

Elizabethtown College 125th Anniversary  
National Historic Preservation Trust This Place Matters Campaign & Campus Historic Building Survey  
Based on the National Parks Service Historic American Building Survey  
2024 Summer Creative Arts and Research Program SCARP  
Ava Barton Class of 2027 and Shawn Gipe Class of 2027  
Jean-Paul Benowitz, Director of Prestigious Scholarships and Fellowships and Public Heritage Studies



## Kenneth L. Bowers Class of 1959 Rosalie Erb Bowers Class of 1958

Kenneth L. Bowers, a 1959 graduate of Elizabethtown College began working for Hershey Foods Corporation in 1970 where he was the head of the public relations department. One of his earlier jobs was finding a solution to the overgrown Hershey Factory Tours that were overwhelming the company's factories. By 1970, almost a million people were touring Hershey factory each year. Kenneth Bowers is recorded in the Hershey Archives discussing the various options that were laid in front of them:

*"One, to simply terminate the tour program, because it had gotten to the point where it was creating problems for the plant. It was creating problems traffic-wise, congestion-wise for downtown Hershey. And there were plenty of other corporations who had had tours that were beginning to lop them off and close them and it would not have been setting a new precedent. So that was a very real possibility.*

*A second big possibility was to do rather extensive renovation in order to keep that tour program, by putting it, perhaps, into the ceiling of certain of the rooms so it would not interfere with production, with glass-enclosed walkways or something where people could not potentially throw things into the vats of chocolate, etc.*

*And, of course, the third basic choice was to develop something new, different elsewhere, a mini factory kind of thing. Those were the three things that were discussed at great length, with a considerable amount of research attached to each one."*

Even after choosing from these options, there were many other decisions that remained. Namely if the facility should be a model chocolate factory, or a visitor center that would explain how the chocolate was made. The final decision was to build a new facility which

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would teach visitors how Hershey's chocolate was made.<sup>1</sup> In 1993, he retired as Vice President of Corporate Communications at the Hershey Foods Company.

Bowers was elected as chairman to the Board of Trustees in October 1999, after Daniel Raffensperger resigned from the position.<sup>2</sup> As chairman to the Board's development committee, Ken Bowers oversaw the completion of the \$25 million endowment campaign, in addition to being a member of the Strategic Planning Steering Committee.<sup>3</sup> Bowers received an honorary degree from the College in May 1999, and two "Educate for Service" awards.<sup>4</sup> Bowers was honored by the Pennsylvania Public Relations Society with its Ernest R. McDowell Award for Excellence.<sup>5</sup> During Ken's chairmanship, plans were in motion to start a master land use and facilities plan, totaling \$58 million in new construction and campus improvements. Within this project included a new science center, renovation of the Baugher students Center, and an Annenberg Center to create a "campus Crossroads."<sup>6</sup> Additionally, Ken Bowers planned for a new business building, renovations to the Thompson gym, construction within the auxiliary gym, new garden apartments for students, and many additional campus improvements.<sup>7</sup> By the fall of 2000, five major



constructions or campus improvements were made: the erection of the garden apartments, a two-story addition to the Steinman Center, renovation of Brinser Residence Hall, new athletic facilities, and a Centennial Garden.<sup>8</sup>

While the Bowers contributions to Elizabethtown College are extensive, several of these projects were named after the couple. The Mid-Century Modern Ranch Style building on campus known as The Bowers Writers House, was built by John and Eleanor Hess in 1979. The building was

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<sup>1</sup> "Hershey Archives, Part 28: The Wonderful World of Chocolate – Hershey's Chocolate World," Hershey Archives, last modified October 21, 2015. <https://hersheyarchives.org/encyclopedia/hersheyarchives30-28-the-wonderful-world-of-chocolate-hersheys-chocolate-world/>

<sup>2</sup> Chet Williamson, *Uniting Work and Spirit: A Centennial History of Elizabethtown College* (Elizabethtown, PA, Elizabethtown College Press, 2001), 327.; Jean-Paul Benowitz, Peter J. DePuydt, "Elizabethtown College" (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2014), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Williamson, 327.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

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acquired by the college in 2010, renovated, and named after Kenneth and Rosalie Bowers, becoming The Bowers Writers House we know today.<sup>9</sup> The Bowers Center for Sports, Fitness and Wellness owes its creation to the Bowers' generous \$5 million dollar contribution to the 2017 BE Inspired Campaign, all while they continually supported the college's annual fund.



Construction of the Bowers Center was



completed in 2019.<sup>10</sup> The Bowers Interpretive Gallery is located in the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist studies. The exhibits combine visuals, objects, and even sound to provide an introductory education on Anabaptist and Pietist groups. The gallery explores themes of peace and service in relation to the values and characteristics of these religious groups. There is an exhibit portraying objects from the Church of the Brethren Love Feast ritual, items of plain clothes, various pieces of devotional literature and rare books, and even a music section.<sup>11</sup> The gallery is an excellent example of the Bowers' devotion to anabaptist and pietist education.

<sup>9</sup> "Architectural & Biographical Study of Elizabethtown College: Hess House." ArcGIS StoryMaps, Elizabethtown College, Accessed August 9, 2024. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fc6a71870572498b8c5b8273cd79e0a6>.

<sup>10</sup> "Architectural & Biographical Study of Elizabethtown College: Bowers Center for Sports, Fitness, and Wellness." ArcGIS StoryMaps, Elizabethtown College, Accessed August 9, 2024. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fc6a71870572498b8c5b8273cd79e0a6>.

<sup>11</sup> "Bowers Interpretive Gallery," Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Etown. Accessed August 9, 2024. <https://www.etown.edu/centers/young-center/gallery.aspx>

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