

# Benefactor sought for technical school

---

By Sam Strangeways

---

Colin Palmer is a man on a mission. His plan? To create a technical school which will build a Bermudian workforce proficient in all trades for the future.

The former teacher and college lecturer is passionate enough to have written an 80,000 word book on the topic of technical education, drafted a detailed proposal for the school and built a comprehensive website explaining his idea.

He is soon to apply for charitable status for the Bermuda Technical High School scheme.

Mr. Palmer is missing just one thing: money.

He reckons he needs between \$10 million and \$20 million to realise his dream and is looking for one of the Island's super-rich residents to help him.

He'll even name the school in their honour, if they wish.

"I'm looking for a benefactor," he told *The Royal Gazette*. "One of those multi-millionaires that are on the Island that could possibly put their names in lights. The school could be named after them.

"We don't mind what the school is called so long as we can get this education started on the Island. If you look at my proposal I have set it up for the minimum amount of money just to get the building."

Mr. Palmer's idea is to create a fee-paying technical/vocational school for 14 to 18 year olds which would give them a chance to work two days a week in industry, getting a taste of different trades and an idea of what future employers will expect of them.

The school would have five terms of eight weeks each academic year with a two-week Christmas break and four weeks off in the summer.

A selection panel would choose the students, with the majority of places going to Bermudians.

Mr. Palmer wants to set up a scholarship system for youngsters whose families can't afford the fees and intends to ask Government to provide vouchers for deserving students.



Colin Palmer

"The whole idea is that there will be no barriers for kids getting there," he says, adding that he hopes to attract female as well as male students.

The proposal is getting positive feedback from industry, Mr. Palmer says, after decades of inadequate technical education for students.

But what he wants now is people prepared to help him make it a reality — young Bermudians who could take evening classes at the school to improve their own employability.

"I need people to help start the movement, get out there and talk to people, get excited about it and possibly collect some funds," says Mr. Palmer, a Brit who came to the Island in 1983 and married a local.

"Obviously they would be recognised as founding members."

His wife Karen adds: "We have a lot of people who are interested and saying good luck. We are trying to push that this isn't his (Colin's) project; it has to be a community project."

Students attending the school would leave with an internationally recognised qualification at the end of their four years — Mr. Palmer has yet to decide whether it would be a British City and Guilds or Canadian Stationary Engineering — equipping them either for college or the workplace.

Some might argue that at 14, a student is too young to decide whether to opt for an academic or technical education.

But Mr. Palmer, who taught at CedarBridge Academy and the Berkeley Institute and lectured at Bermuda College, says the school will broaden their options rather than narrow them.

"My experience of 14 year olds in the classroom is that they are switched off. We want to switch them on."

He adds: "They could do a business degree or technical degree."

"We are not saying that they are going to go into a technical career. But we are going to give them a much higher standard (of education) than they are getting now."

Mrs. Palmer insists that many youngsters *do* know at age 14 or 15 whether or not they want to pursue an academic career.

Both believe that it's never too early to start teaching youngsters what will be required of them in the workplace — so the school will place a heavy emphasis on "soft skills" such as punctuality, resume and letter writing, dress code and interview skills.

The couple are now putting the finishing touches to a trust fund which will allow donations to be made so a building can be bought.

"The building would be in the trust forever" says Mr. Palmer, an engineer who began his career in the Navy and has worked all over the world. "It would be Bermudians' property. It would be the students' property, basically."

Mr. Palmer says Bermuda has to start seriously thinking about where its tradesmen and women of the future will come from, since the world economy might not make it possible to bring in expatriates to do the jobs.

His school, he says, could provide a solution. "It's just something that has got to be done. We haven't got much choice really."

To find out more visit <http://www.bdathhs.com> or email [bdatechhs@bermuda.com](mailto:bdatechhs@bermuda.com).