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## Landmark looks back at 20 years of growth

By HOWARD WEISS-TISMAN  
Reformer Staff  
**PUTNEY** — Before Landmark College first opened its doors 20 years ago, students with learning disabilities had very few options for continuing their education beyond high school.

In 1985, the public schools were just beginning to understand how to educate learning disabled children and Landmark's founders wanted to establish a

college where those students would be able to overcome their disabilities.

Since then there has been an explosion in the number of people diagnosed with attention deficit disorders and today, almost every college has at least a counselor and a special education department.

The world of teaching students with learning disabilities has grown and changed in 20 years, and Landmark

has grown with it.

This weekend Landmark will open its Putney campus to the public and celebrate two decades of service.

Highlights include a free concert tonight with the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra from Lincoln Center.

Gov. James Douglas will help dedicate two new buildings on campus Friday afternoon and, throughout the weekend, films and talks are scheduled.

Landmark College faces new challenges and competition today, as it grows from a small, experimental school of 77 students toward a projected campus of 500.

The school recently completed a \$12 million expansion and renovation project to meet the needs of an expanding student body.

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**'Over the past 10 years we have made a conscious effort to look at the needs of those students.'**

— President Linda Katz

### Landmark

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When school president Lynda Katz first arrived in Putney 12 years ago, she said she wanted to increase the number of students on campus to develop a more complete college experience. More students, she said, meant more clubs, more sports, and more of the opportunities that any student would want when choosing a college.

"Landmark used to be the place of last resort. It was the place students would come when they failed at other colleges or high schools," Katz said. "We wanted to be a college of first choice."

Today, she said, more students are choosing Landmark because of what it offers, not because it is the only school that will take them.

That switch has not been easy, she said. Competition is fierce and Katz said staff travel the country letting parents and students know about the small college in Putney, and why it is truly a different experience.

Sometimes the selling has been a challenge. Landmark is annually recognized as the one of the most expensive colleges in the country. Tuition is just more than \$35,000 without room and board.

Katz recognizes the dubious distinction, but she said the college is trying to "extend its endowment. She said the number of students that receive financial aid increases every year.

She also said the college's Institute for Research and Training is viewed as a way of bringing in more money that might be used to help students who need it in order to attend.

The Institute, started in 2001, trains educators and extends the understanding of using technology to help students with learning disabilities.

One of the renovated buildings on campus houses the institute

and Katz said she hopes it can grow to become a leader and innovator in the field of teaching students with learning disabilities.

Along with growing to meet the competition coming from traditional schools, Landmark went through major changes over the past 10 years in meeting the demands of the changes in the diagnosing of learning disabilities. When Landmark opened, it was billed as a school for students with dyslexia.

Since then an understanding of attention deficit disorders arose, and Katz said the college changed to welcome those students.

"Over the past 10 years we have made a conscious effort to look at the needs of those students," Katz said.

The two diagnoses often go hand in hand, she said, but faculty had to be trained to work with the students with deficit disorders.

The changes have not always been smooth or easy. Maintaining a residential community with hundreds of ADD students requires constant vigilance and understanding.

Christie Herbert, a Landmark teacher who has been there since the beginning, said that special on-campus experience appeals to the students.

"They are coming from a place where they have to hide who they are, or at least learn how to get by," she said. "It is incredible to watch them grow, when they get here, and say 'these are incredible people.'"

That culture, she said, is what was behind the school's development, and what is behind its continued success.

A full schedule of this weekend's events can be found at [www.landmarkcollege.org](http://www.landmarkcollege.org)

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