

The Dumb Ox

September 2024



From Student to Boss

By: Ashlin Knox

The former valedictorian and first recipient of all three Aquinas milestone awards has made a full circle back to where it all began. The new Head of School, Mr. Deschamps, enjoyed his time as a student so much so that he immediately began furthering his academic career at Franciscan, Duke, and Carnegie Mellon University. You can check out his several degrees hanging on his office walls.

Editors

Anne Dolan

Alice Rothfus

Publisher

Sam McGowan

Writers

Caitlyn Abbett

Madison Bradley

Brynn Burnsworth

Joe Chufo

Lucy Flynn

Jack Hoerster

Abigail Irvin

Ashlin Knox

Felicity Koble

Claire McMann

Katherine Repaskey

Alexa Risdon

Julianna Schemer

Laila Tuffiash

The faculty agree that Mr. Deschamps is qualified for this position. Señora said that she was “so excited it was him because he knows Aquinas in and out as a former student and faculty member.” “Look at all his MBAs, it’s impressive,” stated his former office buddy and co-high school director, Mr. Flynn. He also added that Mr. Deschamps “has what it takes to be the one, he is the one you need.” Sadly, they both miss sharing offices, but Mr. Deschamps enjoys “a separate space to meet with students, teachers, and visitors.”

This new change to the school was not fully a surprise to Mr. Deschamps; in fact, he was aware for the past couple of years that there was a possibility he could be the next head of school even with the interview and application process taking place last summer. Although many students will miss having Mrs. Mitros as principal, Senior Mary Osburg said “I’m glad that she’s been able to take a step back and teach more.” Although accepting the offer of principal was a serious decision, Mr. Deschamps says that “prayer through the discernment process as well as conversations with friends, family, colleagues, and especially Mrs. Mitros,” helped him decide to take on the new position.

Emotionally, he is doing “as well as expected,” but if he had a day off with no interruptions, he said he would spend it “hiking, paddle boarding, and grabbing a delicious meal with my wife!” Although he has summers off, he notes, “It went by in a flash, and when the students returned in August, it almost felt like they never left.” He adds that his best memory is definitely his honeymoon, saying, “My wife and I went to Cancun for a week, and it was beautiful and relaxing.”



Students are also curious about the secret bonuses that come from being head of school, such as arriving late with no consequences. However, Mr. Deschamps says the “secret bonuses” include “late night emails and texts, working long hours, and immense responsibility.” Even though those “bonuses” do not seem fun, they pay off in the years to come, in which he is looking forward to seeing the students grow and develop and the high school reach a capacity of 200 students. When asked if he ever thought he would one day become principal, he answers honestly. “By the time I graduated from Aquinas, I had thought I might one day come back for a period of time to teach, but certainly did not imagine being head of school.”

Getting to Know Mr. Blume

By: Alice Rothfus

Mr. Blume, one of the founders of Aquinas Academy, has joined the faculty. For the 2024-2025 school year, the senior year course selection added Constitutional Law, taught by none other than Mr. Blume himself.

From 1996 to 2024, Mr. Blume served as president of the Aquinas board. This past year he stepped down, but he is still a board member. He also went to a reduced role at his law firm where he had practiced full time for 43 years. As of now, Mr. Blume is president of the school, which is a position that many other Catholic high schools have. He has taken on this position in order to help with the transition of Mr. Deschamps becoming principal. In addition to being president, Mr. Blume oversees the business office, the facilities, enrollment, and fundraising.

On top of Mr. Blume's exciting transitions is his new role as an Aquinas teacher. He teaches Constitutional Law, which is a semester-long honors social studies course on the Constitution. When asked about his favorite part of teaching this class he said, "I love getting my students excited about their constitutional rights, especially their first amendment rights of free speech and freedom of religion, including on the college campuses where they'll be next year." The seniors enrolled in the course are enthusiastic about it. Constitutional law student Harold Tarr expressed, "The class is fun because he teaches you how to think like a lawyer." Grace Bond also

shared her appreciation of the class saying, "I like that we sit around in a circle and have a class dialogue."

Being one of the founders of the school, Mr. Blume feels much devotion toward Aquinas. In addition to sending all of his eight kids to the school, he now has four grandchildren who attend the school. Along with spending time with his family, in his free time he loves to go to Aquinas sporting events. He noted, "I have so many favorite things. Perhaps my favorite thing is seeing so many kids from the same family together at Aquinas and now seeing children of our alumni here. We have great students!" Mr. Blume is thrilled to be working as the president of Aquinas as well as teaching a high school course. If you happen to see Mr. Blume in the halls or pass by his office make sure to say hello.



From Basketballer to Byzantine

By: Claire McMann

New faculty member Mr. Andrew Kurzawski had a successful highschool sports career and then joined the seminary at St. Vincent College. With an undergraduate degree in philosophy and prelaw from St. John's University, a masters in theology from St. Vincent, and a masters in education from Point Park, he is more than qualified to teach 8th grade theology, 10th grade Old Testament and Ecclesiology, and Philosophy of Western Tradition.

In addition to his varying education degrees, Mr. K also spent several years as a clergy member of the church. He was a monk at St. Vincent and took his temporary vows for three years. However, he left before taking final vows in his last year of studies to become a Byzantine Catholic. He then joined the Holy Apostles Institute four year program to become an Eastern Catholic deacon.

On the sports side, Mr. K will also be the new girls' basketball coach and has already spent time coaching the team in their summer league games. While in seminary he had the opportunity to play in a charity game against the Steelers because their training camp is held at St. Vincent. During the game he got recruited to help coach both the men's and women's teams. Later in his career he also coached at Carlow University and Penn State Beaver.

Mr. K now runs sports training with Gym Rat Strength and Conditioning and will start preseason practices with the girls' basketball team in November. He states, "The last couple of years I have coached and worked in public schools, and it's definitely easy to take a place like Aquinas for granted. We go to a school where teachers legitimately care about you and want you to grow. We teach about virtues day in and day out, and it challenges students to grow in a spiritual life and shows tools you are going to utilize for lifelong beyond academics." If you see him in the hallways make sure to give a warm welcome to Mr. Kurzawski.



Mr. "Kuh-knee-guh"

By: Madison Bradley

Mr. Kuniega is one of the new teachers this year at Aquinas, teaching Latin and theology. Mr Kuniega has been teaching for four years, three of those years being at Greensburg Central Catholic and the other being at North Catholic. Previous to those years of teaching he went to St. Vincent College in Latrobe for his undergraduate degree and then three years of seminary in Nebraska. Mr. Kuniega chose to come to Aquinas because of "the focus on family, community and faith- daily Mass and the opportunity to teach Latin." He loves his experience here so far. "Great - just as expected, there are obviously lots of differences coming from a school with around 700 kids 9th-12th grade to here, but everyone has been extremely welcoming so far. I am very glad I took the job here," Mr. Kuniega states. The students are also glad he became a part of our staff. "It was great getting to



know him on the retreat," said senior Ari Buchanan. Grace Mlecko, a freshman, remarked, "Mr. K is a really fun teacher and makes me enjoy religion class." He not only likes to teach but also loves to cook. His favorite foods to cook/eat are Indian dishes. He also enjoys numerous other activities such as backpacking, mountain climbing, skiing and international travel. At one of his previous schools he actually ran the ski club. Mr. Kuniega is very friendly and a great addition to Aquinas. He says if you want to go talk to him to borrow a research book or a spiritual reading he encourages you to. You can visit him in his office in the basement which he shares with Mr. Meland and he will help you out to find a book. Welcome to Aquinas Academy, Mr. Kuniega!

Set for Success

The Aquinas volleyball team is fairly new but has increased in its size rapidly over the past three years. It started as just a club during Crusader period and has now officially joined the WPIAL. According to what the team has been saying, it looks like this season is going to be very successful and is going to show people what Aquinas can really do.

Giada Buzzelli, a sophomore and new player to the sport, spoke about how positive and helpful the team is and looks forward to a good season. Violet Johnson, a senior and captain on the team, said, "We have a very talented group of girls," and that she is very ready for a great season in the WPIAL. The team dynamic is like a family, and there are a lot of freshmen who are joining that can continue to improve the team and the program.

Violet said the coaches, Mrs. Chufo and Mrs. J, are very supportive, helpful, and all around amazing coaches. They make the environment great for the girls and are always there to provide their knowledge if needed. This season, the Aquinas volleyball team will establish themselves and demonstrate their true capabilities.



Swinging For Victory

By: Alexa Risdon



The golf team at Aquinas has been around for nearly ten years. Players are having fun and enjoying their time on the team even with the losses they have faced. Senior David Zaharko said, "Despite the tough season, we're going to make a great stride in the second half with sectionals and individuals coming up." The new coach Mr. Peter Haw has been welcomed as a great new coach.

Zach Yohe, a freshman, said, "I've had a lot of fun during the season. I appreciate that the students involved are very nice." Another freshman, Brooks Trischler, has learned many new skills such as his swing. "I am getting better after every match with the help of my coaches and teammates, and the season is going well," Brooks shared. Especially since he's new to Aquinas, Brooks loves the inclusive atmosphere of his teammates and how welcoming they are. The opening half of the Aquinas golf season has not been easy, but the team is working to improve and pull through for the end of the season.

Girls Tennis: Unite In Faith!

This small tennis team has shown their closeness in their spiritual life resulting in a powerful and moving team dynamic. Their great community and team chemistry have helped provide them with 3 wins and 2 losses. Senior Alice Rothfus states, "We are united in faith." They show this by praying together before each match to the patron saint of tennis, St Sebastian. They do have a smaller team but it has enhanced them to become closer and more tightly knit. Allie Swift, a freshman says, "It's great and very together in the community. I love it!"

This small but mighty team containing 10 players is led by coach Bill Money who will undoubtedly lead this team to many successes this year. Maggie McBride describes the team as a "great community, fun, and enthusiastic!" Ava Lesnefsky acknowledges that their team dynamic is very connected. Everyone is encouraging and does their best. She also states, "On the team there is a variety of skills where people have been playing for years or some people started playing tennis when they joined but we have an amazing coach who helps everyone improve their talents and skills." Meghan McGee also adds "It will grow in popularity and skill with time. The team holds promise for future aspirations for succeeding." Their team unity and faith in God has made them stronger throughout the season. Their team perseverance and determination resulted in an amazing win against Hopewell with a score of 5-0. There are high hopes for the team as it



grows in popularity and skill. They feel as though they will have a most promising season this year and for many more years to come.

Boys Soccer: The Apex Predator of AQ!

The boys' soccer team feels emphatic that they have the opportunity to at least win the section, if not more. Both captains Will Scioscia and Jacob Guillen feel confident in the team's work ethic as well as resolve to do well. Will Scioscia says that they "can at least win the section." Jacob Guillen, the goalie,

says "The team looked shaky and unsure at first because of losing the amount of valuable seniors, but we've got our footing now." Both captains admire that their team has put so much effort on and off the field.

The players on the team possess many qualities such as camaraderie and



determination. They feel proud of their accomplishments such as their win against Serra Catholic where they played an outstanding game winning in a shutout of 4-0, led in scoring by Marco Anselmino

and his brother Enzo along with Gio Spotts. There are many new additions to the team of 25 players. The new freshman Michael Richthammer felt that the transition from middle to high school soccer was quite easy and "the only difference was the physical aspect that involved you to step up your game."

Many new players are older players' younger brothers. This helps provide a stronger sense of family and brotherhood. Jonah Burchill, a starting defender, believes, "The team is at its strongest when we stick to the plays and execute them properly and efficiently." Jonah has also shown his strengths at closing down shots and distributing the ball well with the help of Guillen. Together they provide a lockdown defensive coordination that leaves many teams fumbling. This diligent team is led by Coach Anselmino and Coach Archer. So far with only one loss under their belt this team shows promise for winning the section and perhaps even more.

By: Lucy Flynn

Chasing After the Win

By: Lucy Flynn

The high school cross country team started in 2018. In the past the team was so small it had to be a co-op with Vincentian. The previous coach of two years, Nick Wolk, led a few students to multiple WPIAL and state races. The new coach this year, Coach Grese, has been a great addition to the team and has benefitted the team in many ways. Owen McKernan, a junior runner, said, "This season has been good and really fun. We have evolved very well as a team and we just talk and have fun." A fellow team member, Caitlyn Abbett, also spoke about the new coach, saying "He's very organized, and he's well liked by the team." She also added that "Practices are fun, tough, and organized well and I love the team this year...and being the smallest sports team gives us that connection and bond that not many other ones have." With all the practicing and bonding, the Aquinas cross country team is very ready for the WPIAL championship, and some runners will even have a chance at running at states.



Girls' Soccer Success

The Aquinas Academy girls' soccer team has started their season with impressive performances, securing big victories in their opening games so far. The team showcased their skills with a 7-1 win against Serra Catholic. Tess Duer stated that "The team really looked great at the game! It was a great opportunity to showcase our skills and definitely made us more confident!"

Continuing their winning streak, the girls triumphed over South Allegheny with goals from Eliana BouSamra and Elliot Keverline. These early victories have clearly set a positive tone for the season, highlighting the team's offensive performance and solid teamwork.

This year's captains, seniors Eliana BouSamra and Ari Buchanan, are providing strong leadership both on and off the field. Their experience and dedication are assets to the team and will help navigate the the season.

Coaches Buchanan and Stalder have returned to guide the team once again. Their consistent coaching through the years and strategic insights have been key in the team's early success.

With their eyes set on the playoffs, the girls are excited to see what they can achieve this year. Ari Buchanan worded this perfectly saying "The early victories have boosted our confidence for sure! We are eager to continue our strong performances throughout the season. The team is motivated and ready to take on any challenges that come our way, aiming for a successful run in the playoffs!"



By: Katherine Repasky



they are focused on refining the team's strategies and fostering a strong, cohesive group of players.

With the girls' strong start, the team is determined to make it to the WPIAL finals again this year. Captain Anne Dolan said "The team is motivated and driven! We are ready to put all of our previous experiences and hard work into this season with a clear goal in mind: to win the championship!" The team's hard work, dedication, and team spirit are evident and they are ready to take on this season's challenges.

Field Hockey Stars

The Aquinas Academy girls' field hockey team has kicked off their season with impressive victories, setting a promising tone for the year ahead. In their first section game, they secured a 2-0 win against Shadyside, a team they narrowly lost to in double overtime during last season's WPIAL section finals, creating a section upset.

Building on this momentum, the girls claimed another victory against the formidable Oakland Catholic team, winning 2-1, and now stand as the section leaders!

The team is composed mainly of sophomore players, with only six upperclassmen. However, these six are great for providing leadership and experience. This year's captains are senior Anne Dolan, junior Francesca Hite, and Alice Dingle, the latter of whom is notably serving as a sophomore captain.

This year, Albert Casas stepped up from his previous role as assistant coach to head coach. Coach Casas brings a fresh perspective and renewed energy to the team, aiming to build on last year's successes. Assisting him is Stephanie Van Ingen, whose continued support and extended experience have already proved to be a great asset to the team's skill level. Together,

Perks of Being a Workaholic

By: Jack Hoerster

Some high school students at Aquinas Academy will often decide that they will manage both school work and maintaining a job during the already busy school year. Having a job will naturally have its pros and cons. Students will work to secure a lovely paycheck while also acquiring some work experience. However, this comes with the difficulty of having to find balance between work and school.

Junior Elliot Keverline said that it was possible to work during the school year due to having such flexible hours and being able to take off work for extracurriculars and travel. She spoke about how she enjoyed having a job because of her coworkers and manager. Most importantly, she said to “always put your school work first, be communicative with your managers, and don’t overwork yourself because we have our whole lives to work.”

Thomas Spiller, a senior, has a similar, yet slightly different outlook on holding a job during the school year. When asked, he said that balancing work and school was difficult, especially due to his AP classes, but he managed to complete his homework by consistently using his study halls, free

periods, and the occasional Mass study hall.

Similarly to Elliot Keverline, Thomas said “You have to be able to look at how you’re managing work at school, and you shouldn’t sacrifice school for work.” While this is difficult to do, Thomas managed to both excel in school while also managing work after the school day was over. When he was asked about whether students should work over the summer and into the school year, he stated that you should do it for the experience if you can handle it. Naturally, the main issue with having a job and going to school is time management.

In short, maintaining a job and succeeding in school is a delicate balancing act which relies entirely on your ability to manage your time well. This is not to discourage anyone from obtaining a job, but is merely to openly state the benefits and downsides. Having a job can lead to opportunities to network yourself with potential employers and will give you that starting paycheck for later down the road. However, it would be wise to avoid sacrificing schoolwork and good grades for money. We have our whole lives to work; why not just live in the moment?

A Taste of Summer

By: Abigail Irvin



From June 6th to August 26th, the Aquinas community enjoyed a summer break full of relaxation and fun after a long school year. High school students kept themselves busy with a variety of activities including beach vacations, summer camps, sports, retreats, and even college classes. Savannah Deschamps, a junior, had a particularly eventful summer, competing in the World Ninja League Championships in Greensboro, North Carolina, where she placed 12th overall. Savannah remarked that “The most fun part of the championships was being able to coach my younger teammates; it was very rewarding to see them do well!” In addition to ninja, Savannah competed in two obstacle course races. Her first was in Savage Rave, Ohio, and she placed 1st for her age group, and 2nd for women. In August, she also placed 1st in her age group and 4th overall at Savage Race, Pennsylvania. When not doing Ninja and OCR, she went to the Poconos and Great Wolf Lodge with her family.

Sophomore Aurora Predis went to the Steubenville Retreat and Catholic Youth Summer Camp. At Steubenville, she “enjoyed spending the weekend with my friends and learning more about my faith.” CYSC was the best part of her summer. Aurora loved forming new friendships, but the best part was growing in her faith. She recounted that “[She] had so much fun during that week and one of [her] favorite things was watching how God moved through the room at Adoration. It is so powerful and life changing.”

Students were not the only ones to have fun summer plans; teachers also enjoyed a great summer break. Mr. Volkwein had a relaxing summer full of playing golf and reading books. One of his favorite summer memories was a golf match he played against Mr. Salinas, Mr. Dechamps, and Mr. Gracy. Mr. Salinas was the victor of the match. Mr. Volkwein also caught up on two book series and, of course, enjoyed time with his cats. Señora spent her break with her family. She went to Bethany, Cape May,

and Wildwood beaches. One of her favorite parts was going on morning beach walks and looking for sea creatures with her kids. One of Señora’s memorable parts of the summer was having a tea party with her children. They wore fun hats, drank iced tea, and did summer reading under their favorite oak tree in their yard.

No matter what each member of the Aquinas family did over the summer, the break was full of great activities, friendship, family, and rest.

A New Tradition

By: Joseph Chufo

A new trend has taken over highschools around the country. When looking at any high school parking lot, it is now common to see fun and colorful parking spots painted by seniors of the schools. The class of 2025 decided to take action this year and talked to administration about allowing Aquinas Academy to take part in this fun activity.

Senior fine arts prefect Brynn Burnsworth is primarily responsible for organizing the spot painting. Brynn advocated in her prefect campaign to try and make this a reality. She remarked, "I thought that it would be a great opportunity for students to come together and express themselves through art. The experience of painting the spots was a great time and everyone put a lot of hard work into it." The second person to thank for this new tradition is Mr. Deschamps. When asked about the process of approving the activity, Mr. Deschamps said, "When Brynn presented the idea, I was initially skeptical, largely worried about the potential damage to the lot. I allowed it after discovering that many schools allow this as a privilege for seniors and after Brynn completed some research regarding its effects on the asphalt. I hope that the seniors had a great time painting the spots and experiencing some excitement and joy every morning as they arrive on campus. I suspect others who have ventured back to that lot also enjoy the beautiful work the seniors have done!"

Design of the parking spots range from simple images and symbols to elaborate scenes of landscapes, starry nights, and tropical locations. Students have creative control over their personal spots. Underclassmen also will benefit from this young activity. "I expect it to continue, as long as the students continue to exercise the privilege well," says Mr. Deschamps. If everything goes to plan, senior students should be able to participate and enjoy this artistic and creative tradition for

years to come. If you have not yet, remind yourself to walk up to the senior lot and take a look at our school's new addition. Maybe you will find some inspiration for your painted parking spot in the future.



Hellos and Goodbyes

By Brynn Burnsworth



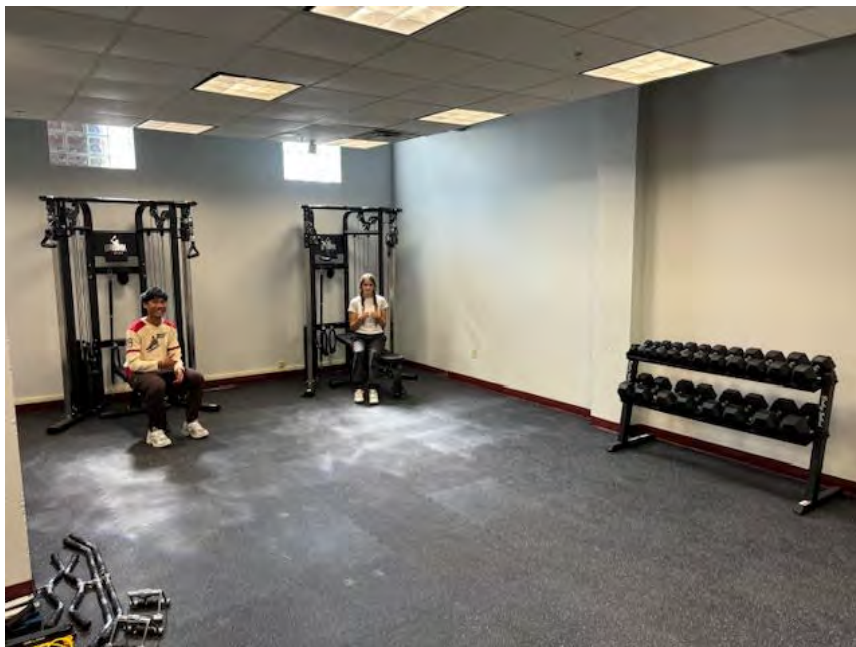
Over the summer workers have been laboring hard in the old middle school building to bring the Fine Arts Wing to life. The bathrooms are being gutted, the lockers have been replaced with a storage area, and sinks have been installed in the new art rooms. Yet the most notable change is the renovation of the old science lab. All the lab tables have been removed, and new floors have been put in. All of this work is to make room for the Arts. Mr. B and Ms. Fetchko have moved into rooms 303 and 304 to teach their art classes, room 305 has become a storage area, and room 301 is anticipated to become a weight room filled with pull up bars, dumbbells, and a bench press. Finally, room 302 will continue to be the band room.

Moving the art rooms across buildings proved to be a challenging task. Ms. Fetchko shared, "We had to find rooms to store everything while the old art rooms were being converted into science rooms, and the new art rooms still weren't ready yet. However, Mr. Burchill and Mr. B were able to get students to volunteer to move

stuff a couple times over the summer which was super helpful!" She and Mr. B really love the new space as it is much more open with higher ceilings and natural light. The two also appreciate the huge storage room for art materials. Mr. B states, "The new art spaces are fantastic! Ms. Fetchko has twice as much space as before." Ms. Fetchko joked that "trying to organize it is going to take some time!"

Mr. B and Ms. Fetchko are excited to start ceramics now that they have kilns. "It will be fun to make some pottery with slab and coil building techniques," said Ms. Fetchko. Mr. B is especially enthusiastic about the fact that his room has access to the outdoors, as it makes it easier for students to do things such as spray paint. He added, "We're super grateful to have these great news spaces!" The only downside is that they miss being close to the senior lounge and close to the faculty members that have offices and classrooms in the lower level of the high school.

While the renovation is exciting, it leaves old students and teachers feeling nostalgic. Mr. Salinas, who spent his entire career as head of the Middle School in that building, watched it become unrecognizable. Seniors walk through its halls trying to remember the way it looked for them all those years ago. The beloved Latin, English, math, and history rooms and science lab have become mere shells of what the students used to know. Senior Claire McMann, who spent all three years of middle school in that building, said "I love the fine arts wing, but I honestly miss walking past my old lockers, going into the rooms to reminisce, and seeing current middle schoolers having fun in the space I did too." Most seniors will still refer to the building as the "old middle school," in hopes to try to hold on to a large portion of their younger years.



Jumonville

By: Caitlyn Abbett



To kick off the start of the school year, the Aquinas high school students set out on an overnight spiritual retreat to Jumonville, PA. The students participated in numerous activities, including color team games, rock climbing, archery, hiking, and gaga ball. They were able to spend time with God in small groups discussing this year's theme, "Aquinas Pride," and listen to seniors and teachers talk about their spiritual lives. Father Bob provided the opportunity for late night and early morning Mass and confession.

New freshman talked about how much fun their first retreat was. Morgan Long said, "The retreat really helped me get to know the girls in my class. We didn't have to worry about schoolwork and just enjoyed getting to know each other!" Other students who had attended the retreat before also remarked how much they enjoyed the experience. J.J. Ortiz, head prefect, remarked, "I really enjoyed walking around with my camera during free time and meals. It allowed me to capture amazing memories and connect with the whole student body! I also loved seeing all the students enjoy time with the Lord during adoration and connect with each other at the campfire."

A majority of the students discussed their favorite parts of the retreat. Tess Austin, a sophomore, exclaimed, "My favorite part of the retreat was the late night Mass and Adoration with confession under the stars. It was a really beautiful experience." Lucy Flynn, a junior, enjoyed hanging out with her friends, new and current. "I really liked getting to know a bunch of new people, both freshman and upperclassmen! It was a great way to make new friends and I felt a really good sense of community." Others enjoyed free time, where they could engage in a variety of activities such as nine square, basketball, tennis, football, soccer, gagaball, and just walking around with friends. Mrs. Kaffenets, who chaperoned the retreat and joined the students in gaga ball, loved learning how to play the game and laughed as the students protected her from getting out. The high school students and faculty had a very memorable time at Jumonville this year. The trip was a great way to start off the 2024-2025 school year by having fun and connecting with our Aquinas community.

An Eventful Start to the Year

By Laila Tuffiash



When high school students at Aquinas want to get to know each other better, enjoy time with friends, and participate in a fun activity, they do not have to look much further than the organized prefect events. These monthly events consist of different activities such as sports, movies, prayer, arts and crafts, and more. "As prefects, one of our main goals is to unite the whole student body, and one of the ways we do this is through our events," said head prefect, senior J.J. Ortiz.

On August 23rd high school students had the opportunity to transition from the summer to the school year through a back to school intramural on Dolan Field. Students played volleyball as well as a variety of other yard games. They got to catch up with each other as they enjoyed s'mores by the campfire.

On September 7th students participated in the Color War, a classic Aquinas event where members of each of the four color teams run after

each other with chalk in the color of their team. "Color War was so much fun," says junior Caitlyn Abbett, "I loved how they gave us enough chalk for three whole rounds, and how everyone was comfortable going after each other whether they knew each other or not. I also liked that there were snacks at the event this year."

Both the back to school intramural and Color War were a blast for students, and the prefects are very happy with how the events turned out and how they are benefiting the student body. "The last two events were fantastic, and we had very high attendance for both. I love seeing everyone at the events while they enjoy spending time with each other and participating in the activities!" said activities prefect, junior Francesca Hite. "These events are what make Aquinas unique, and I love seeing everyone at them," stated J.J. Ortiz.

These events are only the beginning of a year full of fun activities planned by Francesca, J.J., and the rest of the prefect board. "In the future, we are planning to have more intramurals as well as adding fine arts nights and youth group-like faith nights," J.J. shared. "The next biggest event coming up is our homecoming dance on October 13th," added Francesca. "It will be a lot of fun especially since it is off-campus this year at the Richland Barn!" Whether you've gone to the past prefect events or not, consider attending a few in the future; you will not be disappointed.



Labors of Life: How Aquinas Students Made a Difference at Genesis This Summer

By: Felicity Koble

This summer, Aquinas students spent two-hour periods on various Tuesdays serving at Genesis of Pittsburgh as part of Vivat Vita's pro-life service initiative. Students sorted baby clothing and other donations and organized storage spaces to help the agency better assist its clients.

Genesis began in 1973 as a hotline for people with crisis pregnancies and has since grown into a shelter, adoption agency, and educational facility. Clients can find counselors, receive shelter, take classes, or place their children up for adoption. This makes it a very pro-life agency. In choosing Genesis to serve this summer, Vivat Vita co-president Savannah Deschamps commented, "Genesis has always been close to my heart because my family adopted my sister Josie through it, and I wanted to find a way to give back."

Obviously providing resources for so many people

requires a high level of organization. When volunteers walked into the Genesis Adoption Center for the first time in late June, the place was packed wall to wall with donations: car seats, bassinets, play pens, clothes, and diapers. In just two hours, the Aquinas volunteers cleared the entire space. "I chose to participate in Vivat Vita volunteer days because the impact we have on others is so tangible," senior Clara Yuo explained. She noted, "Genesis receives a lot of donations, so by sorting clothes into their proper bins, we made the process of selecting clothes much easier for those who utilize Genesis' services." This is only one of the ways our volunteers made a difference in serving Genesis. Most other service dates were devoted to sorting baby clothes or assembling backpacks with school supplies for kids of struggling families.

While helping Genesis with their projects, volunteers learned a lot about working in a pro-life agency and had a lot of fun. They helped clients find what they needed and learned about the various struggles of people facing a crisis pregnancy or a difficult financial situation. They even decoded the strange European clothes sizing chart, examined the various baby apparel trends of the early 2000's, and visited with each other. "One of my favorite aspects of the volunteer days was having the chance to catch up with some friends I hadn't seen for a bit, as we did impactful service work at the same time," Clara Yuo continued. Genesis volunteers reached across multiple high school grade levels and provided a chance for students of all ages to connect.



Vivat Vita's work did not end with the summer. The club has been working on bringing back a number of much-loved Aquinas traditions while also instituting a few more service projects as well. Aquinas students participated in the annual PA March for Life on September 23rd. Stay tuned for the Baby Bottle Drive in October, Art for Life in November, and more service opportunities in December. If you're a new student and unfamiliar with these events, come visit a Vivat Vita club meeting, so you can make an impact in a world that has forsaken the right to live.

The Switch to Veracross

At the end of the 2023-2024 school year, it was announced that Aquinas would be leaving Backpack for a new software company called Veracross. Heading into the 2024-2025 school year, head of school, Mr. Deschamps confirmed that Veracross would be replacing Backpack in the summer letter. Aquinas students were uncertain, yet excited about this switch. Backpack came with lots of challenges, as it was an old system. Math teacher Mr. Volkwein stated, "I feel like the Backpack had a lot of quirks that were sometimes difficult to navigate and Veracross, though it seems scary at first since it's new, is actually going to be a pretty positive change." When students were asked about their preference between Backpack and Veracross, the answers were mixed. Some students did not have a preference for either system, and others did not like Backpack at all. Freshman Grace Mlecko said, "I haven't been on it much, but I don't really have a preference. I think I like Backpack a little bit

By Jules Shemer

better because it was easier for me to manage, but I guess I'll have to experience with Veracross more and see its potential." Rocco Fischer gave his opinion, stating, "Honestly, it's about the same.

It's pretty easy to navigate both of them. They function nearly the same in my opinion, so it's not really that big of a change."

Other students had brutally honest answers to express how much they disliked Backpack. Senior Maddy Bradley stated, "I think it's new, but it's better than the Backpack." Mr. Deschamps also gave his opinion on the topic.

"I think it will be great in the long term but any change like this is difficult. It's definitely a positive switch and will make the lives of athletes, students, and parents better than what we were experiencing in Backpack. The transition to the new system is always very

time consuming and difficult at

times." Though the switch to Veracross was a new change for Aquinas Academy, students and faculty will surely adapt to the new software.



Snips & Quips

"No physical manifestation of cheese fully exhausts all of cheeseness itself."

-Mrs. Meland

(talking about Greek tragedies) "So this is just fanfic for the Trojan war?"

-Clara Yuo

(while running a 5K) "The pizza was a mistake."

-Charlie McSorley

"I'm having a hard time putting Trump and Socrates on the same podium."

-Mrs. Meland

"If I drop an atomic bomb on my parents, they'd have to give me the cookie."

-Sam Duer

(while teaching Econ) "You're giving me flash-backs from when I used to work at a prison."

-Mr. Malchano

"I'm going to write on his college letter: 'Nolan gets mad when he doesn't know the answer.'"

-Mrs. Manolache

(Waiting to cross the border) "If they ask if you have anything to declare, what do we say?"

-Mr. Dolan

"War."

-Lara Hanian

"I prefer not to base my identity off of what Buzzfeed says is my inner vegetable."

-Felicity Koble

(While everyone else is getting texts from crossing the border) "Even Canada doesn't want to talk to me."

-Jack Hoerster

"Back to the cheese..."

-J.J.

Writers Favorites: Favorite Seasonal Drink

Abigail: Pumpkin roll latte

Anne: Peppermint mocha

Alexa: Apple crisp macchiato

Alice: Sprite cranberry

Ashlin: Cold water

Brynn: Iced pumpkin cream chai

Caitlyn: Apple cider

Claire: Dunkin' chai

Felicity: Homemade apple cider

Jack: Water

Joe: Pumpkin cream chai

Jules: White mocha latte

Katherine: Apple cider

Laila: Iced pumpkin chai

Lucy F: Pumpkin spice latte

Maddy: Hot chocolate

Sam: Apple cider

"Naw, bruh."

-Mr. Meland

Please send articles, ideas, corrections, or Snips and Quips to: thedumbbox@aquinasacademy-pittsburgh.org

Aquinas Academy

2308 West Hardies Road

Gibsonia, PA 15044



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