Reimagining the Legacy of John E. Andrus

by HEATH BLOCH, PRESIDENT & CEO

John E. Andrus breaking ground at Andrus with Mayor Thomas F. Larkin in 1928.

John E. Andrus reimagined as "a city" the Dyckman family farm, a place where his wife Julia, welcomed as an orphan, grew up. He recognized the impact that environment could have on children and reimagined the 110-acre Dyckman farm as a place where children in need from the surrounding communities could live and thrive, feeling safe and protected.

The plans included cottages for the children to live in, an administration building, an assembly building with a gymnasium, an athletic field, a dairy, an orchard, and a farm. Times have surely changed since 1928, when Andrus was founded. For example, the site of the dairy farm is now the Orchard School, serving approximately 190 children annually. A health center, now Griffith Hall, was constructed in 1990. A gym and swimming pool were added as part of McGee Hall, which was built in 1950.

The changes that have been made, in recognition of the evolving needs of the children served by Andrus, continue to the present. With the benefit of years of research and an expanding knowledge of the determinants and interconnectedness of mental and physical health, Andrus is reimagining the spaces and places where it serves children, families, and adults. As part of our strategic plan to provide the best-in-class customer service, Andrus has an ambitious plan to repair and repurpose its physical assets, both on campus and at its locations in downtown Yonkers and Peekskill.

At our downtown Yonkers location, we are planning renovations that will provide a more welcoming, visually appealing environment that research has shown is important to the adults and families we serve. By making these updates, Andrus will be in keeping with the newly renovated buildings and public spaces that surround it.

As we repair and repurpose our physical plant, our particular innovation is to carefully consider the neurodiverse needs of the children we serve, and thereby create a more inclusive environment that promotes a deeper a sense of acceptance and belonging. Being able to accommodate those needs – such as sound and light sensitivity, for example – will be an important part of our capital plan, especially for our campus-wide meeting space in McGee Hall, which has remained largely unchanged since its construction in 1950. A further part of our capital plan is to realize Andrus' vision by building on the power of nature, both to heal and to be self-sustaining. We plan to achieve full energy independence on campus, and in the process, to educate our youth as the next generation that will care for the environment and carry forward the knowledge of what is possible to achieve by working alongside the natural environment. ■

Andrus is seeking grants and major gifts to support reimagining the spaces on our campus and at our downtown Yonkers location at 35 Dock Street.

For more information, contact Dorea Ferris, VP and Chief Advancement Officer at (914) 418-2871 or dferris@jdam.org.

NURTURING FAMILIES & MAKING CONNECTIONS

"The community baby shower just meant so much to me. I was so worried — I didn't know how I was going to add diapers and wipes to my budget. I got to the community shower and everyone made me feel like I was going to be okay."

— Suzette G., Parent at the Andrus Yonkers Wellness Center