals last year as a freshman. Track and field kicked off the season with a league meet at McDaniel High School under first-year head coach and Benson Tech alumnus Duy Do (Class of 2012). There were standout performances by sophomores Rickeil Miles and Londyn Dyton in the 100-meter dash, juniors Larry Chesterfield and Tayshaun Schmidt in shot put, and junior Itzcoatl Ruiz Catalan in javelin.



## Benson Tech's newest Rose Festival princess

Brenda Martinez De Jesus is Benson Tech's 2025 Rose Festival Princess (photo below)! Brenda's post-graduate plans are to attend a university and major in nursing. She aspires to become a pediatric nurse.

A fun fact about Brenda is that her birthday is on Halloween. In her spare time, she loves scrapbooking and taking pictures.



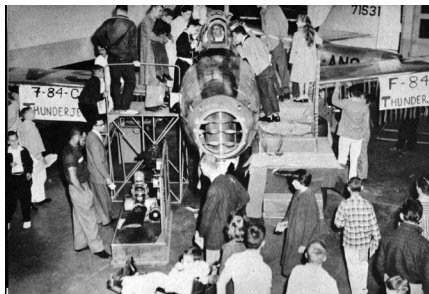
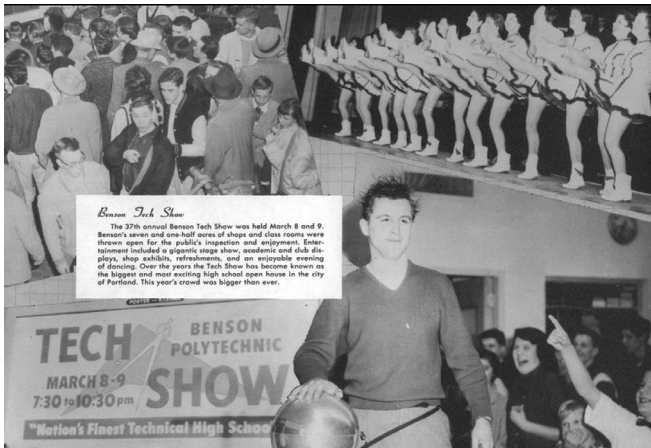
## ALUMNI TEXT CREDITS

**Co-Editors & Writers:** Dale Bajema and Roger Edwards

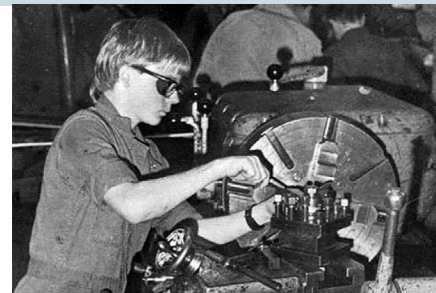
We want to thank Kelly Janes, Rob Johns, Rachael Lizio Katzen Kuryunny, Jacob Patterson, Jessica Russell and Thomas Smith for their articles, as well as Steve Curley, Heide Goertzen, Carl Larson, Dan Malone, Eva Martinez Mercado, Irynne Padua, Matt Pellico, and Curtis Wilson for information and assistance in creating this newsletter. And, as always for the diligent efforts of Connie Mar, our designer.

**FEEDBACK WANTED!** Is the Benson Tech Alumni Text still relevant in 2025? We want to hear from you! Send your ideas on how to make it better, including suggestions for different formats and/or content, to [info@bensontechalumni.org](mailto:info@bensontechalumni.org).





## SHOWCASING TECH SKILLS & SPIRIT FOR OVER A CENTURY





## Aminé Foundation Scholarship established for broadcasting majors

by Jacob Patterson, KBPS Broadcasting Program Instructor

Hip-hop superstar Aminé (Adam Aminé Daniel, Radio Broadcasting Major, Class of 2012) has donated \$25,000 to KBPS for student scholarships. The Aminé Foundation Scholarships will be given out in five separate \$1,000 scholarships each year to radio broadcasting majors for five years, starting this year. KBPS staff has decided to tie four of these scholarships to the four existing KBPS Senior Awards for "Leadership and Professionalism," "Academic Achievement," "Best On-Air Announcer," and "Most Outstanding Contribution" to KBPS. The fifth Aminé Foundation Scholarship will go to a deserving student chosen by KBPS staff. The first Aminé Foun-

ation Scholar was announced at the Benson Girls Basketball Game and Senior Night for Cheerleaders on Feb. 28. Senior Rosa Guerra was selected for the "Most Outstanding Contribution" award. Rosa was also being honored that evening for Cheerleader Senior Night with her family and friends in attendance.

Aminé has also very generously donated a free pair of his brand-new and extremely popular shoes (shown at right) to every Benson Tech senior of the Class of 2025. The shoes are a beautiful tribute to Benson Tech, in blue and orange colors, with a modified BPHS seal logo inside the shoe, and slogans like "Benson Tech," "Class of 2012" and "Radio KBPS" printed on the shoe's tongue. Previously, when the shoes were available to the public for \$120, they sold out



*Above:* A shoe-related tribute to Benson Tech from Aminé.

instantly. Pairs can now be found selling for even higher amounts through secondary markets. Aminé was interviewed by current KBPS seniors about his generous donation and the new scholarship in November 2024 — you can listen to it on the KBPS website: [www.kbps.am](http://www.kbps.am).



*Above:* Broadcasting from KBPS for the Summer Sound Program. (Photo courtesy of Portland Public Schools.)

## KBPS Summer Sound receives boost from donation

by Jacob Patterson, KBPS Broadcasting Program Instructor

A former Benson Tech student, who wished to remain anonymous, donated \$5,000 to the KBPS student fund on February 17 to help the KBPS Summer Sound student job employment program and additional studio remodel cost. The Summer Sound program was started by KBPS staff in 1971. It pays students directly to operate the station and learn advanced broadcasting skills during the summer, and costs just over \$10,000 to operate.

The timing of the donation is fortuitous. It will help keep the program alive as KBPS staff continue to work to connect with individual donors for program support, including Phil Knight, whose generous personal donations in the past have kept Summer Sound active and thriving in recent years.

KBPS is also actively raising additional money to purchase broadcast industry standard furniture for its two broadcasting studios. The radio station was the last part of the Benson Tech campus modernization project to be finished. Requests for replacement of existing broadcast furniture in all KBPS studios were denied as the project was already over budget and delayed at that point. KBPS also was told that the existing broadcast furniture was not allowed to remain in place because it was not ADA-compliant — all "old" furniture was removed. KBPS did receive new broadcasting furniture for one of the studios, new audio mixing boards, and new microphones in the modernization updates.



## Robotics Club goes to state tournament

The Robotics Club Team 267 (photo below) coached by Matt Pellico (former Benson Tech instructor) and Ian Baldwin (former Club 267 team member) reached the Oregon State Championship Tournament final rounds on March 16, 2025. After surviving tough competition in early rounds, the team was selected as the fifth seed (of six) into a double elimination final tournament.

The challenge this year was to gather samples and specimens from a simulated underwater environment. Each team of two robots placed as many samples as they could into two nets (eight points each), and hung as many specimens

as possible onto two horizontal rods (10 points each). A single match lasts only two and a half minutes. As an endgame challenge, each robot could



attempt to climb a two-rung ladder for up to 30 additional points.

Despite good performances, the Benson Tech team will not be one of

the four teams representing Oregon at the June International Tournament in Houston, Texas. Attesting to the team's skills, however, its robot, was one of only two Oregon robots that were capable of a "third stage accent," i.e., being able to lift itself up to a third horizontal bar.

The Robotics Club's other team coached by John DeLacy (Class of 1966) did not make it to this year's Oregon State Championship Tournament, but it has in past years. Most of the team's members are returning next year, and they are already enthusiastic about doing even better next season.

## Bringing performing arts back to Benson Tech

by Dale Bajema (Class of 1954) and Josh Piper (Class of 1995)

Restoring Benson Tech's long history of performing arts was one of the voiced objectives during the multiyear planning effort leading to the 2021-2024 modernization of Benson Tech. The new main building indeed has a renovated auditorium with state-of-art light and sound equipment, new black box theater, and new band room with practice rooms. Unfortunately, Portland Public Schools' (PPS') operating budgets for 2024-25 or 2025-26 have not had the resources to staff a performing arts program in the modernized building.

Several groups of motivated, energized students have taken the lead in searching for short-term and long-term solutions. The Benson Auditorium Technical Staff (BATS), working with Principal Curtis Wilson, has found a new advisor in Heide Goertzen. They successfully hosted a free concert featuring the band, Almost Monday, back in December. They also recently hosted the first school-wide assembly in the renovated auditorium.

A new Music Club, also advised by Heide Goertzen, has formed to provide students a musical outlet. Its mission is to create space for Benson Tech students to make music and create a sense of belonging at the school through

music. All forms are welcome; no one is turned away. Current goals include gaining access to PPS instrument rentals and possibly bringing in musicians to help coach the students. Principal Wilson nearly worked out a half-time band director, but it fell through. He remains committed to bringing music back to Benson Tech, but with PPS' budget woes, we are likely 1-2 years away from being able to afford it. In the meantime, the Benson Tech Site Council and BPHSAA are offering the club support and help in finding the club instruments, instructional help and other needed resources. Anyone wishing to help the club should contact Heide at [hgoertzen@pps.net](mailto:hgoertzen@pps.net).



Above: The Benson Tech band performing at the 1969 Tech Show.

## Darrel Austin: From vocational student to one of America's most distinctive artists

*by Roger Edwards (Class of 1963)*

Seventeen years after January 1925, when he became a Benson Polytechnic High School graduate, Darrel Austin was recognized nationally as a distinguished painter. His sold-out gallery exhibits produced articles in *Esquire*, *LIFE*, and *Time* magazines in 1942, and a continuing demand for his works. There are at least eight of his paintings in the Portland area: three in storage at the Portland Art Museum and five displayed in the Ram's Head Bar at Timberline Lodge.

Darrel was the second of three children born to Albert and Ella Austin. His parents were in Kansas during 1904 for the

had won a Chamber of Commerce poster contest heralding the beginning of the new merchandise opening. He won the \$50 prize for the previous year's celebration as well.

His art instructor at the University of Portland was Emil Jacques. Emil convinced Darrel to join him at the University of Notre Dame when he was offered a teaching position there. A Tech Pep alumni report in the Dec. 20, 1929 issue describes that journey to Indiana. The article also gives a description of Darrel's personality that fits in with the accounts in the *Esquire* and *LIFE* narratives. The writers who interviewed him



*The Woodcutters (Photo courtesy of Flickr, A. Davey.)*

birth of Darrel's brother Robert. Darrel was born in Raymond, Washington, on June 25, 1907, and his sister Dorothy was born in 1913. The family was found in Portland for the 1910 Census.

At Benson Tech, Darrel majored in printing, served on the staffs of both the Tech Pep and the Poly-Tech, the Fire Squad, Boosters, and the Executive Board. He is listed as an artist with the Poly-Tech, and was the advertising manager for the 1925 class play.

After graduation, Darrel enrolled in a series of drawing classes. The Sept. 6, 1927 issue of the Tech Pep includes Darrel's senior photo on the front page in an article noting he



*The Dishwashers (Photo courtesy of Flickr, A. Davey.)*

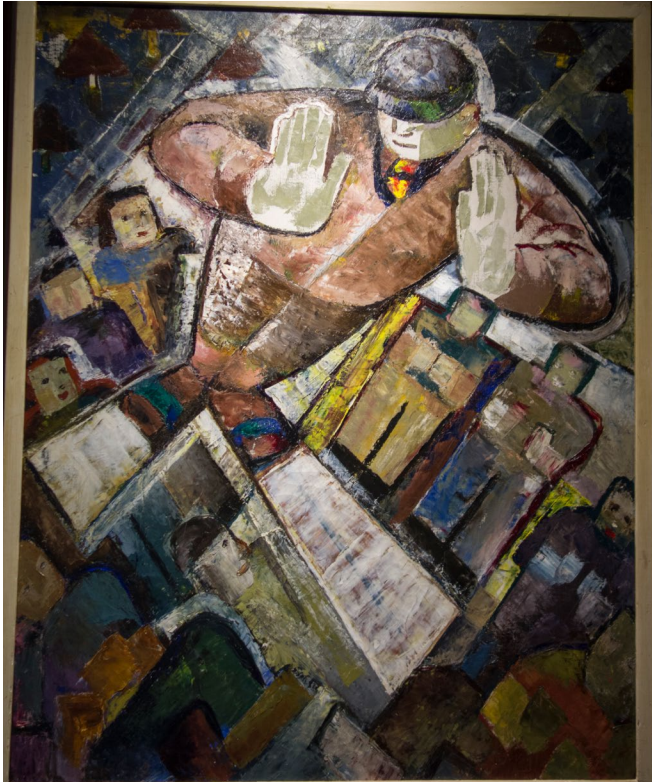
concluded that he had a high opinion of his work and of his wife, Margot, and himself. The two were content to limit their social circle to other believers.

Margot Helser was an Oregon native from Portland and fellow art student in the Notre Dame classes who caught Darrel's eye. They were married in Portland on 24 February 1933. They found a studio apartment and eked out a meager living, with Margot working with stained glass, and Darrel doing department store ads and whatever else that paid a wage.

The establishment of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1935 proved to be a milestone for Darrel's painting career. The WPA commissioned him for



four murals for the Oregon Medical School in 1936, and the five Timberline Lodge paintings in 1937. The five depict *The Dishwashers*, *The Musicians*, *The Ironworkers*, *The Woodcutters*, and *Fish Story*. *The Ironworkers* is now called *The Skier*. (Shown below.) This change is appropriate for Timberline,



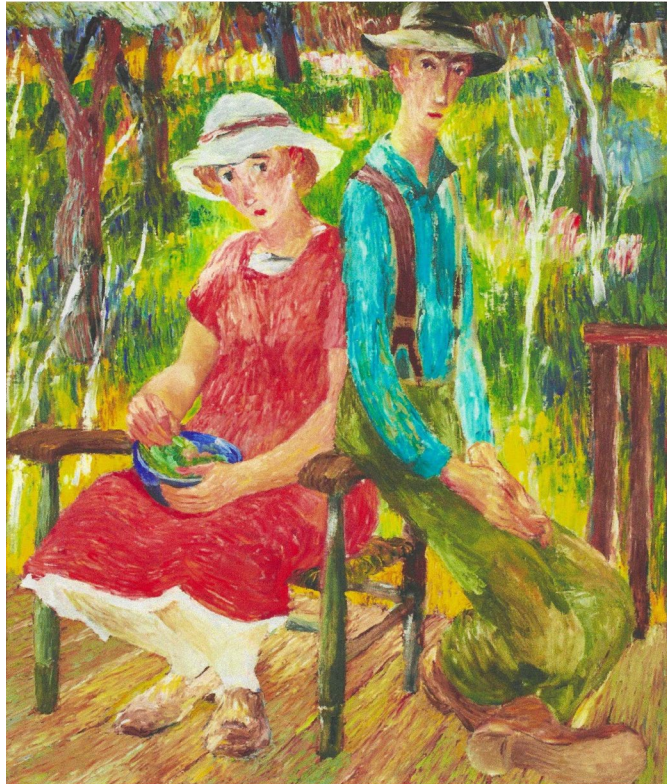
*The Skier* (Photo courtesy of Flickr, A. Davey.)

but note the square front ends of the skier's skis. Note too the diminishing elongation of the skier, a feature also seen in top-down views of tall buildings. There is no snow or ski poles, and ironworkers are often found walking on perpendicular I-beams.

Darrel's *Boy and Girl*, pictured above right, was painted early in the 1940s. Its sketch-like appearance is due to the application of paint with his palette knife rather than brushes. This technique of Darrel's is used in all his paintings and while it does not match the appeal of works from the High Renaissance, it does produce an element of charm. And a striking element in many of Darrel's pictures is the attitude of his subjects. The lad and the lass here are not of one mind, much like the two Dishwashers. His ability to perch on the arm of the chair and the limited space for his feet proclaim him gangly. The girl's distress is not from an inconsequential irritant. Could they be siblings? This painting is at the Portland Art Museum along with his *Portrait of a Girl* and *Picnickers*.

The WPA was disbanded in 1939 but Darrel's painting career was well under way by then. Painting proved to be a simpler task than selling the painted pictures. On a visit to Los

Angeles, they had a query about his works and the resulting exhibition in January 1938 at the Putzel Gallery of Hollywood sold out. On to New York City, where Darrel pounded the pavement and painted, and Margot wrote and illustrated books for children. It was in the fall of 1940 before arrangements were



*Boy and Girl* (Photo courtesy of Portland Art Museum.)

made for another one-man show at the Klaus Perl Gallery on 57th Street. It too produced a sellout and a cluster of additional gallery and museum exhibits in New York and beyond. In 1944, the Austins established a permanent residence in Connecticut and royalties from Margot's book contributed to their continued well-being. Her best seller was *Peter Churchmouse*. Margot died at their New Fairfield, Connecticut home on June 25, 1990, and Darrel followed her on Aug. 16, 1994. They are survived by their son, Darrel Jr.

Most of Darrel's paintings depict scenes from a parallel universe of a benevolent and mythical nature, viewed under a lunar sky. Girls and cats are his favorite subjects. Many of the works are variations of a central theme, each a little different from the others. His entire catalog of works can readily be found online. A few examples of these paintings, which accompany the magazine articles, will be displayed in the Alumni Room during Tech Show. Photos of the Portland-area pictures will also be displayed there. The Alumni Room is upstairs in the Auditorium, behind the balcony. Because there are events scheduled in the Auditorium, the doors at the west end of the building provide the best access.





## REUNION INFORMATION

### CLASS OF 1950

The Class of 1950 continues to meet quarterly over lunch. Those interested in joining should contact Jim Robb ([jfrobb@comcast.net](mailto:jfrobb@comcast.net)) for details about the next gathering.

### CLASS OF 1955- 70th Reunion

The Class of 1955 is hosting an informal reunion in the school's community room during Tech Show on Friday, 4/18/25. For information about this and future gatherings, contact Rex Gilley at [rexgilley@msn.com](mailto:rexgilley@msn.com), or 503-785-1633.

### CLASS OF 1965- 60th Reunion

Please contact the BPHSAA at [info@BensonTechAlumni.org](mailto:info@BensonTechAlumni.org) if you are aware of any plans for a Class of 1965 reunion.

### CLASS OF 1975- 50th Reunion

Please contact the BPHSAA at [info@BensonTechAlumni.org](mailto:info@BensonTechAlumni.org) if you are aware of any plans for a Class of 1975 reunion.

### CLASS OF 1985- 40th Reunion

**WHEN:** Friday, Sept. 12 and Saturday, Sept. 13, 2025

**WHAT:** Friday evening, no host, adults-only meet-and-greet, 6:00 PM-close.

**WHERE:** Kenton Station (8303 N Denver, Portland OR 97217)

**WHAT:** Saturday family-friendly gathering in conjunction with the Benson Tech Community Celebration, 12:00 PM-3:00 PM

**WHERE:** Benson Tech Campus (546 NE 12th, Portland 97232)  
*Note: Wear your blue and gold, and don't miss the class photo!*

**WHAT:** Saturday evening, no host, adults-only get together, time TBD.

**WHERE:** McMenamin's Edgefield (2126 SW Halsey Street, Troutdale, OR 97060)

**FACEBOOK:** Visit the Benson Tech Class of '85 (40th) Class Reunion Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/357404773729370>) for updates and details.

**CONTACT:** Contact Denise Brumels at [bethel2az@gmail.com](mailto:bethel2az@gmail.com) or 602-909-1642 with questions.

### CLASS OF 1995 - 30th Reunion

**WHEN:** Saturday, September 13, 2025

**WHAT:** Adults-only get together, time and other details TBD.

**WHERE:** Loyal Legion Beaverton (4500 SW Watson Ave., Beaverton, OR 97005)

**FACEBOOK:** Visit the Benson Class of 1995

Reunion Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1387398751577925>) for updates and details.

**CONTACT:** Email Krisi Guerra at [krisiguerra@yahoo.com](mailto:krisiguerra@yahoo.com) with questions.

**\*\*\* BPHSAA Note:** *Regardless of whether or not it is part of your official reunion, members of all classes (and their families) are invited to attend the Benson Tech Community Celebration on Saturday, September 13 from 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM at the modernized 12th Avenue campus.*

### CLASS OF 2005 - 20th Reunion

**WHEN:** Weekend of Sept. 12-14, 2025

**WHAT:** Specifics are TBD, but will include the Community Celebration on Benson Tech's campus on Saturday, 9/13 from 12:00-3:00 PM.

**FACEBOOK:** Join the Benson Polytechnic Class of 2005 Facebook Group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/BTECH05RE-UNION>) and check back regularly for information and updates.

**CONTACT:** Contact Vanessa James at [vanessa.rjames@yahoo.com](mailto:vanessa.rjames@yahoo.com) or 503-737-4853 with questions, or if you'd like to assist with the reunion.

### CLASS OF 2015- 10th Reunion

Please contact the BPHSAA at [info@BensonTechAlumni.org](mailto:info@BensonTechAlumni.org) if you are aware of any plans for a Class of 2015 reunion.

## Let the BPHSAA help to promote your next reunion!

Does your class end in a "6" or a "1"? Are you considering, or perhaps already in the process of planning a reunion in 2026? The BPHSAA can help to spread the word, and connect you with graduates from your class. Simply send an email with the following information to [info@bensontechalumni.org](mailto:info@bensontechalumni.org), and we'll share the details of your reunion on our webpage, social media accounts, and in our newsletters.

- **When** (dates and times)
- **What** (the nature of the events—alumni-only, partners welcome, family-friendly, etc.; formal or casual; catered, potluck, BYO food and drink)
- **Where**
- **Cost and how to purchase tickets**
- **Event website or Facebook page** (if applicable) and **contact information** for the organizer(s)