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2008 Committee Hopes to Revamp SAC Patio

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It is somewhat of a recent Choate tradition for the graduating senior class to give the school a parting gift – with prior projects ranging from a commemorative benches to banners in the hockey rink. However this year, the Choate Class of 2008 intends to significantly up the ante by completely upgrading the patio outside the Student Activity Center (SAC) as a senior gift initiative.

The idea originated last year during the spring term as a way to create a place on campus for seniors only. “We wanted to have a spot for seniors, something really we don’t have on campus now,” remarks student council representative Lauren Provini '08. This initially began as wooden platform that only seniors would be able to go. Although it was not going to be large in size the platform would symbolize a spot for senior seclusion and privacy. After presenting the idea to the dean's and facilities, the idea was essentially scrapped because the Choate administration deemed it senseless to build a platform randomly on campus. Follow up suggestions included the SAC patio as a senior-only spot. Five students: Lauren Provini '08, Ben Pascale '08, Alex Hillbrand '08, Max Mullen '08, and Christian Duffy '08 were appointed by the Dean's Office as The Class of 2008 Senior Gift Committee, which would to work alongside the school's Development Office (represented by Neil Gordon '96, Associate Director of the Choate Annual Fund) to get this project up and running

The project just grew from there: “It’s sort of amazing that a project that we thought off as so simple has turned into this extensive patio design,” notes Provini.

The patio is to be completely redesigned; Choate has received architectural designs from Studio ABK architects, an architecture firm based in New Haven that specializes in residential and academic clients. This firm was chosen, in part, because two Choate alumni, Anil Khachane '96 and Mai-Tse Wu '87 currently work there and, as a result, Studio ABK had offered to take-on this project free of charge. According to Gordon both Khachane and Wu were “ecstatic” to work with their alma mater.

Studio ABK presented the committee three possible designs. Instead of choosing one, the committee has decided to blend all three designs together. The patio will be furnished with tables and will feature an architecturally distinctive awning . The area will be lit at night and there is there also the potential for barbecues, gatherings, etc. The steps leading up to the patio will include engraved names of all members of the Class of 2008 who donated to this project .

The Class of 2008 Patio is perfectly timed with opening of the new dorms next September. Gordon feels this space, which is now mostly used as passageway, will eventually become a new destination for students.

If fully implemented, the total cost for the project is currently

estimated to be \$150,000 to \$200,000 (an amount that includes an endowment for the patio's permanent upkeep and maintenance). Gordon notes that depending on the success of the class' fundraising efforts, it is possible for some aspects of the project to be taken out to lower the cost.

At the moment, the committee has raised roughly \$40,000 through letters to parents asking for donations. The committee is presently planning an array of fundraising events and outreach initiatives – particularly as March break and graduation approaches. According to Gordon, while not entirely off the table, gap funding by the school to cover any possible cost differentials for this project is not likely.

According to both Provini and Gordon, if 100% of the funds have been pledged and 80% of the funds have been secured prior to specified dates in the spring, then a groundbreaking ceremony for the class will take place prior to graduation. Failing this, a similar celebration is scheduled for the Class of 2008 during Deerfield Day Homecoming festivities in the Fall of 2008. Construction is not expected to take too long since the project requires little infrastructure work. Ideally, there is a good possibility that the project can be completed in time so that members of the Class of 2008 can enjoy a spot for themselves by the end of the spring term.

While Provini and Gordon contend that the project has strong public approval, some people are disappointed with the project – believing it wasteful to spend money on a project that members of the Class may not be able to enjoy. Another is the overall cost of the project. Andrew Silberstein '08 notes that if members of the graduating sixth form are unable to use the senior spot, then in essence, the Class of 2008 will be paying money for a block that has their name on it. Ian Knisely '08 also shares Silberstein's sentiments. But others such as Jin Ha '08 are truly excited about the project and hopes to see its progress.

Compared with prior goals and objectives for senior class gifts, this project is a landmark venture in cost, scale, and ingenuity. If plans progress smoothly, a visitor to Choate's campus will see Choate students relaxing and enjoying themselves under the shade of a truly spectacular Class of 2008 Patio.