

SUPPORTED: PRIVATE SCHOOLS

> MENTORSHIP

Project comes full circle as grads give back

Initiative supports pupils, from new admissions to long-gone alumni

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SPECIAL TO THE STAR

SUPPORTED

When asked to name an inspiring figure from his youth, Robert Bartucci is forced to take a pause. The now-CEO of electrical goods company Glen Dimplex Americas is overcome with emotion as he recalls his years as a student of St. Michael's College School in Toronto.

It was there, he says, that a teacher committed to fostering community on campus made a lasting impact on his life.

"One hundred per cent the reason you're talking to me today is because of John Walsh," Bartucci says, adding that despite his ongoing friendship with the educator as an adult, "Mr. Walsh" will always feel like a more appropriate title for his high school mentor.

Going on to describe the countless hours the former football coach spent challenging and uplifting him as an apprehensive teenager, Bartucci clarifies that these memories of mentorship and support are not unique to his experience at St. Michael's.

He explains they're the result of a full-circle system of support has been at the forefront of the private, all-boys institution's mandate for generations — and one that has been especially fine-tuned in recent years by the same mentor who took him



ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE SCHOOL PHOTOS

Grade 11 and 12 students at St. Michael's College School visit Glen Dimplex in Cambridge, Ont.

under his wing.

"You could basically call me a connector," Walsh says, now head of community partnerships for the school and overseer of its mentorship programming. The five-facet program pledges to connect students with support from the moment they consider the school as an option until long after graduation.

"The whole process begins with our ambassador program," says Walsh, explaining that this first tier links a prospective student with a current student who has volunteered to be his shadow and guide.

"They connect before the first day, and in this way when they walk through those doors in the fall the first friendly face they see will be that ambassador who will connect with them throughout that first year to see how they're making out."

Walsh adds that beyond this introductory initiative, students are afforded numerous opportunities to gain academic advantage and deepen their learning experiences during and after school by way of strategic student-to-student, alumnus-to-student, athlete-to-student-athlete and finally, alumni-to-alumni connections.

"We're a pretty caring community in all facets," says Walsh, an alumnus of the school himself. "Once the students graduate, they realize it just doesn't stop when they leave the front gate and head off to university... we connect with them all the way through."

It's as a result of those unbroken bonds that class-of-1996 graduate Bartucci can now be found circling back to his alma mater with an offer of help. As part of the alumnus-to-student facet of the program, the CEO is



"St. Mike's is a ridiculously supportive environment," says recent graduate Ben Kurrek.

now inviting current students who are interested in an engineering career to enjoy practical experience within his company's headquarters.

"A new batch of students will be coming in this fall and we've got a project that they will work on for the duration of the school year," Bartucci says.

Recent St. Michael's College graduate Ben Kurrek, who participated in the first inception of this engineering practicum last year, calls his experience of working behind the scenes with Bartucci and the Glen Dimplex team "awesome."

"They were actually using some of the same methods that we'd learned in class, which was really cool to see," says Kurrek, who is in his first year studying mechatronics engineering at the University of Waterloo.

While the experience, as retold by Kurrek, offered him

some hands-on experience before being thrust into the working world, what it may have done is build bridges between him and a new professional support circle — and possibly made a mentor out of Bartucci.

"After attending, I was told they really liked my ideas and I was asked if I would be interested in doing a co-op position someday," Kurrek says.

"St. Mike's is a ridiculously supportive environment," Kurrek says. "Personally I would do things like reach out to the younger members of my tennis team or I would sit with a younger student who was alone at lunch.

"I know that when I was younger the upper students were the gods of the school and having a big guy come and sit with me at lunch would have changed my day."

It was a similar small gesture of time and care from a respected figure that so greatly impacted Bartucci's life, and a method of care and outreach that he says he is confident will continue to circle through generations of incoming students at St. Michael's College School.

"In some ways, St. Michael's is a high school like all other high schools," Bartucci says. "They don't teach you math or geography in a different way.

"What they do teach, however, is a sense of community — one that forces you to challenge yourself and to challenge each other."

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