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## De Jesús formally installed as LFA Head of School



Board Chair John Marlatt '65 presented Head of School José M. De Jesús with a medallion to officially induct De Jesús as Head of School. Photo Courtesy Pfoertner Photography.

Libby Elliott, Freelance Reporter  
 3:00 am CDT October 22, 2019



"What a beautiful day, and what a beautiful setting," said John Marlatt, chair of Lake Forest Academy's (LFA) Board of Trustees, on the unseasonably warm, sunny afternoon of Saturday, Oct. 19, as he welcomed an audience of roughly 300 parents, students and stakeholders to an outdoor investiture ceremony formally installing José M. De Jesús as LFA's 30th Head of School.

Marlatt was one of eight speakers to offer remarks at the hourlong ceremony staged outside LFA's Reid Hall, which kicked off with a 30-bell toll, a flag processional and musical performances by the LFA Choir, tenor soloists senior Graham Lin, Class of '20, and his brother, alumnus Nick Lin, Class of '17, as well as the student-faculty band Co-ax, playing Carlos Santana's 1999 hit song "Smooth" and The Beatles' 1969 rock classic, "Come Together."

De Jesús was joined on the podium by his wife Andrea, and two children, Isabela and Joaquin, as well as a host of childhood friends and colleagues from his many years as an independent school student, teacher and administrator.

After relocating with his family from New York, De Jesús took up his responsibilities as LFA's 30th Head of School on July 1, 2019, replacing former Head of School John Strudwick, who served in the position for 18 years before announcing his retirement in 2018.

LFA's search committee spent more than a year vetting and interviewing Head of School candidates before formally announcing De Jesús's appointment last September.

Over the course of his two-decade long career, De Jesús served as head of the upper school and a history teacher at The Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn, NY. De Jesús has also held administrative positions at The Spence School and Poly Prep Country Day School, both in New York City, but spent his 20s teaching history at Concord Academy in Concord, Mass.

"José is a supremely talented teacher and an extraordinary man," said Dr. Bruce L. Denis, former Head of School at The Packer Collegiate Institute, who traveled from New York to speak on behalf of De Jesús. "He has a natural ability to pull together an entire school community."

Born in Puerto Rico, De Jesús migrated at age 6 with his family to New York City, where he attended Horace Mann High School. De Jesús received an undergraduate degree from Wesleyan University and graduate degrees from Tufts University and Columbia University's Teacher's College.

"José is a scholar," said Javaid Kahn, Head of Middle Division at Horace Mann School and one of three childhood friends to speak in praise of De Jesús. "A lesson taught by José is not one that should be missed by anyone."

De Jesús will also serve as a faculty member in LFA's Department of History and Social Science. His wife, Andrea, teaches English at LFA; daughter Isabela is a member of LFA's Class of '22.

In the ceremony's investiture remarks, De Jesús thanked his Puerto Rican ancestors, "who sacrificed so much to make this moment possible."

"I'm filled with extraordinary gratitude," said De Jesús.

De Jesús went on to share an anecdote from his childhood growing up in the Bloomingdale neighborhood on the Upper West Side of Manhattan during New York's 1980s crack epidemic. A voracious reader, De Jesús described the day a group of older, taller friends helped him navigate a six-block walk to the local public library through territories controlled by rival gangs from Ecuador and the Dominican Republic.

"Those boys helped me to seek my passion for knowledge," said De Jesús. "I've spent the last 23 years trying to do for my students what they did for me."

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Praising LFA's commitment to its caring community, diversity and school traditions, De Jesús implored students to "simply listen deeply to each other."

"Great scholarship can't bloom without a strong community to support it," said De Jesús.

To parents, De Jesús pledged his continued commitment to educational excellence.

"We will never take for granted your decision to send your child to us, every single morning," said De Jesús.

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