

The Word

Incarnate Word Academy Magazine

CELEBRATING OUR
SESQUICENTENNIAL
SENIORS

CREATING A
VISION FOR
THE NEXT
150 YEARS



The Word

Mission

Incarnate Word Academy provides young women with a Catholic college preparatory education, helping them grow in their relationship with Jesus the Incarnate and live according to His values. Our cornerstones are academics, values and spirituality.

Leadership

President

Sr. Lauren Beck, C.V.I.

Principal

Cathy Stephen

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Incarnate Word Academy

609 Crawford St.

Houston, TX 77002

On the Cover

Daniella De La Cruz '24 takes a moment to pause before the commencement ceremony at Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral.

Photo by Lin Zhao.

Photo Credits

Daniel Pawlowski, Dave Rossman, VYPE Media, Lin Zhao

Contributors

Holly Beretto, Angelique Longobardi '17, Rick Perez

Inside Cover

Falcons landed in various spots across Texas to view the total solar eclipse on April 8. Here, Athletic Director Rick Perez and students catch a glimpse of the celestial phenomenon at Discovery Green in downtown Houston. Photo by Lin Zhao.



WE ARE
THE HEART OF
HOUSTON





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President's Letter

With a prayer of gratitude and a smile, we close a momentous year-long celebration of a long and proud 150-year history.

We felt a sense of great pride as we said goodbye to our sesquicentennial-year graduating class of 70 students, sending them off to college to begin the next chapter of their lives and fulfill their dreams. While at IWA, they worked hard academically, receiving \$15,000,000 in scholarship money. Quite an accomplishment! Through the Leadership Program, they learned to be servant leaders, using their skills to serve as leaders within the school and out in the community. They developed their talents to shine on the stage and in choral competitions. They stood out as strong, competitive athletes, earning the incredible accomplishment of five college signings. Most importantly, they also left IWA grounded in a deeper relationship with Jesus, the Incarnate Word, and the desire and skills to live according to his values. They have embodied our mission.

As we set our sights on the next 150 years, we are filled with a sense of anticipation and excitement. The construction of our new parking garage is a great way to start. We are thrilled about the opening of our new college counseling center, which will provide invaluable support to our students. We are eager to launch our new robotics team, a venture that will lead to great achievements. These are just a few of the things waiting for our returning students and our new incoming freshman class.

In today's fast-paced world, the explosion of information at our fingertips and the ability to tap into it quickly with technological advances has created both positive outcomes and challenges. AI can easily blur the lines between reality and manipulation. It is so important that young people are grounded in values such as integrity and honesty as they take advantage of all that technology has to offer. IWA has always stood firm in helping them to develop this strong foundation.

Providing a Catholic school education is an important choice for parents and can require sacrifice. As I see our students embrace Academics, Values, and Spirituality, it is clear to me that it is a worthwhile investment. I am grateful that parents, faculty, staff, and generous donors come together to provide a well-grounded, challenging, and enjoyable high school experience. What a privilege to be part of the journey!

Here's to the next 150 years. Praised be the Incarnate Word!

— SISTER LAUREN BECK C.V.I.
PRESIDENT

Student Council Earns Historic Honor



In April, Incarnate Word Academy was voted State President School at the Texas Association of Student Councils (TASC) annual conference in Irving, Texas. IWA is the first private school in Texas to earn this honor.

More than 3,500 students attended the conference, representing 264 public and private schools in the state. IWA's campaign platform was "Love is Respect," and focused on educating and advocating for healthy relationships, not solely romantic, but with friends and family. A recent Boston University study claimed that almost half of teenagers report being harassed by a partner, and 1 in 3 teens reported to be physically, sexually, or emotionally abused by a partner in a relationship before reaching adulthood.



The IWA Student Council created a video which played on the screen while they choreographed a series of glow-in-the-dark words to add impact to their powerful presentation. The video included statistics and testimonials from Texas parents who have lost daughters due to violent teen relationships.

In the candidate sessions, IWA junior Bella Garza said, "Our school cultivates authentic, bold servant leaders. This means that each one of them looks for the need and works to create a solution that answers that need." Twenty students from IWA attended the conference, and each brought authenticity and excitement, listening to students share their stories and offering ideas to improve toxic teen relationships based on respect. Bella serves as the State President Representative for 2024-2025.

IWA Student Council sponsor and Young Leaders Program Director Antoinette Hernandez said, "My heart is full after this experience. The girls demonstrated IWA Sisterhood in every aspect of the word. They knew that they were out there helping one of their own, representing IWA, and ultimately wanted to bring this back to IWA. There were times when they were tired, put in long hours, made thousands of campaign items, and didn't think they could push themselves anymore, and yet they empowered each other and knew this was bigger than themselves."



Serving as the representative for the President School requires a commitment of time and travel for Bella. This summer, Bella has already attended the state steering retreat where she worked with the TASC state officers and district presidents to discuss and propose the state project for the 2024-2025 school year. She then spoke at the TASSP conference in front of over 2,500 principals across the state on how to collaborate with their student council to create a better culture on their campuses. In late June, she attended the Vision (National) Conference in New Mexico where she met and worked with presidents from across the nation, carried the Texas flag in the general session, and took more leadership training. After that, she headed down I-10 to Trinity University to serve as a Junior Counselor (JC) for the TASC Middle Level Summer Leadership Workshop. In July, she traveled with our council to the TASC Summer Leadership Workshop to build a stronger council for the upcoming year. Bella's summer ends in Austin where she will preside over the TASC Board of Directors meeting.

Note: Parents and Alumnae who wish to support IWA's Young Leaders Program can do so by contacting advancement@incarnateword.org.

Together, We Build



Houston's sacred block in downtown marked a moment in history when Annunciation Catholic Church and Incarnate Word Academy broke ground on their new parking garage, to be completed in March 2025. Local dignitaries such as Daniel Cardinal DiNardo; Jim McIngvale (Mattress Mack); Phyllis Laurenzo Mandola; as well as the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament; Fr. Paul Felix, pastor of Annunciation Catholic Church; IWA President Sister Lauren Beck; and representatives from Harvey Construction, turned out to support the ceremony. Sister Lauren and Cardinal DiNardo thanked everyone for the work they have done to launch this project and shared positive wishes for the students, parishioners—and Astros fans—who will benefit from this beautiful new facility.



STEM Steps It Up

With the recent statewide win by Student Council for President School (see page 4), Incarnate Word Academy is increasingly known for its strong leadership formation via the Young Leaders Program. If Engineering and Robotics instructor Ann Marie Girardot's plans evolve as famously, the school will also be widely recognized for its outstanding STEM education in Engineering and Robotics.



"For two years in a row we have had ladies in the Honors Engineering Design and Problem Solving class complete an application and enroll in the Dual Enrollment Engineering Class at The University of Texas at Austin," says Mrs. Girardot. "Since 2022, all Engineering Design students were accepted into dual enrollment, 25 ladies have earned an A and two have earned a high B from The University of Texas at Austin," she reports.

These students submit a portfolio of their work, both for a grade at IWA and for college credit at The University of Texas. Congratulations to the 2023-2024 participants: Clarissa Banda '25, Angela Benny '25, Jasmine Crespo '25, Katherine Gallagher '25, Jazmin Garza '24, Vivian Le '25, Anai Muniz '25, Loly Nguyen '25, Cecilia Prodoehl '25, Lara Rosenblad '25, Caitlin Straw '25, Leilani Tamez '25, Kendy Taylor '25, Allie Temple '25, Kaitlin Trostmann '25, and Valeria Velasco-Vaca '25. IWA also started the Honors Engineering Applications of Computer Science class in the 2023-2024 school year, where students complete engineering projects while learning to code using the Python language.

In the fall, Mrs. Girardot will coordinate the launch of two new Robotics classes and an FTC Robotics team. The team will be mentored by The Moment Makers, an all-girls team in Pearland who have made it to the **FIRST** World Robotics Championship for three years in a row. Interested IWA students participated in a Robotics camp on July 12-13 where they received preliminary training in CAD, 3D printing, building, and programming a robot. The new IWA FTC Team #25955 is currently recruiting adult engineers to

mentor the team during their after school team meetings, which will be on Mondays from 3:45-5:00 p.m. and on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 3:45-6:30 p.m. They will also meet once or twice a month for work/build days and for competitions.



Some interesting facts about **FIRST** Robotics:

- **FIRST** stands for "For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology."
 - **FTC** stands for **FIRST** Tech Challenge.
- In FTC Robotics, under strict rules, limited time and resources, FTC teams of students are challenged to design a team "brand," hone teamwork skills, and build and program an 18" x 18" x 18" robot to play a difficult field game against like-minded competitors. It's as close to real-world engineering as a student can get. Professional mentors lend their time and talents to guide each team. Each season ends with an exciting **FIRST Championship**.
- **FIRST** combines the excitement of sports with the rigors of science and technology.
 - **FIRST** is the ultimate sport for the mind.

- High-school student participants call FIRST “the hardest fun you’ll ever have.”
- **FIRST** is the “only sport where every student can go pro!” Robotics teams are flourishing in schools because they are a fun and interactive way to teach students engineering skills such as brainstorming, CAD, 3D printing, game strategies, data analytics, and coding. “These teams also require creative skills such as design, innovation, connection with our community, teamwork, and group presentation for judged awards, so there’s something to interest everyone,” explains Mrs. Girardot.

Right now, the team is brainstorming a name, and Mrs. Girardot says that if you have any brilliant ideas or want to be on the new IWA FTC Robotics Team #25955, please email her at agirardot@incarnateword.org. Parents and alumnae, if you are an engineer or know someone who is interested in being an engineering mentor to our new team, please email Mrs. Girardot!

DECATS Orbits at IWA

In June, IWA was thrilled to host DECATS: Exploration Awaits! on our campus. DECATS is a popular summer program for academically talented 4th- through 7th-graders that has thrived in Houston for 30 years. Originally launched in Catholic schools, the program now welcomes students who score in the top 5% in both public and private schools. IWA’s principal Cathy Stephen has worked with the program for 20 years. She served as the IWA DECATS Campus Principal, along with Program Director Dr. Tonya Dixon, a professional learning specialist in the Cypress-Fairbanks school district. Dr. Dixon says the 180 Scholars, 30 Graduate Assistants, and Mentors were excited to explore IWA’s dynamic downtown location and modern amenities. Six IWA teachers also signed on to be Mentors: Dr. Tim Daponte, Mrs. Kathie Kelly, Ms. Maxine Morency, Ms. Anja Ozols, Dr. Cynthia Martinez and Ms. Brittany Revia.





Foundation Day Kicks Off the Next 150!

Foundation Day is the favorite event of the year at IWA. Following tradition, the day began with the Crowning of Mary and a Mass celebrated by Fr. Luke Millette at Annunciation Catholic Church. Beautiful music was provided by the Choir and musicians including Rebecca Peterson '25 on the viola, teachers Amanda Snook and Noel Bartniski '16 on flute, and Finance Director John Thaelke on trumpet.

Afterward, the school gathered in the Auditorium for the Jeanne de Matel Award--an award that honors servant leadership and dedication to IWA. This year's recipients are faculty member Antoinette Hernandez and the Student Council, who won State President School at the Texas Association of Student Councils conference. Following a standing ovation for Ms. Hernandez and Student Council, the crowd was dismissed to enjoy "Kickin' Off the Next 150," an on-campus festival that included games, activities, and a grilled lunch hosted by the Falcon Family Association.



IWA Reveals New Branding: The Heart of Houston

During the 2023-2024 school year, IWA and local marketing agency 5+8 collaborated to refresh the school's branding. After a quick survey of students, parents, alumnae, and board members, the tagline and approach became clear- Incarnate Word Academy: The Heart of Houston. This tagline can be revised to promote different programs at IWA such as The Heart of Champions, The Heart of Leadership, The Heart of Service, The Heart of Sisterhood, and The Heart of College Prep. The options are numerous and allow for creativity and multiple campaigns.

"As always," says Sister Lauren Beck, C.V.I., president of the school, "we started with the 'heart' of our mission, to help young women grow in their relationship with Jesus, the Incarnate Word. Many survey respondents also mentioned heart-felt qualities such as our strong sisterhood and the lifelong friendships forged at IWA," she continues.

"In refreshing our visual branding, we will keep our identifiable school crest but pull out the heart icon to create opportunities to launch our branding into a fresh, contemporary look," she says.

The logo for the Athletic program was also revised to reflect a modern female, yet fierce, Falcon. Students met with the Athletic Department and Marketing and Communications office to fine tune the look, which also includes a reference to Falcon feathers in an all-caps IWA logo and as well as a capital F.

There's more to come at an August all-school celebration where we'll introduce our bold brand refresh during an all-school assembly and distribute free swag for students, faculty and staff. We are The Heart of Houston!



CREST LOGO



INCARNATE WORD ACADEMY
A Catholic College Preparatory for Young Women, Est. in 1873

Before



INCARNATE WORD ACADEMY

Refresh

FALCON LOGO



Before



Refresh



Cecilia Martinez '24

Embracing a Beautiful Community

"I don't want to leave this beautiful community!" exclaims Cecilia Martinez '24, when asked about her IWA experience. Now that Cecilia has graduated, she adds to a family legacy of three generations who call themselves Women of the Word—Cecilia, her older sister, her aunt, and her great aunt.

She laughs when she remembers that as a middle-schooler at St. Jerome's, she was reluctant to attend an all-girls high school. At her dad's suggestion, she attended the 8th grade tour. She recalls being impressed by a Student Ambassador who sat with her and made friendship bracelets while they discussed Cecilia's interests and what opportunities she wanted in high school, which included a theater program and dance team.

After Cecilia attended IWA's production of "Hamlet," her decision to enroll was sealed. Science Department Chair Stephen Comer appeared in the production playing the British Ambassador who announces, "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are dead!"— and she thought it was cool that a science teacher would dedicate time to a student play.

Because of the positive experience with a Student Ambassador, Cecilia joined the Admissions Department's Student Ambassador program after freshman year. "The Student Ambassadors are important because they relate to the middle school students and can speak authentically about the IWA education," she says.

"The teacher connection can't be beat at IWA," Cecilia emphasizes. "Even if you had a teacher during freshman year, they keep up with you and ask you how you're doing or congratulate you for achievements throughout high school. I always felt one-hundred-percent cared for and supported by faculty—I think teenagers need that. Honestly, I never understood Math before coming to IWA, but Mrs. Karen Douglass was patient with me until I finally got it!"

Now Cecilia is heading to the University of St. Thomas to study education and minor in theology. She earned a prestigious Rising Star Scholarship, a full-pay benefits package. "College counselor Dr. Pennington-Dorsey provided tremendous support in narrowing down my college choices to find a strong theology program as well as a scholarship opportunity," she explains.

"IWA has given me many gifts. I tried dance, figured out math, and became a leader in Falcon Theatre. But the best gifts were how I built my confidence and faith at IWA," she says. "I learned that no matter what challenges life may bring, when I have faith, family and a sisterhood, I am never alone."

— CLAIRE C. FLETCHER







Autumn Hunter '24

Diving Into IWA

Foundation Day is Autumn Hunter's favorite day of the school year. "I love how the tradition celebrates the Mary Crowning, the school's rich history, and then tops it off with a grilled lunch served by the parents, along with fun games and activities like karaoke." For Autumn, the day highlights the qualities that make an IWA education unique: faith, history, community, and sisterhood.

Autumn went to middle school at Frank Black in Oak Forest north of downtown. She expected to attend high school at a public school. "I was a public school girl," she admits. Her mother works downtown, knew about IWA, and encouraged her to check it out. In 8th grade, she attended Open School Day where she met personable student ambassadors, engaging teachers, and she decided to give IWA a try. "I loved the rooftop, too," she adds with a smile.

"I'm happy I made the decision," she continues, "because IWA gave me opportunities I wouldn't have had in public school. For instance, I thought swimming might be fun. I doubt I would ever join a large public school's swim team, and I was scared to try swimming for a small school. But I swam as a freshman, developed my freestyle skills, and ended up swimming every season. The decision to join the team gave me lifelong friendships—and we made State all four years!"

In May, Autumn graduated cum laude with several honors, including Distinguished Leader, President's Gold Award, and Graduate of Distinction. She will take her academic talents to Trinity University in San Antonio where she'll major in business management. "One reason I chose Trinity is because the university emphasizes strong connections between students and faculty, just like IWA. I wanted to continue to have that experience through college because strong relationships will keep you motivated and interested, even when the academics are challenging."

— CLAIRE C. FLETCHER





TRINITY

Valentina Salazar '24

Discovering Her Smile

From her first steps through the 609 entry during an 8th grade tour, Valentina Salazar knew she could be happy at IWA. "And now, as a graduating senior, I realize that IWA is the place where I discovered my smile."

Valentina confides that she rarely felt comfortable smiling during middle school, and her photos were awkward. "I think those middle school photos reflected my discomfort with who I was. Then one day during my freshman year at IWA, I saw a photo of myself and I realized my newfound confidence was shining through."

At Incarnate Word Academy, she made friends with students from diverse neighborhoods, joined the volleyball team and multiple clubs, and strived to become a stronger academic student. "The academics here are challenging, but the teachers provide support. Kathie Kelly, the English Department Chair, especially helped me develop critical thinking to become a strong writer," she says.

Next fall, Valentina heads to the University of Dallas to play volleyball on a Trustee Scholarship. "Sports are so valuable for high school girls because they teach you resilience," she says. "You focus on the task at hand and learn how to regroup when things go poorly." As a setter and defense specialist she continues, "I am so happy I had a chance to play with our new head Coach Britni Villareal. She's an amazing coach, and the volleyball program will flourish with her as the leader."

One thing people may not realize about IWA is that, "Our traditions are the best. My friends at other high schools, both public and private, often comment on my social media, and say, 'IWA looks like so much fun, you celebrate with Masses and ceremonies throughout the year.' They can see how this community's strong bonds lift students up."

At the University of Dallas, Valentina will major in political science with a goal to become an immigration lawyer. "In many fields of law, people are fighting against each other," she notes. "But immigration law is about bringing people together and uniting families. That is the work I want to do."

— CLAIRE C. FLETCHER







Ann Marie Girardot

Math and Engineering Teacher

Ann Marie Girardot arrived at IWA in the fall of 2022, bringing more than 40 years of teaching experience. She taught math for 35 years at John H. Reagan HS and L. C. Anderson HS in Austin ISD, teaching Honors and College Prep Geometry, Algebra I, and Algebra II. After retiring, she taught at Austin Jewish Academy and then taught Robotics and Engineer Your World classes at St. Dominic Savio Catholic High School in Austin. Along the way, Mrs. Girardot earned her National Board Certification in AYA Mathematics in 2006, renewed this certification in 2016, and was certified to teach both Engineer Your World: Design and Problem Solving and Engineer Your World: Applications of Computer Science from The University of Texas at Austin. In college, she was a double major in Math and History at St. Mary's University in San Antonio and had a double minor in Music and Psychology.

Mrs. Girardot moved back to Houston when her husband, Dr. Daniel Girardot, became the Associate Director of the Office of Worship for the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. Dr. Girardot was the Director of Music and Liturgy for 37 years at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Austin, and Mrs. Girardot directed the Children and Youth choirs for over 25 years. Their three children are also passionate musicians: Mrs. Girardot's son plays trumpet and keyboards and is a back-up singer with The Revivalists, out of New Orleans, and her daughter sings as a soprano soloist and will sing in the HGO chorus this fall.

Q & A

WHAT'S TOPS ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

The Revivalists (my son's band), Fleetwood Mac, Fay Wray, Queen, Bon Jovi, the Beatles.

WHAT CAREER WOULD YOU CHOOSE IF YOU WEREN'T A TEACHER?

I thought about being a music teacher but didn't think I was "good enough," so I started college as a pre-law major, but then switched in my sophomore year to majoring in Math and History with Music and Psychology as a double minor. If I were a senior in high school now, I would major in Engineering.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU ADMIRE ABOUT IWA STUDENTS?

IWA ladies really care about learning. They are motivated, responsible, courteous, and cooperative. I love that I can share both my love of math and engineering and also real-world experiences and my faith and spirituality with my students.



Engineering students try out their Camera Obscuras.



Mrs. Girardot, husband, and son at The Revivalists concert at Red Rocks outside of Denver.



Mrs. Girardot joins her family at Jazz Fest in New Orleans.

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR OR ROLE MODEL WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A TEACHER?

My favorite teachers/mentors were my middle and high school choir directors: Martha Card, who helped me overcome my fear of singing a solo, and Milton Pullen, who instilled a love of music in my heart and soul. I also developed a love of math in high school, starting with my Geometry teacher, who helped me learn how to do proofs and understand the logical reasoning skills necessary for learning Geometry, which became my favorite math class to teach.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?

New Orleans, because the food is great there, but mainly to spend time with my two grandchildren, who are now 1 and 4 years old. I also love being in the mountains in Colorado, where we have traveled often, getting to see The Revivalists perform at Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Last, I love to be anywhere with a water view, and watch sunrises and sunsets. I tell my children, "Look at the beautiful sunset God painted for us today. When I'm gone, think of me whenever you see a beautiful sunrise or sunset, and know that my love and God's love are shining upon you!"

WHAT WOULD STUDENTS BE SURPRISED TO KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I won 2nd place in a goat-milking contest at the San Antonio Rodeo while in college, with a member of my service sorority. I caught the goat, and my teammate milked the goat!



Michelle Le

World Languages - Spanish Teacher

Michelle Le is a native Houstonian and a Costa Rican-American. She received her B.A. from Texas State University and has taught Spanish for 17 years.

One of Mrs. Le's goals for the World Languages Department is to involve the students in real-world experiences in Spanish. She loves teaching units on Business Spanish, Medical Professions in Spanish, and Cultural Exports from Latin America. This year she encouraged students to enter the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese art contest, and she has also Zoomed with the Houston Dynamos soccer team for career discussions during class.

Mrs. Le has two young children Luke (5) and Summer (4), who are in the Pre-K 4 and Kindergarten program at St. Rose of Lima. Their father, Mr. Le, is also a History teacher in the middle school at St. Rose. On weekends and holidays, her family loves to travel to San Antonio and visit any beach location—near and far.

Q & A

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE BOOK?

My favorite book of all time is *El Principito, The Little Prince*, written by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

WHAT'S TOPS ON YOUR PLAYLIST?

My playlist includes all of Kelly Clarkson's catalog as well as my Sirius XM Kelly Clarkson radio station. I love Kelly Clarkson because she is a native Texan. I watched her win American Idol years ago, and I have continued to follow her career since the early 2000's. I truly love her Sirius XM radio station as she plays many interesting artists on her station, really awesome Christmas tunes during the holidays, as well as her catalog of songs.

WHAT CAREER WOULD YOU CHOOSE IF YOU WEREN'T A TEACHER?

If I hadn't chosen an education field I would have tried to become a C.I.A. agent.

WHAT QUALITIES DO YOU ADMIRE ABOUT IWA STUDENTS?

I admire IWA students' grit and perseverance.

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR OR ROLE MODEL WHO INSPIRED YOU TO BECOME A TEACHER?

My number-one mentor of all time is my mother, who inspired me to want to learn more about Spanish language and culture, to explore the world (she absolutely loved traveling), and to appreciate art and creativity—which led me to teaching.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE VACATION SPOT?

My two favorite places to travel in the world are Costa Rica (abroad) and Miami (in the U.S.A.). I have been traveling to Costa Rica all my life, and my top three recommendations of places to visit are: El Volcan Poas (the Poas Volcano), El Parque Manuel Antonio, and the Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve in Puntarenas.





SPANISH STUDENTS SHINE IN ART AND LANGUAGE SKILLS

Above: The AATSP Houston Chapter Spanish Art contest was open to students from the Houston metropolitan area who are currently enrolled in a Spanish/ Portuguese level 1-4 class. Each student created a Spanish-themed artwork as well as submitted an artist statement in Spanish with their artwork. Our school's participants were (above, L to R): Vivienne Ziegler '27, Nayeli Deciderio '26, and Danna Pinzon '27. Vivienne's artwork titled, "La Bailaora de Flamenco," won in the AATSP Houston Chapter.

Below: Mrs. Michelle Le and Mrs. Sonia Breaux's Spanish students brought home a heavy collection of medals in the recent National Spanish Exams, ranging from Spanish 1 to Spanish 4. We congratulate the following students, many of whom are featured in the photo below: Fiona Little, Madeleine Bartholet, Kara Baumeister, Vivienne Ziegler, Camila Cotto, Alex Beltran, Sophie Ogbo, Rinelle Aliboso, Trinity Welsch, Daniela Cross, Paulina Martinez, Victoria Hillier, Victoria Taboada-Palau, Caitlin Straw, Cecilia Prodoehl, Alana Shadow, Alyssa Garrido, Erin Baumeister, Lizbeth Michel, and Maria Aguirre.



Congratulations to



the Class of 2024!



Sesquicentennial Seniors Raise the Bar

The entire community came together at the Sacred Heart Co-Cathedral on May 18 to celebrate the Class of 2024, IWA's Sesquicentennial Seniors. The Baccalaureate Mass and Graduation also punctuated the end of the school's year-long series of exciting and sentimental events to honor IWA's 150-year anniversary.

The 2024 class of 70 young women is known not only for leadership and resilience, but also for earning a record number of college scholarships—\$15 million. In addition, the class logged more than 8,400 hours of service to the community, volunteering at local nonprofits such as The Food Bank, Camp Smiles, Pro-Life Houston, Lone Oak Ranch, and many more.

"The best is yet to come for the Class of 2024," says Director of College Counseling Dr. Talia Pennington-Dorsey. "These young women are willing to put in the hard work to achieve their goals, and they are true servant leaders. I am excited to witness all the good they will bring into the world."

As the graduates join more than 40 colleges and universities throughout the United States, the foundation built at IWA will guide them to great new heights.

Photo: Salutatorian Jane Volf and Valedictorian Lauren Gentry

70
TOTAL
GRADUATES

\$15M
IN
SCHOLARSHIPS
AND AWARDS



Honors

**MARGARET SHELTZ
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP**
Rebecca Peterson

**BISHOP SHELTZ
SCHOLARSHIP**
Raina Winfrey

**CHARLINE BARRY
THEOLOGY AWARD**
Victoria Cassat

**SOCIETY OF WOMEN
ENGINEERS AWARD**
Noelyn Portilla
Adriana Cerda

**RENSSELAER AWARD
FOR EXCELLENCE IN
MATH AND SCIENCE**
Kendy Taylor

**AMAZON FUTURE
ENGINEER SCHOLARSHIP**
Miranda Rinaldi

**DISTINGUISHED LEADER
GRADUATES**
Marianna Belisle
Flinn Burrell
Victoria Cassat
Katia Castillo
Jasmine Cavazos
Hayden Coogan
Alyssa Garrido
Devin Gold
Susie Hinojosa
Autumn Hunter
Gabriella Lopez
Catherine Mayeu
Allison Porche
Brianna Reagins
Angelina Reyes
Eleanor Seaton
Addison Solis

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
THEOLOGY**
Cassandra Martinez
Eliza Hager
Katherine Gallagher
Jane Volf

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
ENGLISH**
Vivian Espinoza
Micah Daniel
Ailey-Marie Willis

Maria Aguirre Lamus
Emma Way
Rose Collora
Tania Rodriguez
Anastasia Burdzinski
Noelyn Portilla
Arabella Smith
Vivienne Ziegler
Alexandra Beltran
Rebecca Peterson
Victoria Taboada-Palau
Samantha Martinez
Avery Tucker
Eliza Hager
Abigail Anderson
Clarissa Banda
Flinn Burrell

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
MATH**
Leighton Murphy
Anne Parma
Faith Puzon
Anna Luckow
Ava Bocock
Emma Way
Clare Hayes
Brianna Reagins
Jane Volf
Kendy Taylor
Lauren Gentry

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
SCIENCE**
Alexandra Beltran
Ava Bocock
Paulina Martinez
Clare Hayes
Kaitlyn Conover
Bella Martinez
Hannah Richard
Veronica Uy
Erin Baumeister
Kelsey Glover
Mia Borin
Kendy Taylor
Noelyn Portilla

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
SOCIAL STUDIES**
Anna Luckow
Sophia Vasquez
Paulina Martinez
Elizabeth Carter
Kendy Taylor
Bella Martinez
Adriana Cerda
Brianna Reagins

Kate Holden
Hayden Coogan
Alyssa Garrido
Rinelle Aliboso
Holly Cromeens
Kaylee Picard
Reese Mason
Olivia Montemayor

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
LEADERSHIP**
Leighton Murphy
Isabella Mireles
Cienna Adam
Flinn Burrell
Clover Focke

**DEPARTMENT AWARDS
ATHLETICS, FINE &
PERFORMING ARTS AND
TECHNOLOGY**
Ginelle Guerrero
Chloe Green
Sophia Vasquez
Allison Brickey
Isabella Moore
Katherine Dickinson
Madeline Uyenco
Alexandra Waggoner
Veronica Uy
Veronica Burger
Isabella Herrera

SCHOLAR ATHLETE
Jane Volf

**NATIONAL MERIT
PROGRAM**
Erin Baumeister
Maribel Garza
Ruby Ramirez

**NATIONAL HISPANIC
RECOGNITION PROGRAM**
Jasmine Cavazos
Katia Castillo
Adriana Cerda
Alyssa Garrido
Addison Solis
Cienna Adam
Esperanza Vazquez

**NATIONAL AFRICAN
AMERICAN RECOGNITION
PROGRAM**
Brianna Reagins

**PRESIDENT'S AWARD
FOR EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT SILVER
AWARD**
Marianna Belisle
Adriana Cerda
Katherine Dickinson
Alondra Fernandez-Cruz

**PRESIDENT'S AWARD
FOR EDUCATIONAL
ACHIEVEMENT GOLD
AWARD**
Flinn Burrell
Katia Castillo
Jasmine Cavazos
Hayden Coogan
Lauren Gentry
Devin Gold
Susie Hinojosa
Autumn Hunter
Reese Mason
Catherine Mayeu
Grace Oggero
Kaylee Picard
Allison Porche
Brianna Reagins
Hannah Richard
Miranda Rinaldi
Addison Solis
Veronica Uy
Jane Volf



Distinguished Scholars



Cienna Adam-Magna Cum Laude



Flinn Burrell-Magna Cum Laude



Katia Castillo-Cum Laude

* Servant of the Word Award



Jasmine Cavazos-Cum Laude



Hayden Coogan-Summa Cum Laude

* Woman of the Word Award



Alyssa Garrido-Cum Laude



Lauren Gentry-Summa Cum Laude



Devin Gold-Cum Laude

* Spirit of the Word Award



Susie Hinojosa-Cum Laude



Autumn Hunter-Cum Laude



Reese Mason-Magna Cum Laude



Catherine Mayeu-Cum Laude



Allison Porche-Summa Cum Laude



Hannah Richard-Magna Cum Laude



Miranda Rinaldi-Cum Laude



Addison Solis-Cum Laude



Esperanza Vazquez-Cum Laude



Jane Volf-Summa Cum Laude

Athletic Director's Report

Rick Perez



The 2023-2024 school year proved to be a banner year for Athletics at IWA. Five seniors signed to play at the next level—a school record. Signers included Grace Oggero, who will swim for the D1 program at University of Arkansas - Little Rock (featured last issue); Kate Holden, who will run track/cross country for Ouachita Baptist University; Valentina Salazar, who will play volleyball for the University of Dallas; Esperanza Vazquez, who will run track/cross country at Trinity University in San Antonio; and Jane Volf, who'll play soccer for Rhodes College. All of these athletes were team leaders, accomplished students and women of character. We couldn't be more proud, and we wish them the best of luck in their future endeavors.

Continued on page 28.





GOLF

The Golf team was led by first-year head coach, Charlie Butler. The team opened their season at the annual IWA Invitational at Hermann Park GC. What a beautiful day for golf. The team finished in 3rd place. It was also senior recognition day. The seniors were Jordan Fowler, Hayden Coogan, and Avery McClure. In late February, the golf team got 2nd place at the Emery/Weiner School tournament. Ailey-Marie Willis '26 won first place as she shot an 86. Jordan Fowler '24 finished 4th. The team won 3rd place in the IWA. On April 22 and 23 they participated in the Regional Golf tournament in San Antonio. Ailey-Marie Willis qualified for state which was on May 6 and 7. At the spring sports banquet, the following awards were given to the golfers: Most Valuable Golfer-Ailey Maire Willis, Champion of Character-Jordan Fowler, Newcomer of the Year-Madeleine Bartholet.



TRACK

The Track team is led by head coach Margaret Glover and assisted by Coach TJ. The team participated in very competitive meets this season. Eden Fuller competed in the Rice University Invitational as she finished 3rd place overall in the 300-meter hurdles. At the TAPPS Regionals at St. Agnes Sports Complex, the 4x100-meter relay qualified for state. The relay team consisted of Ava Bocock, Kyree Ike, Mia Arroyo, and Eden Fuller. The 4x400-meter relay qualified as they finished 2nd at regionals. The relay team consisted of Vivian Espinoza, Ava Bocock, Dale Gold, and Eden Fuller. Esperanza Vazquez qualified for the 1600. Eden Fuller won state in the 300-meter hurdles. We are so proud to have another State Champ at IWA, and we can't wait to see what Eden achieves next year.



SOFTBALL

The Softball team was led by head coach Rick Perez and assisted by Taylor Le. The team consisted of two seniors, five sophomores, and six freshmen. The team was young and had quite a bit of talent. On Saturday, April 20, we celebrated the seniors, Lauren Gentry and Samantha Martinez. Before the festivities, the game sped to an exciting end as we were tied up 8-8 going into the bottom of the 7th inning when Lauren Gentry came up to the plate with one out and a person on first and hit a two-run home run to win the game 10-8. In the TAPPS playoffs, the Falcons lost in the first round to powerhouse Bishop Lynch 8-4. The following girls earned post-season honors: Lauren Gentry got 1st Team All-District, 1st Team All-State, and Academic All-State; Olivia Montemayor and Faith Puzon got 2nd Team All-District; Faith Puzon also earned All-State Honorable Mention; and Jayna Fontenot and Leighton Murphy got All-District Honorable Mention. At the spring sports banquet, the following awards were handed out: Most Valuable Player-Lauren Gentry, Champion of Character-Samantha Martinez, and Newcomer of the Year-Faith Puzon. Also at the Spring Sports Banquet, I announced that after 17 years of coaching softball, I have decided to step down as head coach. I will continue to be the school's athletic director and will cheer on the sidelines for all of our teams.



TENNIS

The Tennis team was led by second-year head coach Joseph Schiller, assisted by Talia Pennington-Dorsey. The team competed in a few tournaments this season and was consistent in district matches. At the TAPPS Regionals, Erin Baumeister finished 4th place and qualified for state in Waco. Congratulations to Erin!

SWIM

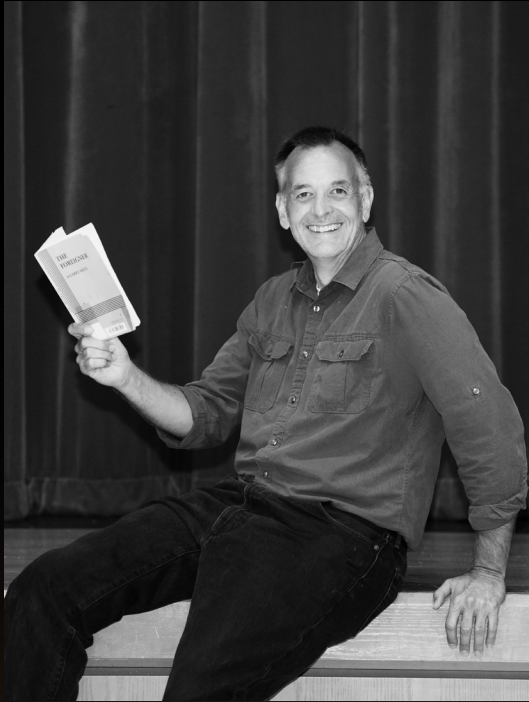
A final note about our swim team. As we went to press for the Winter issue of the magazine, eight swimmers qualified for state, which is a great accomplishment for our school. Congratulations to the team and Coach Rachel Boyle. Grace Oggero '24 came home with two medals, 3rd place in the 500-yard freestyle and 3rd place in the 200-yard freestyle.

Be sure to follow us on our Instagram account, [iwa_falconathletics](https://www.instagram.com/iwa_falconathletics), for the latest updates. Go Falcons!



[iwa_falconathletics](https://www.instagram.com/iwa_falconathletics)

Backstage with Falcon Theatre Director Chip Simmons: Theatre's Power to Transform



In July 2002, Chip Simmons was a hopeful college graduate in Oregon who packed two suitcases in his car and headed to Houston. An aspiring actor, he was applying for a summer internship at A.D. Players, the nationally renowned Christian theater company in Houston. Simmons, whose father is a chaplain, says, "From the start, my passion has always been to inspire compelling theater that merges with elements of faith."

Twenty years later, Simmons remains a popular cast member of A.D. Players, most recently starring in 42 performances as Boolie in "Driving Miss Daisy." He has performed in their Touring theater company, local productions, and a one-man show based on the Book of Romans. "I've toured, directed, and taught acting classes in their Performing Arts Academy" he says.

Two years ago, Simmons added IWA to his repertoire, when he began part-time work directing Falcon Theatre productions. Since the school's founding in 1873, Incarnate Word Academy's holistic curriculum has always emphasized creativity and the arts, he acknowledges, and now is the time to grow and energize that enthusiasm through the Performing Arts Department. "There is a core group of students here at IWA whose passion for Theater Arts is unmatched," Simmons says.

"One big goal for the 2024-2025 school year is launching a Theatre Arts Elective for the fall semester. The class will focus on tools and techniques for project-based collaboration, which Theater Arts can develop on another level. I like to think of a theater production as a blank canvas with twenty-five artists painting a mosaic," he explains. "These artists have to be in clear agreement



about the story and the message. It's a kind of artistry that requires skills like constructive criticism, collaboration, and presentation. Skills which seem even more valuable today for teenagers who are emerging from the pandemic years," he adds.

"This fall we also want to launch student participation with social media about our productions and processes. We'll share short narratives about how a play comes together and create fun content of behind-the-scenes happenings in Falcon Theatre. And a third initiative will be to have a separate Black Box Theatre Showcase," he continues. "This offering could feature short vignettes written and/or directed by the students. Finally, I'd like to strengthen our partnership with St. Thomas High School and other area schools to include more male student participation as well as encourage annual subscriptions to Falcon Theatre by adding incentives like priority seating for our supporters. Being a season subscriber sends our students a clear message of support."

For Simmons, the rewards of directing IWA's high school theater program are immediate as well as long-lasting. "The best moments are what I call penny-drop moments," he confides. "When suddenly, you see the lights come on in a student's eyes. Those 'aha' moments that happen backstage or at a rehearsal are priceless."

Theater motivates people to dig deeper and walk a mile in someone else's shoes. "A great script can inspire both

the actors and the audience to develop empathy. And with empathy - you're given access to a transformative change of worldviews. The real power of storytelling is seen in transformation. Think about the parables in the New Testament. Jesus knew the power of a story!"

Speaking of Jesus and the parables, Simmons shares that Falcon Theatre's fall production will be the 1970s smash hit and Broadway musical "Godspell," which focuses on a new and relevant portrayal of parables found in the Gospel of Matthew. In the spring, the dramatic offering will be "Miss Holmes," a theatrical fan fiction that shines a new light on favorite characters from the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle classic. "Miss Holmes' examines the Victorian world of Holmes and Watson by exploring the added obstacles faced by these two iconic characters if they were women," Simmons says.

"I believe both our acting troupe and student body will be excited for this season," he concludes. "We look forward to a year of growing audiences and fan support for Falcon Theatre."

— CLAIRE C. FLETCHER

Below: Falcon Theatre's production of "12 Angry Jurors," hit the stage on February 23-25. This blistering examination of the American melting pot explored whether 12 ordinary strangers could peel away each other's layers of artifice for the sake of justice.



Creative Students Excel at Scholastic Awards



L to R: Mrs. Amanda Snook, Issa, Avery, Alexis, Rinelle, and Isabel. Not pictured: Ms. Josie Postel and Anastasia.

Congratulations and applause to IWA's Regional Scholastic Award winners. This year, the school had winners in both art and writing.

Art:

- Issa Moore '26 - Silver Key
- Anastasia Burdzinski '24 - Honorable Mention

Writing:

- Avery Tucker - Gold Key for Poetry, *Herculean Hills*. Avery moved on to nationals where she earned a Silver Award.
- Rinelle Aliboso '26 - Silver Key - Dramatic Script, *The Woman with an Ax* **and** Honorable Mention: Critical Essay: *Why Guidance is Fundamental to Morality*
- Alexis Zogg '27 - Silver Key - Personal Memoir, *Clean*
- Isabel Nero '25 - Honorable Mention - Poetry, *Silenced Story*



Vivian Le Wins National Art Competition for "Prodigal Son" Painting

Art teacher Josie Postel says she is always impressed with the talent of her students, and one of her goals is to get their creative works out into the public eye. When she heard about Mission Sharing's national competition for 2-D art that depicts the Bible story of the "Prodigal Son," she encouraged her students to enter. "I know one of you can win," she promised.

Junior Vivian Le accepted Ms. Postel's challenge, and spent a weekend painting a powerful vignette of the moment the father reconnects with his penitent son. Soon after, she was pleased to learn that her acrylic painting had won the national contest, as well as the \$1,000 prize for 1st place.

"Actually, I was shocked," admits Vivian. She has purchased some technology gear with the winnings. And though she doesn't plan to major in art in college, she says, "Painting is something I will always do because I've developed a passion for it, and I enjoy it."



IWA Choir Proves to be Perennially Superior

In April, the IWA Choir participated in two contests held at Willow Meadows Baptist Church in Houston. The first contest was the TPSMEA State Solo and Ensemble contest. IWA had four soloists and one small ensemble who had advanced from the Regional level.

Soloists Katie Dickinson, Courtney Hall, Reese Mason, and Eleanor Seaton received a medal for the highest rating, a Superior (One). The small ensemble singing "The Silver Swan" also received medals for a Superior (One) rating. At the Concert Contest, the IWA Choir earned straight Ones from all three judges. Congratulations to Director Josh Wilson and the IWA Choir!



Impact Dance Team Delivers

The Impact Dance Team put on another high-voltage Spring Showcase this spring at St. Thomas High School. Their show featured dances from their competition season, new dances created by students, and dances created by IWA Alumnae and our very own Ms. Stacey Kornegay. This year brought a special guest performance by Lanier Middle School's Dance Team. Applause for our Student Choreographers: Devin Gold '24, Lizbeth Michel '25, Tania Rodriguez '25, Cecilia Prodoehl '25, and Jasmine Crespo '25.

The team and their director, Cloe Leppard, wrapped up their season with their annual Banquet at Maggiano's Little Italy. Congratulations to all our dancers and award winners: Best Newcomer - Olive Thiel '27; Leader With Vision - Devin Gold '24, and Dancer of the Year - Julia Bounds '25.



Business Heats Up for Cool Frescas

Each year, Leading with Business classes learn by doing, creating pop-up businesses with detailed marketing plans, finance and human resources teams, and operations specialists. This spring, after in-depth market research, the class came up with an idea to create an agua frescas business called Refresca Fiesta. The target audience included students and faculty who seek a refreshing drink after school.

"We started strong with a launch that was a resounding success," says Leading with Business instructor Maxine Morency. "The addition of a QR code where customers can pre-order drinks has made all the difference," she adds. Immediately after dismissal on business days, the group had prepared a colorful assembly line of agua frescas, including popular choices such as watermelon, strawberry creme, and Brazilian limeade. Customers gave rave reviews as they grabbed their cups for a sweet boost before athletics activities or homework.

"The experience of developing and maintaining a business was a learning experience for all the girls. They learned to problem solve, strategize, and galvanize," says Ms. Morency. "Throughout the duration of Refresca Fiesta, students nurtured the entrepreneurial spirit by sharing their creativity, innovative pursuits, and collaborative skills to ensure the business was successful."

Profits from Refresca Fiesta were directed back to the school to support extracurricular activities.



Pirate-Themed Workshop Sails to Success

This year's middle school leadership workshop, Look and Lead, was a sold-out success. More than 40 Houston-area Catholic middle-school girls came to campus on Saturday, March 23, to participate in interactive activities that brought them together to learn leadership skills and form friendships with students from other schools. The "Leadership is a Treasure" workshop focused on tactics that help build agile and adaptable teams.

Young Leaders Program Director Ms. Antoinette Hernandez reports, "There was definite growth in the girls throughout the day as they went through the lessons and worked with their teams. The middle school students were quiet and shy at the start of the day, but by the end were confident in expressing their ideas and directing conversations," she continues.

"An important lesson they learned from our IWA Young Leaders Program is that leadership is not a title but rather a process that anyone can learn. The keys to good leadership include caring about others, being positive, and striving to bring out the best in your classmates."

Favorite activities were pirate-themed versions of "Amazing Race" and a resourcefulness lesson titled "A Pirate's Bounty." Thirteen IWA students volunteered to make the day a memory the middle school students will treasure.

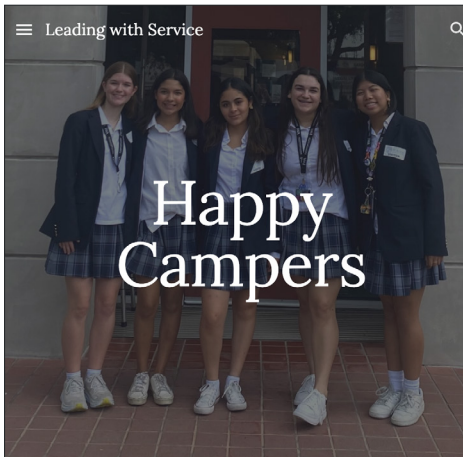


Positive Words Change a Life

March's powerful Leadership Live event featured Soul Singh, a Houston-area educator, author and motivational speaker. Ms. Singh experienced innumerable traumatic events during childhood, including being abandoned by her mother, being shuttled to more than 30 different foster homes, and feeling alone and unseen. In 6th grade, a note from a teacher that read, "Thank you for smiling," changed her life for the better. "That teacher's simple act of caring illuminated my path to hope and helped me find my humanity," said Singh. She became the first person in her family to graduate from high school, and eventually she graduated with a bachelor's degree in Sociology from UT-Austin.

Ms. Singh gave students copies of her book, "Thank You for Smiling," and says that her message and life purpose today is to help others—especially children—overcome adversity, achieve goals, and lead fulfilling lives.





Welcome to the Happy Campers website!

We are ambassadors from IWA who share what school-related stress looks like and ways to cope with it inside and outside the classroom.

We partnered with St. Anne's Catholic School to carry out our project!

Imagine you have just begun school and are completely overwhelmed by all the stress from your courses. What do you do with this sudden stress and how do you utilize it to your advantage? Ever since early childhood, people have dealt with varying problems that cause them stress. Especially during adolescence, children deal with immense stress that stems from the school environment.

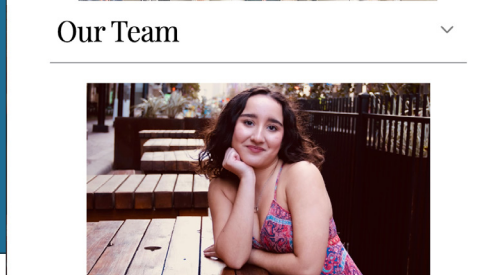
At our Stress Seminar, the kids will learn how to manage and acknowledge their stress. They will gain techniques on how to either cope with or fix their stress. As adolescents, we will share our personal experiences with stress from transitioning from middle school to high school. Since we all have different techniques for relieving stress, it will be helpful for the kids to hear a variety of skills. They will be able to pick which skill works best for them and for their personal needs.



Welcome to Our Page

We are Advocates for Children's Cancer and we aim to spread childhood cancer awareness to middle schoolers, so they can make change in their hearts and actions.

About us



Welcome!

What you think is a small action can mean the world to another person. Your actions can cause others to follow your lead, creating a chain reaction of leaders in your communities! With more leaders, we'll be able to take better care of the environment that God gave us. It's everyone's job to look over the Creations that God entrusted us with.

Down below, we've included reflections from each member of Compassion Crew. These reflections entail the things we've learned and the extent of the impact we've made. Just press the button of the member whose reflection you want to read!

- [Nayeli's Reflection](#)
- [Ailey-Marie Willis Reflection](#)
- [Trinity's Reflection](#)
- [Sarah's Reflection](#)

Leading with Service Students Produce Websites

Ms. Maxine Morency's Leading with Service class completed their Social Change Project for the year and documented their efforts by creating content and design for their websites. The goals of Leading with Service are to give students an understanding of the authentic meaning of leadership as well as the opportunity to apply the practices in the community.

Check out these student-designed websites to learn more about how IWA students partnered with three area middle schools and organized efforts to bring compassion to children with cancer, help students manage stress, and show middle-schoolers how small acts of kindness can change the world.



Scan the QR codes to explore their websites.



Red & White Gala

Celebrates Theroux Family and Raises Funds for IWA

On Saturday, April 20, Incarnate Word Academy hosted the 2024 Red & White Gala: A Legacy of Honor. The Gala was chaired by Brandi and Bobby Dixon (above), parents of Mia Howard '26. Each year, the gala committee selects an honoree for the Agatha Sheehan Award, and this year the school honored the Theroux Family, who have three IWA alumnae: Mary Kate '17, Claire '19, and Dana '21. The family also has two sons, JP and Billy, who graduated from St. Thomas High School and one son, Jean-Luc, who attends Annunciation School.

Following dinner, Sister Lauren Beck presented the Therouxes with the Agatha Sheehan Award, saying, "Each year, the gala leadership committee has the difficult task of selecting the recipient of the Agatha Sheehan Award. Last May, we unanimously agreed that the award would be given to the Theroux Family. Sadly, Todd Theroux, loving husband and devoted father of the six Theroux children, unexpectedly passed away. While Todd is not with us this evening in person, we know he is smiling down on us as we hold him in our hearts and our prayers," she continued. "Strong, healthy families are essential for the well-being of the Church, the nation, and the world. They make us all better!"

More than 300 parents, alumnae, faculty & staff, friends, local clergy, and the Sisters of the Incarnate Word & Blessed Sacrament turned out to support IWA. The entertaining evening included performances from the IWA Choir, who wowed the crowd with their renditions of "I Will Follow Him" and "Oh, Happy Day" from the musical "Sister Act." Miranda Rinaldi '24 served as harpist during the cocktail hour, and senior Flinn Burrell helped raise funds for financial aid during the Paddles Up portion of the evening.

Auctioneer Johnny Bravo kept the Live Auction moving with his high-energy fundraising skills and humor. Local events maestro Scott Konitzer adorned The Revaire ballroom with glamorous decor, including crystal vases overflowing with red and white blooms, candles and glittering tablecloths. More than \$910,000 was raised for financial aid and scholarships.





Father-Daughter Mass Brightens March

The school welcomed hundreds of fathers at the March 1st Father-Daughter Mass at Annunciation Catholic Church. Father Luke Millette, who presided, reminded everyone about the importance of forgiveness in fortifying family relationships. The service closed with a special blessing for both fathers and daughters. After Mass, everyone moved to the IWA Auditorium for a reception hosted by the Falcon Family Club. The care and respect shared between IWA fathers and daughters at this annual tradition always uplifts our campus.



Red Check Brings Laughter and Tears

Red Check, an annual senior tradition at IWA, brought a mix of heartfelt sentiment and hilarity on May 15. The Advancement Department kicked off the event by hosting a Tex-Mex luncheon for the Class of 2024 on the rooftop. Angelique Longobardi '17, Annual Fund and Alumnae Coordinator, reminded the students to stay in touch with their alma mater and make plans to attend all the upcoming alumnae events.

Following lunch, the entire school gathered in the Auditorium for a presentation that included a reality show spoof, "Survivor: IWA," where seniors acted out memorable moments at IWA and impersonated faculty, staff, and fellow students. The audience howled with laughter at the seniors' clever performances. Afterward, a nostalgic slideshow of all the young women's baby photos and senior photos played while the crowd applauded and celebrated a new chapter for these 70 graduates.



Rooftop Reception Welcomes Falcon Family Club Officers

This year's Falcon Family Club (FFC) Reception took place the evening of Monday, May 6, on IWA's rooftop. Delicious appetizers, drinks, and desserts were enjoyed by all. The incoming Board members for the 2024-2025 year were presented, including President, Cheryl Dzurec; Vice President, Maureen Marcon; Treasurer, David Gold; Secretary, Amy Carter; Hospitality Chairs, Gilda Mendoza and Nickie Bounds; Spirit Shop Chair, Brandi Dixon; and Communications Chair, Jeny Burrell.

Thanks to outgoing FFC Board members and event leaders for their efforts in making all IWA events a success this past year. Events included everything from special Masses and admission events to Thanksgiving, Christmas, Teacher Appreciation, Family Falcon Picnics, and Foundation Day luncheon, to name a few. Not only did they work continuously to support the IWA Community, but many of the FFC officers have been on the board for numerous years. Special recognition goes out to two-term President Michelle Parham; Vice-President Lance Tolson; Treasurer Maureen Marcon; Secretary Amy Carter; Hospitality Chairs Gilda Mendoza and Nickie Bounds; Spirit Shop Chair Sara Mayeu; and Communications Chair Missy McClure. Also many thanks to those who served as lead and event chairs for various committees throughout the year - Brandi and Bobby Dixon (Gala); Kathryn Straw (Annual Fund); Tracy Temple and Rebecca Perez (Dream Girls Style Show); Quinn Richards (Falcon Raffle); Mary Volf (Spirit Shop); Marna Dickinson (Mass Lead); Amanda Focke (Faculty Events); and all volunteers who gave of their time this year.

IWA is blessed to have great parents dedicated to the school's success. Thank you to all of our Family Falcon Committee volunteers!





IWA Community Comes Through to Meet Giving Goals

What a way to cap off our 150th Anniversary! Whether the campaign was for our Falcon Raffle, the Red & White Gala, Giving Tuesday, or the Annual Fund, the IWA community came together. The Annual Fund surpassed goal for the first time in five years. "This remarkable achievement would not have been possible without your unwavering dedication and loyalty to IWA. Thank you all for your ongoing support and everything you do for the academy," says Angelique Longobardi '17, Annual Fund/Alumnae Coordinator.

Stephanie Fish '23

Stephanie Fish '23 (top, left) competed in her first collegiate meet at the Charlie Thomas Indoor Invitational at Texas A&M in February 2024. "She's doing great things at Arizona State," reports Athletic Director Rick Perez. #ForksUp



Shantel Van Santen '03

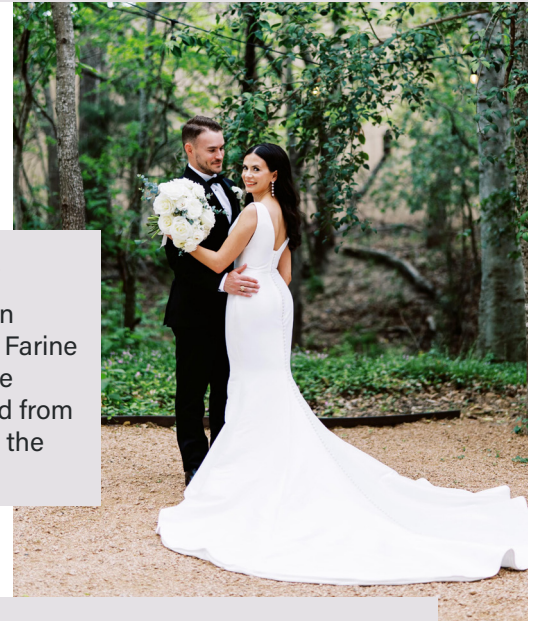
Shantel Van Santen is an IWA graduate from the class of 2003. She went to IWA all 4 years and continued her education at TCU. After graduating from TCU she pursued an acting career. She has appeared in shows like "One Tree Hill," "Shooter," "The Final Destination," "You and I" and others.

Shantel has now joined "FBI: MOST WANTED" on CBS as Special Agent Nina Chase. In May, Athletic Director Rick Perez caught up with Shantel in Houston at Nerd Blvd. store signing autographs. Shantel voices one of the characters in the Apex Legends video game.



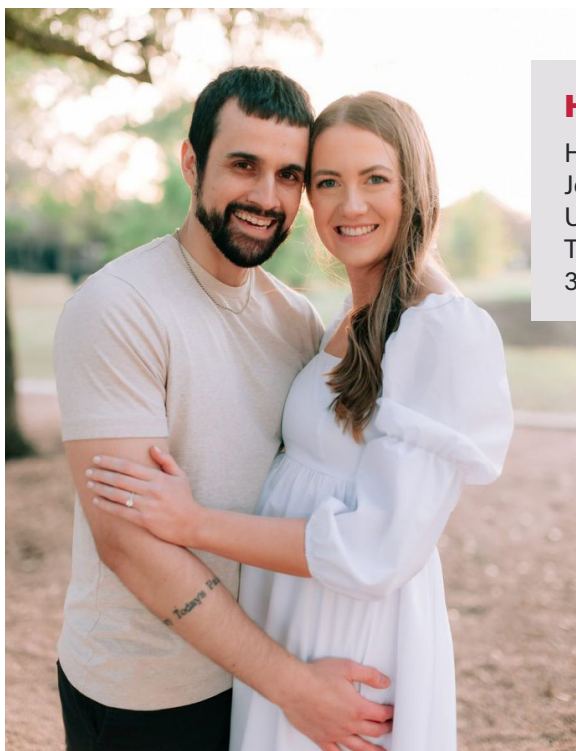
Lisa Perez Farine '14

Lisa Farine, who graduated in 2014, tied the knot with Cole Farine on March 15, 2024. They were introduced by a mutual friend from their college days. Cheers to the newlyweds!



Carolina Olivares '16

Carolina Olivares '16 just got engaged to Joseph Kulbeth, a STH alum. They met their junior year at a STH vs. Strake football game, and although they didn't start dating until years later, it was the beginning of their story. A big congratulations to the happy couple!



Haley Turner '17

Haley Turner '17 is engaged! She and her fiancé, Jose Moris, met in their research lab at Baylor University, and their journey started from there. The lovely couple has been together for the last 3 years. Congratulations to our IWA alum!



Class of 2014

The Class of 2014 came together for their 10 year reunion on Sunday, June 9, 2024! It is heartwarming to see our alumni reconnect and reminisce about their times at the Academy.

Class of 1973

The IWA class of 1973 celebrated their 50th class reunion in outstanding fashion on Saturday, November 11, 2023. The exclusive Houston Racquet Club provided the perfect background for their festivities which featured fine dining, great music, much dancing, a photo booth, and a photographer. They were honored to have Sr. Madeleine Grace and Sr. Theresa Kelleher in attendance, along with 42 classmates and guests. Attendees say it was so much fun to visit with their classmates. While many still live in Houston and the surrounding areas, they had several attend from various U.S. states and D.C., Puerto Rico, as well as parts of Mexico.



Melina Bellomo '90

A special congratulations to Melina Bellomo '90 who joined the HCU women's basketball program as the Director of Engagement. She will be working to build partnerships for the women's team and create new opportunities for Houston Christian University's staff and athletes.





Fifty Years of Friendship

Renette Hundl and Marie Jamail IWA Class of '74 pose with Danny Hines STH Class of '74 at the STH Class of '74 50th Year Reunion Celebration!

Camille Anigbogu '20

Camille Anigbogu '20 is among the 24 individuals chosen to participate in the National Eucharistic Pilgrimage that began in May of 2024. The group of "perpetual pilgrims" will journey through four different routes across the U.S. for two months before arriving at the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis in July.



Sister Jean Marie Guokas, C.V.I.

Sister Jean Marie Guokas, C.V.I., recently celebrated her Diamond Jubilee, 75 years of profession of vows as a member of the Congregation of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament. Sister Jean is not only a Class of 1948 alumna, she taught at IWA beginning in 1955 and was named principal in 1964.

Top: Sister Jean poses at the reception with her 1948 classmate Mary Ann Mary Valouch Weishaupt. Alumnae from classes in 1948 through 1977 attended her jubilee, including (bottom): Linda Azios Peterson '67; Marie Ulrich Pousson '71; Barbara Van Postman '69; Belinda Postman Kaylani '67; Paulette Zann Chavez '67; Terry Enriquez Hickman '67. Guests also included: Virginia Theall Berreth '53; Ann Caliva Lowry '59; Darlene Hanks Villarreal '77; Mary Jo Grizzaffi Montalbano '74; Maria Ballas Jamail '74; and Michelle Ballas Pritchard '72.





Olivia Hill '23

Olivia Hill '23 was recently offered \$1.2 million in scholarships for military academies and has decided to attend the United States Air Force Academy (USAFA) on a full scholarship. After graduation she'll receive a commission as an officer in the Air Force and serve on active duty.

"I chose the Air Force after being able to explore the different branches and what they have to offer during my prep year at Marion Military Institute," says Olivia. "In the Summer of 2023, I was able to participate in the Air Force Aim High Flight Academy and learn to fly. I was also able to meet and talk to many pilots who are in the Air Force. Later in the year, I traveled to Columbus Air Force Base in Mississippi and saw what flight training as a pilot in the Air Force looks like. I also visited Ft. Benning in Georgia to see what an Army armored unit and Ranger School looks like. Through these opportunities I saw the branches in action and I knew that USAFA is the perfect place for me. Going there will allow me to explore and pursue my interests, as well as allow me to have a rewarding career." Olivia looks forward to continuing her journey with the amazing friends she has made from MMI. "I have a great group of friends going with me to USAFA and the other service academies, so I am so excited to have this network of friends that live all across the United States and will be stationed all around the globe," she continues. "I am also looking forward to the many opportunities that I will have while being a cadet at USAFA. As a cadet you get to do all sorts of cool things such as Survival Training and getting your jump wings by completing five solo free fall jumps!"

After the Academy, Olivia plans to be either a pilot or a weather officer. "I hope to one day be a part of the Hurricane Hunters 53rd Weather Reconnaissance Squadron that monitors and flies into hurricanes all over the globe."



Any News?

We want to hear from you! Please send your news about weddings, engagements, births, career news, and IWA get-togethers, to Annual Fund and Alumnae Coordinator Angelique Longobardi '17 at alongobardi@incarnateword.org.

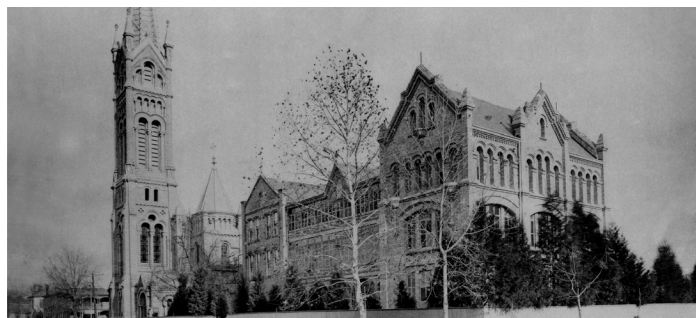
In Memoriam

- Rosemary Badami '41
- Judy Broussard Duckless '71
sister of Glenda Broussard Jackson '72
and Jennifer Broussard Jones '75
- Patricia Gibson Hueber '48
- Shirley Wise Mangogna '57
- Devina Sedito Palermo '48
- Eugenia Neubauer Kowalski '46
- Joyce Jamail Waldrop '55

A Living Legacy: Incarnate Word Academy Marks 150 Years

By Holly Beretto,
Herald Correspondent

HOUSTON — When the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament first came to Houston that April day in 1873, there was no way they could know the community of faith they were about to build in downtown Houston would still be there a century and a half later. Sent from Lyon by way of Brownsville, Mother Gabriel Dillon, accompanied by Sister Mary Lawrence and Sister Marie Therese, came on the invitation of Bishop John Odin, the first bishop of Galveston. He would die before the sisters arrived, but they would carry out his desire to educate young people across his diocese, which included the entire state of Texas.



Settling in a former Franciscan monastery and then moving to 609 Crawford Street, the sisters celebrated Mass in their new home while opening the Academy of the Incarnate Word the following year. At the time, Houston itself was less than a century old but emerging as an important center of commerce in the South. Incarnate Word Academy (IWA), like the city it would call home, would grow together, changing to meet the times and welcoming those willing to work to fulfill their dreams.

Now, as IWA concludes its 150th celebration, its Class of 2024 graduated with special stoles marking the sesquicentennial; the school stands as a bridge connecting the past to the future.

“Looking at all that we have today and looking back at our history is a strong reminder that we stand on the shoulders of giants who were faithful to incarnational spirituality, an educational vision, and served with spirit and courage. For this, we are all grateful,” said Sister Lauren Beck, C.V.I., president of IWA, about the milestone.

Mother Dillon would become the school's first principal, assisted by Sisters Lawrence and Therese. In those early days between 1873 and the late 1880s, they embraced an ethos that education was for everyone, and the academy educated the daughters of Houston's oldest families, newcomer settlers to Texas and freed slaves. While the sisters were building the curriculum and educating those first students, designer Nicholas Clayton oversaw the plans and construction of the first school building and church, all of which were completed in 1905.

That was the same time the academy shifted its focus from serving as a finishing school and started its journey as a college-preparatory institution. That was unusual at the time when young women were still expected to make lives inside the home and not go on to higher education. But it speaks to IWA's legacy of providing a strong educational foundation alongside its deeply rooted Catholic faith.

"When you start a mission, coming over one way from France, think about the level of courage that took," said Cathy Stephen, IWA's principal. "Bringing the mission forward is still important today because we believe in a space where girls can be heard, and hone their voices, skills, and talents to be successful wherever they go."

Over the years, the school has expanded and enriched what was already a strong curriculum. The school named its first lay principal in 1994 and launched a pioneering leadership series in 2010 that would evolve into IWA's Young Leaders Program, the first of its kind among Catholic schools and one of the few in the nation that helps students understand that leadership is multifaceted and every student has leadership potential.

The school's current building was completed in 2017. Its modern white exterior adorned with red awnings is a downtown landmark. Its 18,500 square feet are an extension of the old school. In the courtyard stands the historic marker that announces IWA's beginnings as one of the city's — and the state's — important education landmarks. That's just one more example of how the old and new stand side by side at IWA, proving its ability to grow alongside the city it calls home.

When you talk to IWA students and alumnae, the concept of home is one that's heard frequently, although it's usually expressed with the word "sisterhood." Multi-generational families of women educated within the walls of "the 609" are not uncommon stories.

"Everyone at IWA knew everyone," said Dominique Bartholet, a 1994 graduate of the school who is now an attorney. "I never felt like I was a number there. You really become part of a family."

The school allowed her to thrive, she said, and she graduated as salutatorian with a scholarship to the University of Texas at Austin. But she chose to attend Trinity University, instead, which she felt was big enough, but still a small enough environment where she could find her way.

Last year, her oldest daughter Danielle, graduated IWA and now attends Emerson College, where she's pursuing her dream of being a writer. Bartholet's youngest daughter, Madeline, is currently at IWA; she'll graduate in 2027.

"They wear the same plaid skirt I did," she said of her daughters, and she likes the legacy of a shared experience.

"IWA really prepared me for college," said Danielle. "I learned how to advocate for myself and speak up for other girls. That's been super helpful in college, and I feel like I can approach my professors, and I am so prepared academically."

She's loved watching her sister go through her freshman year. The two have different likes, and that's made their IWA experiences different. Danielle was on the school newspaper and took part in theater at IWA and with St. Thomas High School. Madeline tried out for sports teams and has taken up modeling.

"But all three of us — my mom, my sister and I — have this connection through IWA," Danielle said. "We'll all have rings from the same high school. We have the same values and core surrounding us."

Over the course of the school's year-long anniversary, it hosted a series of events that mark the occasion, including the Red and White Gala, and a Blast through the Past open house showcasing documents, artifacts, and memorabilia from the last 150 years, including a statue of the Virgin Mary that was displayed when the school opened. And the "sesquicentennial seniors," who graduated on May 18, all wore stoles commemorating the anniversary.

That's surely something Mother Dillon would've been proud of, even if it wasn't something she could foresee. But the legacy she and those who came after have left behind is one that's important for the school and the city it serves.

"I think Houston is built on those renegades and those brave pioneers who were ready to go out there and change the world," Stephen said. "I'm humbled by the legacy of this school and very proud to carry that forward each year with a new group of freshmen."

Note: Printed with permission of the Texas Catholic Herald.



INCARNATE WORD ACADEMY

609 Crawford Street • Houston, Texas 77002-3668

Join Us for 2024-2025 IWA Admissions Events:

- Open School Day - September 3, 2024 | 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
- Open School Day - November 8, 2024 | 9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.
- Open House - November 17, 2024 | 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

For more details, additional events and RSVP, scan the QR code below or visit our website at www.incarnateword.org/admissions/visit-iwa.

