

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **Green Bay Press-Gazette**

[Back](#)

College-prep school planned for September opening

By **Todd McMahon**

The De Pere Journal February 7, 2008

A river city overflowing with a college, two public school districts, parochial schools and a variety of other educational hubs is making room for another learning center.

Founders of Wisconsin International School are firming up plans to open Brown County's first independent school with no religious affiliation in September.

While more details on the project will be shed in community informational meetings next week, board president Sandi Van Den Heuvel confirmed that a former school site on the west side of De Pere is the preferred start-up facility for WIS.

The old St. Boniface Catholic Grade School, at 405 Grant St., has been sitting empty after it was most recently used as a ministry center for adjoining St. Norbert College, which doesn't own the property.

"We and the landlord have an agreement," Van Den Heuvel said.

Pending zoning approval by the city of De Pere, the new school would be launched at the start of the 2008-09 school year.

"It's a perfect building. We don't have to do a lot of retrofitting," Van Den Heuvel said.

The premise behind the venture, though, is a contemporary alternative to traditional public or private schooling.

WIS is designed as a college-preparatory school for children in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade. The curriculum, while being age appropriate, will be rigorous and challenge the young students to expand their horizons.

"When you say college prep, it's not necessarily just throwing all kinds of academics at them. It's getting them to love to actually learn," Van Den Heuvel said. "Just throwing academics at children is not going to make them happy. So, they're not going to want to do it when they graduate from high school. We'll be getting them excited about learning, being accepted in their small, little community of students."



 zoom

The old St. Boniface Catholic Grade School on Grant Street in De Pere is the proposed location for Wisconsin International School, which would open in September. Founders of the independent school are awaiting formal approval by the city before they occupy the building. Todd McMahon/The De Pere Journal

Advertisement

Class size will be capped at 15 students to give students personalized attention.

It's a comfy atmosphere Van Den Heuvel knows well.

Her three children — ranging in class standing from fifth- to second-grades — have been enrolled at University School of Milwaukee for two years. The independent school also has classrooms with no more than 15 learners.

"The kids have enough friends in the class to socialize with, but it's still small enough," Van Den Heuvel said. "My children know everybody, and everybody knows my children. That's important to me. They don't get lost; they don't stay in the background."

Van Den Heuvel's children previously attended public school in the Unified School District of De Pere on the east side. She has family ties to the Milwaukee area, which helped her make the move down to that city so her kids could attend University School of Milwaukee.

Van Den Heuvel's husband is a physician in Green Bay, so the family maintains a residence in Ledgeview. The sacrifice of occasionally being apart has been worthwhile.

"Some of my friends, obviously, said, 'What are you doing, moving?' " Sandi Van Den Heuvel said. "Once they saw the benefits of what I had (with the school), that's when they started talking ... and wanted to do something like that in Green Bay."

The closest non-parochial private school is The Academy in Appleton, where children of a few of the board members of Wisconsin International School are enrolled.

Van Den Heuvel said initial interest in the new Brown County school has been strong after the board conducted community surveys and began planning last year.

WIS is accepting applications for enrollment on its Web site, [www.wisinternationalschool .com](http://www.wisinternationalschool.com).

School officials also are assembling a staff. The hiring process started with the appointment last month of Stanley W. Way as Head of School.

Way was among six candidates interviewed by the school board. His worldly qualifications meshed with the school's educational philosophy.

The school will use an International Baccalaureate curriculum, which Van Den Heuvel said will expose students to globalization.

"It's having your child understand their place in their own world and then exploring outside of that world to see how other people live," she said. "When our children grow up, they're going to have jobs that aren't even created yet.

"We have to prepare children to think globally, to love to learn, so that the jobs that we can't even imagine ... they are going to be trained where they still have the safety tools to be successful at their job."

Way will come to WIS from Lake Ridge Academy in North Ridgeville, Ohio, where he is head of academics for the lower and middle grades at the independent school.

His background in education spans the globe and includes jobs in Denmark, Egypt and West Africa.

The fundamentals of American education won't be pushed aside at WIS, however.

"English, math, social studies, science, those basics are going to be taught," Van Den Heuvel said.

Students also will have opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, including music, drama and sports.

"A lot of parents are feeling that their children aren't necessarily as challenged as they would like them to be, in some respects," Van Den Heuvel said.

She added that the proposed inclusion of the independent school in the Brown County educational landscape isn't meant to create "a competition" with the public and parochial schools in the area.

One local school administrator doesn't have a problem with the new school moving into his territory.

"We have schools starting up all over the place — Montessoris, all kinds of schools," said Lanny Tibaldo, superintendent of the School District of West De Pere. "This is America. It's a free country."

Attending Wisconsin International School won't be cheap.

School officials haven't disclosed tuition rates. Van Den Heuvel, though, said they wouldn't be as pricey as the going rates of \$14,000 to \$16,000 per year for students in pre-K to eighth grades at University School of Milwaukee.

Financial aid will be afforded to some students at WIS.

"We want to try to make it as economical as possible for people," Van Den Heuvel said.