

Catholic School Open House

By LAMBETH HOCHWALD

ASK these Catholic school educators what they love about their work and they all agree: Their schools all provide a respectful, kind and caring environment. That's what drives them to do their jobs — happily — every day. Here's more of what inspires them.

Bouncing to victory

Joe McGrane, 58, the chair of the health and physical education department at Xavier HS in Chelsea, has been commuting to the all-boys school from his home in Pearl River every day since he joined the staff in 1990.

Under his long-standing leadership, Xavier's varsity basketball team has won two City A Championships — in 2000 and 2014 — and he earned the title Catholic High School Athletic Association A Division Coach of the Year in 2007, 2014, 2015 and 2020. He was also inducted into the CHSAA Hall of Fame in 2015.

In January, McGrane celebrated his 400th career victory with a win over Cardinal Spellman, but, interestingly, he actually began his career in accounting.

"My brother-in-law was a basketball coach at Xavier and one day I started helping him coach the kids after school," he said.

His days begin at 7:30 a.m. when he meets with students to mentor them, especially if they need extra help, before teaching several physical education and health classes throughout the day. The basketball season is a four-month commitment that can go late into the evening and into the weekends.

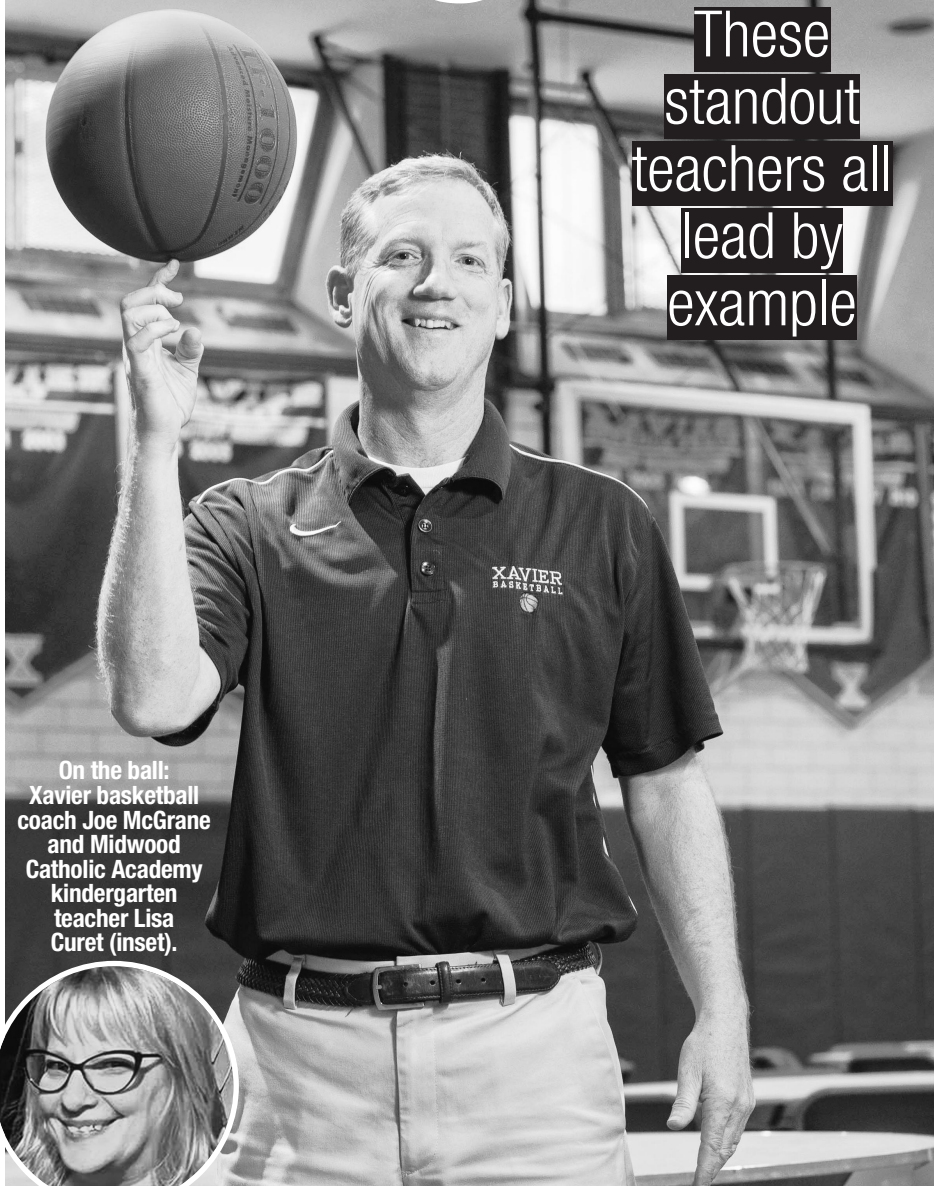
"The energy and passion my colleagues bring to the classroom and on our retreats makes me want to be my best," he said. "We all share in the work and a lot of what we do goes way beyond the classroom. This extra time spent leaving your family to do service trips or coaching — it's for the greater glory of God."

When school is family

Lisa Curet, 52, has been a beloved kindergarten teacher at Midwood Catholic Academy since 2005. But it was when she was diagnosed with stage 3 ovarian cancer in 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, that she discovered the strength of this elementary school community.

INSPIRED & DEDICATED

These
standout
teachers all
lead by
example



On the ball: Xavier basketball coach Joe McGrane and Midwood Catholic Academy kindergarten teacher Lisa Curet (inset).



"Our school is like a family," she said. "My principal called my husband every day."

While she did her best to keep her kindergartners her top priority, she had to take a four-month leave during her treatments, which wasn't easy because she loves teaching and her students.

"They're the perfect age," she said. "They're still young enough that they have a little bit of playtime and snack time. They still want me to mother them, but they can

think for themselves."

Curet's cancer came back last year, but as of press time she had just found out that thankfully she's in remission. Throughout, she was once again reminded why she loves working at MCA.

"My principal wrote a letter telling my kids' parents what was happening and they were very supportive," she said.

Curet said her position is more than just a job.

"I'm so lucky to work here," she said. "My col-



The Catholic Schools of Brooklyn & Queens

Sebastien Etheart (center) with fellow Sacred Heart teachers Kerline Valmond (left) and Vanessa Marino.

leagues and I all support each other. If someone is hurt, we back each other up. They're almost like a second family to me."

Covering all the bases

When you speak with Sebastien Etheart, 25, a third-grade teacher who is in his third year teaching at Sacred Heart Catholic Academy, a K-8 school in Bayside, you immediately sense how enthusiastic he is about teaching.

A Catholic school graduate himself, he not only runs an after-school basketball program, but he initiated the school field day, does all of the sound for the talent show and drama club, and is enrolled in a master's program in childhood education at Brooklyn College.

"I view myself as a big kid, so teaching third grade really works for me," said Etheart, who added that he hopes to get another master's degree in education administration and eventually become a Catholic school principal. "I love learning and I'm able to relate to these students because third grade is when

certain interests are starting to pique and they begin to form who they are on their own."

He continues to be inspired by his students and the curriculum, too.

"Catholic schools provide students with room for growth," he

said. "Learning through faith benefits every student and offers important lessons for my class and the community."

Blinded by science

Whether she's standing in front of a beaker or teaching dissection, Lauren Serpagli, 41, the STEM department co-chairperson at Dominican Academy on the Upper East Side, is dedicated to the freshman and senior students at this all-girls high school.

"I just love being able to share my love of science with the students and really have fun everyday doing it," said Serpagli, who is also a biology teacher, 3-D printing teacher, freshmen coordinator and moderator of the National Honor Society, pre-med society and Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. She also earned the 2020 AP Computer Science Female Diversity Award and has been recognized as an outstanding educator by the Archdiocese of New York.

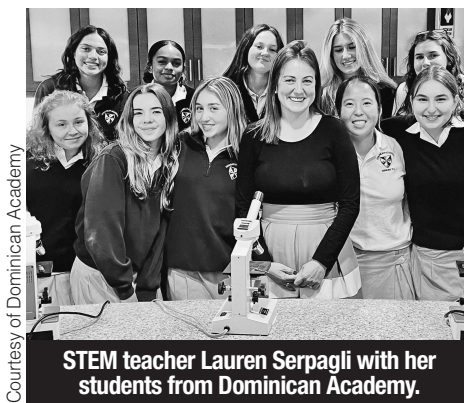
"I really love it when students tell me they hated science before taking my class and then want to pursue it afterward," she said.

In her 19th year of teaching, what she loves most is the sense of community.

"I get to know the students and learn what they're interested in and what will help them grow," she said.

She continues feeling beloved even after her students are no longer in her classroom.

"I get messages from students after they graduate telling me how much they appreciated my class," she said. "These make my day."



Courtesy of Dominican Academy

STEM teacher Lauren Serpagli with her students from Dominican Academy.