30 YEARS+ Fr. Leon talks about NDP's first 30 years and what's to come in the next 30 FALL/WINTER ISSUE 34

IRISH

MAGAZINE

Dedicated to alumni, parents and friends of Notre Dame Preparatory School and our heritage schools, including Notre Dame High School, Pontiac Catholic High School, Oakland Catholic High School, St. Michael High School and St. Frederick High School.

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MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL



30 YEAR ANNIVERSARY REFLECTION

As we celebrate our 30th anniversary, I am proud to have been here for 20 of those 30 years. As an alumnus of Notre Dame High School, I never dreamed that I would come back and work for the school, yet alone make this my home for the rest of my life.

I feel gratitude to the Marists that impacted me as a student at Notre

Dame, including Frs. John Bryson, Ray Coolong, Leon Olszamowski, Joe Hindelang, Juan Gonzalez, Jim Strasz, Gerry Demers, John Sajdak, Ron DesRosiers, Ray Ouellette, and Br. Louis. Over the years, I have also had the pleasure of meeting Frs. Bob Champagne, Bob Graham, Br. Leonard and John Kiselica, who were all instrumental in their respective eras at the school.

I was also heavily influenced by great teachers at NDHS including Conrad Vachon, Hal Rice, Norm Kotarski and Ken Parent, the latter three whom I had the privilege to work with as adults. I have seen firsthand the impact of great teachers at NDP, such as Dave Osiecki, Beverly Williams, Sandy LewAllen, Sylvia Mulrenin, Donna Kotzan and many more.

It's heartwarming to know that students today are getting the same great role models at NDP that we had at NDHS and other legacy schools such



as St. Frederick, St. Michael, Pontiac Catholic and Oakland Catholic. Without the commitment and support of all these great schools, we would not be where we are today. Thank you!

I inherited a picture of the school from Fr. Leon that hangs in my office. It is a picture of the campus in 1994. It is almost unrecognizable from the school today. Over the past 30 years, we have added three academic wings, including the Timothy Easterwood Science, Arts, and Technology wing, the Melissa Kozyra Botany Center, the Mary Courtyard, the Grimaldi Athletic Center, the Beverly Gifford Music Center, Kozyra Alumni Field, six tennis courts, turf baseball and softball diamonds, the Betty Wroubel Athletic Center, and built a lower school across the street on the corner of Giddings and Walton. This is due to the benefaction of alumni, parents and friends who believe that Catholic education remains more important today than ever in a mixed-up world where traditional Judeo-Christian values are often dismissed or take a back seat to popular secularism.

In 2013, we purchased all the property and grounds from the Archdiocese of Detroit and incorporated the school as an independent Michigan-based educational nonprofit 501(c)3 corporation. As such, we receive no financial support from the government or the AOD and depend solely on tuition revenue and donations to keep the school strong and healthy.

I remember our first MHSAA State Championship in 2006. It was girls ski, and we were very excited. It took more than 10 years to reach that pinnacle of success, and the students were awarded a day off from school to celebrate. Since that time, we have won 18 MHSAA state championships, 15 MHSAA runner-up state championships, and crowned 23 individual MHSAA state champions, including our most recent MHSAA state championships this past fall in boys soccer and football. What a great time to be Irish!

Equally important to the student experience is the plethora of extra and co-curricular programs, such as our award-winning robotics teams, top-notch musical productions, premier band, choir and visual arts programs, innovative science and engineering and empathy class, fully operational greenhouse, a thriving spiritual life, and dozens of different clubs for student to grow, learn and have fun.

We are the only Catholic school in the City of Pontiac and draw students from 48 different zip codes within a 30-mile radius of the school. We are the first Catholic school in the nation and the only Catholic school in Michigan to offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at all three divisions (lower, middle and upper).

We have an A+ ranking on Niche and are perennially listed as one of the top Catholic and private schools in Michigan. Our lower school is an Apple Distinguished School and our middle and upper schools are Microsoft Showcase Schools.

Despite these successes, the school still needs support. We lack some of the facilities to cover the depth and breadth of our academic, spiritual and athletic offerings. We also lack a true endowment that could protect the school from financial downturns, bolster teacher pay and increase scholarships for families in need. These are priorities for the institution in the coming years. We must do everything we can today to secure a strong future for the students of tomorrow.

I am proud of how far the school has come these past 30 years and confident that with help from our alumni, parents and friends, we can build an even better school for the future.

In Mary's name,

Andrew J. Guest ND'84

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Head of School

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ON THE COVER

Artist and author Joe Borri ND'80 (Motor City Joe) painted an original portrait of Fr. Leon Olszamowski, s.m. ND'65, whose interview begins on page 6.



Fr. Leon talks about NDP's first



and what's to come in the next



(Right) Alum, artist and author Joe Borri ND'80 painted this original portrait of Fr. Leon Olszamowski, s.m., who was principal when Borri attended Notre Dame High School.



In 1994, Fr. Leon Olszamowski, s.m., and his Marist colleagues began a journey of academic excellence that transcended normal boundaries of private Catholic education. Since then Notre Dame Prep has continued to reach higher and higher standards that define a school like no other — truly a masterpiece of education.

n Aug. 28, 1994, Notre Dame Preparatory School began its first year with a meeting of teachers, administrators and staff around four small tables in the library of the former Oakland Catholic High School building. The meeting included 18 staff members and consisted of veteran teachers from three of Notre Dame's heritage schools: Harper Woods Notre Dame, Pontiac Catholic High School and Oakland Catholic High School. The meeting was facilitated by Russell Surveyer, a social psychologist from Boston, Mass.

Drawing on a mission conceived by Society of Mary founder Fr. Jean-Claude Colin in 1829 and the experience of graduating from and later teaching at Notre Dame High School, Marist Fathers Leon Olszamowski, Jim Strasz and Joe Hindelang formulated a vision: Notre Dame Preparatory School would be "the school of choice in Oakland County."

The following day, on Aug. 29, faculty and staff welcomed 183 students to a new school in the refurbished Oakland Catholic building. It was also on that day that students heard for the first time the defining phrase of the mission of the new school: "With God, we form Christian people, upright citizens and academic scholars."

Notre Dame Preparatory School has come very far in a relatively short 30-year timespan with a solid foundation rooted in faith, community service and academics.

And the next 30 years promise to be just as exciting.

So says Olszamowski, who, as corporate president, remains very active at the school he helped found in 1994. IRISH Magazine sat down with him in late September to discuss the school's first 30 years as well as the next 30. The following interview was edited for clarity and space.

IRISH MAGAZINE: Father, the campus and student programs have grown significantly since 1994. In your opinion, what are the major milestones accomplished over the past 30 years?

FR. LEON OLSZAMOWSKI, S.M.: Well, I think one of the major accomplishments over that time was actually succeeding in putting the Marist philosophy into a school that was not Marist. That philosophy called people to be, as you know, Christian people, upright citizens and academic scholars.

Another one of the major milestones for me occurred at the end of the first year of the school. When we took the property over after Oakland Catholic closed, I remember giving NDP about a 50-50 shot of making it. And at the end of the first year, we ran into some financial difficulties, including the fact that it appeared we were going to run a \$30,000 deficit that year, and the diocese, which had ownership of the school at that time, threatened to close the school. They wanted a clean balance sheet, obviously, but Father

Joe talked with the Archbishop and we got another year, after which we ended up running a \$60,000 surplus. So then they kind of backed off and let us manage the school as we saw fit.

Plus, given the fact that we had 101 new freshmen coming into the school, it was becoming more evident that we in fact were going to make it. So we shifted from a survival mode into a growth mode.

I think the next milestone that helped the school was in the area of faculty. Originally, we had eight really good teachers on hand from Oakland Catholic. Then eight teachers from Harper Woods Notre Dame decided to join us. Related to faculty, another key milestone for us was that we addressed an obvious inequity problem with male versus female teachers. In that

first year, our women teachers on average made \$6,000 less per year than the men did. I remember thinking back then that I didn't want to touch that issue with a 10-foot pole. But I suggested instead that we form a faculty committee to address it — how to make this equitable in the school. So what the committee actually brought back to me was shocking, at first — but a good recommendation, nonetheless. On average, the next year, the women got a \$6,000 raise and the men got a \$300 raise. That was a big turning point, staff-wise, because it created a sense of equity and better morale among the faculty. They really understood what was going

on, and faculty and staff kind of bonded really well from that point forward.

The other thing that really helped us back then besides an excellent staff and a sizable freshmen class was the merging of new students with students who remained from Oakland Catholic, which basically would have been sophomores, juniors



and seniors. The problem there was basically that when it came to academics, the incoming freshmen were at a higher level than many of the remaining Oakland Catholic kids.

Essentially, we had to run two separate program tracks, one for the freshmen and one for the other three classes. These things were all happening behind the scenes, by the way, but eventually everything worked out.

As an example of what we were facing, after our first school year, our valedictorian had a 3.20 grade point average and the average ACT back then was around 19. For comparison, our last NDP

"I've always said that there is a difference

graduating class featured valedictorians with GPAs ranging from about 4.35 and 4.60 and the Class of 2024 averaged 26.1 on the ACT.

Eventually NDP had four classes of students we brought in ourselves and parents began to see that we had a real, genuine program going on here and more from the feeder schools in the area began to send their kids as well. Another factor that really helped us survive during those early years was that **OLSZAMOWSKI:** Yes, after the initial improvements in 1994 we did major capital work in 1998, one of the parents came up to me and said, "My God, this is beautiful what you've done here. What are you trying to look like? Cranbrook?" I just smiled. Also, in the beginning, some prospective families would say, "You expect us to go into Pontiac?" After a while that turned into, "Oh, it's only a few miles from us in Pontiac."

> So yes, a little long-winded answer to your question, but basically these were some of the practical things that were being done on the ground, as well as the attitudinal changes that were going on at the same time. We also received a lot of support in the early days from many of the local parish pastors, which was a big help.

In fact, to this day, I won't mention the name of the person, but someone from the Detroit archdiocese once told me that Notre Dame Prep is looked on as the best of the Catholic schools in the diocese. And that is because we have a strong religion program and the fact we were offering things that other

schools didn't offer, including the addition of the International Baccalaureate program. The addition of IB was huge and continues to pay dividends for us.

IRISH: Especially since we are the only Catholic school in Michigan with IB for students aged 3 to 19, correct?

OLSZAMOWSKI: Correct, and even though some students don't go into the Diploma Program in their junior and senior years, they can still benefit from IB by taking IB classes a la carte, so to speak. And as freshmen and sophomores, they've already







other Catholic high schools in the area and even the public schools didn't pay much attention to us, thinking that we were not really competition for them. It gave us a chance to really explode our student population since we were in fact delivering what we promised.

IRISH: You also were making capital improvements as well during that time, right?

(Above) Notre Dame Prep is the only Catholic school in Michigan and one of only two nationwide to offer all three levels of the International Baccalaureate program.

between 'knowing' faith and 'doing' faith."

had the benefit of the Middle Years Program, Plus, if they've been through our lower and middle schools, they've received the considerable benefits of the complete continuum of the International Baccalaureate.

IRISH: What about the decision to acquire ownership of the school from the archdiocese?

OLSZAMOWSKI: Yes, I think that was an important milestone when we bought the campus in its entirety from the Archdiocese of Detroit in 2014 and turned ownership over to our Board of Trustees. The trustees now are the actual owners of the school. They are in control of both the debt and the assets. Speaking of which, another big milestone that was achieved rather recently is related to our quest to come to a one-to-one ratio between the debt we had and the excess cash and investments that we had on the other side of the ledger. So, that's something we've also struggled with, particularly in the last few years. But under the leadership of Andy Guest, our head of school, Tony Block, our CFO, and board chair Steve Pangori, we now operate with a balanced budget and building small reserves. So we're actually not just one-to-one, we're heading toward two-to-one in favor of assets now. That's a major milestone and provides for a rather stable picture for the school going forward, helped along by the increases in student population, particularly at our lower and middle schools.

IRISH: And the future looks to include some other big changes as well?

OLSZAMOWSKI: Yes, there are still projects that we need to do that would put NDP in an even better place. As you know, we're in the process of looking at adding much-needed space at the lower school, which includes a multi-purpose gym that can be used for athletics, lunch, and theater space, as well as more early childhood classroom space. We also plan a renovation of the library and administration area at the lower school. And we think we're in a position now where we can probably do

it. There are other projects on our wish list, including a much larger chapel at the main campus, plus a student commons area and consolidated administration space. And more space for our arts programs, especially performing arts.

IRISH: What kind of impact does offering everything we do here at NDP have on our ability to fund it all?

OLSZAMOWSKI: Well, I think that people actually recognize that there's a lot of life that's going on here. But, you're right, there also are consequences for that. We have one of the highest tuitions of Catholic schools in our area. And we're also in a kind of buffer zone between what we call a price-value school and a process school that offers a lot more. That "a lot more" includes paying for the outstanding academic program we have, capital improvements like our greenhouse, upgraded athletic facilities, our STEM wing and so much more. Like our robotics program, for example, which has a worldwide reputation as one of the top programs. When we initially brought FIRST Robotics into the school, we shared it with Avondale High School. But after going on our own, it has just grown and grown. Now, beyond our FIRST program, we have a VEX robotics program that really is exploding in size. We have kids in kindergarten getting into robotics and even at some of these younger ages, our kids continue to bring home awards and championships. It's really another major learning opportunity for our kids separate from our academic curriculum. But again, while we get funding help for some of these extracurricular activities from parents and sponsorships, there is in fact a significant impact on our balance sheet as well.

I also would be remiss not to mention the progress we're making in student diversity, especially lately. I've always said that there is a difference between "knowing" faith and "doing" faith. Part of that is teaching students to go beyond prayer and challenge them to love and seek justice for others. So we're making some real strides in this area, in-

"I think one of the things, of course, I'm most Prep is still a very Marist and a very Catholic

cluding with our Building Bridges program.

IRISH: Professional development of staff has been a focus, hasn't it?

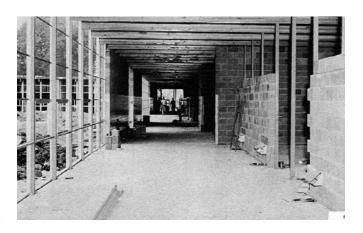
OLSZAMOWSKI: Yes, it's always been a big thing for us and we continue to encourage and fund the development of skills necessary in this rapidly changing world we live in. Additionally, with the very tight labor market, it's sometimes been a struggle lately to bring in new well-qualified teachers, including replacements for longtime veteran personnel who retire.

Also, as many over the years have heard me say that NDP is one school with three divisions, it's also been a big focus of mine and of the administration to encourage a sense of real camaraderie among all three schools, teachers, students, parents included — that we are all one big family, all Notre Dame Prep with the same mission and vision albeit at different age levels. It is very heartening to me when I see the older students from the upper school intermingle with kids from the middle or lower schools. I love to see our youngest students working in the greenhouse or building robots in our robotics center located in the upper school. And of course, celebrating all-school Masses is always a wonderful thing to see each month. The younger kids in particular really sing their hearts out during the school alma mater at the end of each liturgy.

IRISH: In your view, what does it mean to be a Marist school now in 2024 and has that changed from 1994 or even 1954 when NDHS was opened?

OLSZAMOWSKI: When comparing NDP and Harper Woods Notre Dame, you can't ignore the fact that one school is coed and one is all-boys. I've worked in both types of schools in the past, and noticed that it does make some difference in terms of school atmosphere, for example. But the basic Marist values of being the best person you can be, of working with other people and striving to do the

best that you can with your academic talents were certainly a part of Notre Dame High School as much as they are a part of Notre Dame Prep today. But there are differences. NDP, I want to say, has generally a more mellow atmosphere, a more natural atmosphere versus the way it was with NDHS, where in order to speak with girls, you had to cross the parking lot between Regina, an all-girls school,



and Notre Dame. We had some very strict nuns on the other side of that parking lot that kind of quashed most interaction between the two schools.

But going back to your question, the mission of both schools, whether it's 1954, 1994 or 2024, is basically the same. Our basic philosophy across the board is to be like Mary in all we do — think like Mary, judge like Mary, feel like Mary, and act like Mary. Those are the things that we've always stressed. Plus, we try to focus on a Marist Way theme each year. This year, for instance, our theme is "humility"; other themes explored in the past are "love of God" and "doing the work of Mary." Those themes are reinforced in every student and staff member, which, to be honest, may not have been stressed as much at Harper Woods Notre Dame. However, that's also been a more recent phenomenon due to having far less priests on hand. When I attended Notre Dame High School, there were 28 priests on staff. That will never happen again, at least in my lifetime. At NDP, we've got four Marists — three priests and Br. Louis. But the basic thread of what it is to be a Marist person is common to both NDHS and NDP. And even today it's still a

proud of is that, in my opinion, Notre Dame school."

close family at Harper Woods Notre Dame. When I went to a recent NDHS 1962 reunion, as an example, it was like being with my own old buddies. I mean, they're not even my 1965 graduating class! They were seniors when I was a freshman and it's like, wow, you know, and it's a real feeling; it's still a feeling of being home.

I think there's also a certain overlay in any Marist school in which there is kindness and love. Even with the "tough guy" Marists in the old days, guys like Fr. Joe Chase, as an example, or Fr. Omer St. Onge. They were in a way kind of rough, but they were rough in a kind way. A Marist Way.

There was very little thought of ever trying to excoriate a kid, you know, to break them down. But rather it's always better to try to show them a right path to go. And so it is with our current school, too.

But your question was a good one. The common thread has been, and always will be, the Marist Way. Conversely, that's also why we're very concerned about what's going to happen when there are no longer any Marist religious here. So, we're stressing Marist Way, not just inside the student body, but also in the faculty where we have seminars for them in the summer when Fr. Strasz will give talks on the Marist Way and so forth — to create a language that people

can absorb. For example, at a recent board retreat, we had a session on humility with the board of trustees. Part of the job that we as Marists have

and that I think we're doing a decent job at, is to translate the Marist Way into something that everyone, both lay and religious, can understand today.

IRISH: What are the main challenges Notre Dame Prep faces today versus five, 20 or 30 years ago?

OLSZAMOWSKI: Most of our programs and institutions remain strong, but some need a little more oomph in certain places. For instance, our greenhouse and botany programs could be improved



(Left) Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods under

(Above) Notre Dame Prep first offered engineering and empathy in 2019 as part of its science curriculum. At that time, the school was the first in the country to integrate the class into its curriculum.

a bit and we could bring in more religious and Marist principles into what the kids are doing with the world outside the doors of NDP. Kind of like what's evolved in our STEM program, where we're offering classes that bring in empathy and kindness to science, such as the relatively new engineering and empathy class taught be Louise Palardy.

I'd also like to try to get parents involved in some of our program, too. We have a lot of parents

"So bottom line, I'm very happy that we've asked us to do."

with green thumbs who could be helpful to us with the greenhouse as another example.

One of our other great needs is putting together a sizable endowment. Not just an endowment for buildings and facilities, but one that's just a straight endowment to be used for the professional development of teachers, more academic programs for the kids, and student scholarships. We're working in that direction. I'm not sure if it will be sooner or later, but the more immediate need is for



expansion of facilities in the lower school.

Also on the financial side, now that we're in much better shape, I'm hoping that we start transferring more of that

money into investments so it can grow even more.

I also worry about staffing and keeping an outstanding faculty and staff in place going forward. Today, around 18 percent less young people are going into education and teaching careers, and I fear that may get worse. There's also a very real concern about the loss of the Marist religious. But for now we're here and doing okay. And I really like the fact that people like Andy Guest are here, and people like Mike Kelly are here. People who have a sense of what being Marist is all about, you know, because it's going to be a lay structure eventually. Yes, even after the priests withdraw from daily work, we'll still likely sit on the Board of Trustees. And, yes, we'll still be conducting Marist evaluations from the perspective of the religious.

(Above) Notre Dame Prep is emphasizing faculty and staff professional development as part of building an endowment. But the general operation of the school will be the responsibility of the laity.

IRISH: That kind of segues into my next question. In your opinion, what do you think Notre Dame Prep will look like 30 years from now? And I don't mean necessarily physically, although that could be part of your response.

OLSZAMOWSKI: Well, I guess it's a function of a much broader question in the world writ large. Where will the Catholic faith be in our country or in the world in 30 years or 100 years? I was shocked to hear recently that there are now only about 400,000 practicing Catholics left in Germany, which at one time was a very Catholic country, sharing turf with Lutherans. The same phenomenon is going on in this country. If parents are non-practicing and don't believe much in religion, what can we do about it? Parents are a child's first teachers. If they don't teach them to pray, they don't teach them to go to church, what will that all mean for the future? It's also one of the reasons I want that new gym space in the lower school because currently we're running out of space to put all the elementary kids for their weekly Mass.

For the Catholic Church, the schools have always been the incubator of the faith. Basically, they've been the socialization structure that we've used to bring young people into the faith, right? And although the Mass at the parish level is very, very important, I'm hoping that the parochial schools and schools like ours stay very Catholic even after a parish may go away.

But getting back to our school, I would envision that in 30 years or more this school will still be an excellent educational institution no matter what. But I always go back to the macro view of what's going on in the world; what's to become of the Catholic Church in general unless there's a significant change? Even though Pope Francis is trying to change things in a better direction, he's getting a lot of pushback from a lot of old men who are afraid of change.

been so successful in fulfilling what the diocese

IRISH: If you could point to one or two things only one or two things — that you are most proud of about this school after 30 years, what would that or those be?

OLSZAMOWSKI: I think one of the things, of course, I'm most proud of is that, in my opinion, Notre Dame Prep is still a very Marist and a very Catholic school. It's what we came here to do. It's what we were asked to do by Cardinal Adam Joseph Maida when he was the archbishop.

IRISH: Do you think Cardinal Maida was aware of the Marist philosophy during that transition



from Oakland Catholic to Notre Dame Prep?

OLSZAMOWSKI:

I don't know, but I think he grew to understand it more over time. Also, when we began talking about closing Notre Dame High School due

to the tremendous demographical change on that side of town, I think Maida wanted to give the Marist Fathers another opportunity.

Not many people know this, but at that time, Cardinal Maida asked the Marists about taking over three schools in Southeast Michigan: Oakland Catholic, Aquinas High School and Cardinal Mooney. All three! And we told them we didn't have enough priests and brothers available. So he said, "well, choose the one you want." We looked at it and said this one is the best shot. Major roads nearby, enough wealth in the area to be able to survive, even though it is in the city of Pontiac, which for some was a drawback. But given everything that was here, the facilities and all the basic infrastructure already in place, we figured this was the best shot for us. Plus, it would put us at a sufficient distance from Notre Dame High School so there

wouldn't be any unnecessary internecine rivalry issues in the meantime.

So bottom line, I'm very happy that we've been so successful in fulfilling what the diocese asked us to do.

Here's a little related sidebar: I remember the day when Fr. Gerry Demers, s.m., and I were first checking out this place in 1992 and walking across Oakland Catholic's parking lot that at the time looked like Saigon after the Vietnam



War. We were accompanied by the pastor of Saint Mary of the Hills and we were supposed to be doing this tour on the sly. But then we ran into the principal from Oakland Catholic, who asked, "how can I help you?" And the pastor said, "Oh, we're just here to show them the school and blah, blah, blah." And he walked away likely still very suspicious.

Afterward, when we finished our walking tour, Fr. Demers said to me, "Well, what do you think?" And I said I'd give it a 50-50 shot. And he said, "Good, we'll do it."

Two years later, when Fr. Joe became Marist provincial, we cut the deal at Mountain Jack's restaurant that used to be on the corner of Opdyke and University. And, as they say, the rest is history! +

(Above left) Cardinal Adam Joseph Maida asked the Marists to take over the former Oakland Catholic High School in Pontiac. (Above) Fr. Gerard "Gerry" A. Demers, s.m., (1931-2022) was Provincial of the Boston Province from 1985 to 1991 and served as rector at Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods.

A DIFFERENT D

Jordan Mejaly's career veers to medicine from a settled future on the ski slope

hen 2010 alumna Jordan Mejaly finished up at Hope College where she majored in communications and minored in studio art, she headed west to Colorado and pursued a career in photography, specifically sports photography with a "focus" on skiers and snowboarders. It seemed the perfect place for her to enjoy much success — certainly no shortage of subject matter in Colorado.

And for a time, success is what she enjoyed.

"The job that initially brought me to Colorado was for EpicMix, a group of photographers who are available for guests at the top of the ski lifts," she said. "In my free time, I would also shoot mountain events such as the Dew Tour, and frequently brought my camera out for days on the slopes with friends. My photos were often shared by the professional athletes and I met quite a few of them as a result."

Mejaly also joined a ski patrol team in Colorado and worked on a team of medical responders for the resort that also handled explosives for avalanche mitigation.

But the mountains of Colorado wanted even more from Mejaly, it seems, as she felt an even stronger calling toward healthcare and medicine.



Jordan Mejaly NDP'10, top center, is with colleagues at Children's Hospital in Detroit.

IRECTION



"I like to think that my overriding desire to help others in various strenuous settings began at Notre Dame Prep."

In fact, last fall during Nurses Week, her fellow nurses voted her Rookie of the Year.

Now regrowing her roots in Michigan, this Rochester resident is retrospective about what this state and her high school had given her before she went west.

"My time at Notre Dame seems like many lifetimes ago, and in many ways it was," she said. "However, my passion for the medical field began there. I remember becoming involved with athletic training under Chris Polsinelli and developing an interest in the field. I would shadow Chris often and assist in any way that was within my scope as a student."

She noted that many of her fondest memories from high school involved sporting events with Polsinelli and others in athletic training and trying to learn as much as she could from them.

"I like to think that my overriding desire to help others in various strenuous settings began at Notre Dame Prep."

And while she didn't ski for NDP's skiing program, a part of her wishes she had.

"Looking back, if I could change one thing, I would have skied for Notre Dame Prep," she adds. "Despite years of knowing how to ski, I still had to work extremely hard to become a good enough and strong enough skier to perform medical rescues on the mountain."

Mejaly also keeps one hand in photography, however.

"When I'm not at the hospital (or sleeping after a long shift), I still photograph friends, only now it's more likely at CrossFit or wakesurfing than on a mountain skiing or snowboarding." +





of faith, academics and service

YEARS

As we mark the 30th anniversary of Notre Dame Preparatory School, we reflect on three decades of shaping the lives of our students in the spirit of our Marist mission. Throughout these years, our alumni have carried forward the values instilled during their time at school—values that continue to influence their personal and professional lives. In this special feature, we've gathered reflections from graduates, sharing their cherished memories, the lessons that have guided them, and the lasting impact of a Marist education.

Editor's note: While every attempt was made to represent each graduating class, some classes did not respond to our request in time for the publication deadline.



"My favorite NDP memories included 'Slurpee Thursdays' in AP Biology and Mr. (Gregory) Simon getting so excited about government class that he was almost leaping around the room.

Also, anything in Mrs. Bembas's classes and how Br. Louis knew and enthusiastically greeted every student in our class." - Dr. Leah (Kohler) Spring NDP'98

"I think I miss our track meets the most and the camaraderie we all shared whether the team won or lost. There also was the time Amanda Willick and I won the hand-walking competition during Irish Week when we were freshman. We were so proud!" - Carrie (Geyer) Dillon NDP'99

"When we won Irish Week during our freshman year. Can any other class say the same?" - Nikia Jennings Johnson NDP'99



"I loved every part of being on Student Council from the campaigning to the meetings, attending regional and state conferences, participating in the leadership camps, planning

events like Homecoming, Freshmen Corn Roast/ Orientation, Irish Week, Spirit Days, dances and charity events. Even working the ice-cream machine at lunch was a way to socialize with all the different grades. Mr. Kotarski and Mr. Simon worked us hard, but we learned so much and had fun while doing it. Our last Stu-Co meeting as seniors was always special and emotional." - Emily Giacona Jackson NDP'01

"NDP was a great experience, and science teacher Susan Toczylowski stood out as a person who really got me excited about science. Her AP biology class was fantastic, and I remember



working closely with her to establish NDP's first recycling program and environmental club. It definitely set a high standard for what I expected in college and how I found myself becoming a chemist." - Jeremy Winkler NDP'02



"NDP molded me to be a health care provider and entrepreneur. Mr. (Greg) Simon shaped me to be a leader, planner, and implementer as well as how to budget appropriately; Dr. (James) Doyle

made science fun and interesting; Mr. (Anthony) Borton made sure I acted in a professional manner; Mrs. (Dolores) Vilcone taught me that no matter how skilled my work was, if I wasn't giving it my all, I didn't deserve an 'A'; Mr. (Dave) Osiecki taught me to embrace myself for who I am, be able to laugh at myself, and make learning fun; Mr. (Jerry) McGhee provided me the foundations for health and physical fitness/wellness; and Deacon (Tony) Morici taught me to carry God with me in all that I do." - Dr. John Putnam NDP'03

"I was lucky to have a lot of great teachers at NDP, and this question is always hard to answer because I don't like to leave people out. But I will say that there were a number of teachers who I remember really pushing me to think critically and inde-

"I've found that at NDP, every success as a student and they is expected to ensure that you

pendently. Mr. Osiecki stands out for how he used class discussions in AP US History; Mr. Cannon always challenged me; Dr. Alkidas, Ms. Bembas and Ms. Derico had an easy job when it came to



me as a student, teaching literature to someone who loved to read as much as I did. But they also really helped me develop the writing skills that I still use to this day and challenged me to think about reading and writing at a deeper level. – *Andrew Pauwels NDP'05*



"I feel so blessed to be a part of the Irish family. And some of my favorite memories at NDP were band practices and performances with band director Mr. Martin." -Amanda (Buszek) Fazi NDP'06

"Mrs. Beverly Williams was such an inspirational teacher. Her death rocked so many of our worlds, and her wake was a testament to the positive impact she made on all of us! She injected so much energy into her class and students — and was so hilarious. To this day, I share one of her jokes with my friends and colleagues. She used to write 'S.H.I.T.' on the board which stood for, 'Sure happy it's Thursday." - *Kathryn Woodstock NDP'07*

"At Notre Dame, my love for science was rekindled as it truly was the catalyst for me to consider college and a career in chemistry. My NDP classes in chemistry, biology and mathematics only kept



me yearning for more quantitative approaches to understanding the world around us, and my high school teachers pushed me to work hard and really dig into the material. I have to say that NDP and Mrs. (Sylvia) Mulrenin put me on the path toward chemistry, and Dr. (Claudia) Heinbuck solidified my interest in chemistry. Also, Dr. and Mr. McCaskey got me really geeked about math!" - Andreana Rosnik NDP'09

"Notre Dame Prep never failed to challenge me and because of that I came into college with a substantial head start. The rigorous academics along with its faith, sports and clubs taught me a lot.



Teachers were always supportive and willing to help. On top of that, the art program was second to none." – *Matt LaMothe NDP'18*



"Even though I graduated 12 years ago, I still feel very blessed to have attended NDP because the school impacted my life in such a positive way. Some of my best friends today are friends I

made while I was a student at NDP, and I am so fortunate to have these incredible people in my life."– *Nicole Hogan NDP'II*

"My favorite NDP memories are from when I participated in the musicals each year. My favorite musical that we did was 'Grease.' Getting to meet students from all grades, performing for friends and family, and forming bonds as a cast brings back fond memories for me." - *Katelyn Castle NDP'13*

teacher truly cares about will go above and beyond achieve your academic goa



"The challenging academics of NDP played an essential part in forming the work ethic that helped me succeed in college. But specifically, Mrs. Mulrenin played a huge role in preparing me for

Michigan State University. She sparked my passion for chemistry and inspired my choice of chemical engineering. She believed in me — from predicting my AP score to creating such a hilarious learning environment in her class that I enjoyed being a part of it every day — and that is something I will continue to carry with me forever." - Aleksandra Salic NDP'15



"In addition to the intro to my chosen career at NDP, I also found other passions in high school, such as art, singing, theater, creative writing, and even bowling. Mr. Fazzini, Mr. Devine,

and Coach Yanik were wonderful at supporting my growth in these arenas, and to this day I still continue to create art in my free time and participate in singing opportunities as they arise. I even had the chance to participate in a few theater productions in college." - Katie Spengler NDP'17

"I absolutely loved my time at NDP and all the memories and lifelong friends I made. I definitely got a taste of success at NDP, winning the state title and Catholic League title in 2016 for



soccer and winning districts in 2018 for basketball. I will forever hold those memories close to me." -Celia Gaynor NDP'18

"I have made many fond memories and friendships at NDP. Theatre was a big part of what drove me to become a filmmaker. I did theatre all through high school, and from that, I became inter-



ested in storytelling, acting, and just the general means of what is needed to put on a production." -Rowland Scheessele NDP'19

"I've found that at NDP every teacher truly cares about your success as a student and they will go above and beyond what is expected to ensure that you achieve your academic goals. Also, even though Notre Dame Prep challenged me academically, there was so much more than just schoolwork. With many different sports to play and new clubs being formed every year there's always a place to fit in and thrive." - Brett Tice NDP'21

"Notre Dame has given me the repeated opportunity to explore my faith and grow as a person. Many aspects of the school's faith-based approach to education, including the Kairos retreat,



made both a lasting and significant impact on my life." - John Milback NDP'23

Dan Yessian is an award-winning, Detroit-area composer, producer, musician, and founder of Yessian Music Inc., an internationally-renowned music, production and sound design company that serves the motion picture, television, and advertising industries around the globe.

But this isn't about Yessian. It's about one of his colleagues, Chuck Shermetaro, a 1963 graduate of Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods and an extraordinarily talented musician himself. The lede was about Yessian because it was he who "led" us to Shermetaro after an August recording session in Yessian's home studio on Burt Bacharach's piano hit the airwaves. Outstanding work by the still-active Shermetaro and singer Kenny Watson.

"I met Dan Yessian about 1969 when I subbed with his combo," said Shermetaro. "Shortly thereafter, I became the regular piano player with the band for the next five years. We played weddings, private parties, Holiday Inn cocktail lounges as well as an occasional local radio or TV show. We also recorded a few commercial jingles for local businesses."

CLASSICAL MUSIC AT SEVEN

Since then, Shermetaro worked a long career in logistics and distribution, and as a lab courier for a major Metro Detroit hospital.

Alum was studying classical music as a 7-year-old and went on to a long musical career that shows no signs of slowing down, even as he heads into his eighth decade.





But he never left music. Not by any stretch.

In fact, he's still an active musician and works at the Fisher Theatre a couple times a month among other regular gigs, according to the Chesterfield Township resident.

"I'm also with a band that plays at Greenfield Village for all their events that require live music," he said.

On top of that, Shermetaro currently plays in various clubs and restaurants with many musicians and singers from throughout southeast Michigan. Since 2000, he's also been the regular piano player with the legendary Johnny Trudell's ensemble, now called the Jeff Trudell Big Band.



Not a late bloomer by any measure, Shermetaro's formal training in music began when he was quite young. In fact, he was a long way from even becoming a teeny-bopper.

"I studied privately, mostly classical music, for nine years starting at age 7," he said. "Even from that young age, I was drawn to the swing music and jazz I was hearing on the radio. I would sometimes improvise subtle jazz elements into the classical pieces I was supposed to be practicing, but I don't think my parents knew the difference."

Many subsequent years of experience playing jazz, rock, country, pop and dixieland-style music has afforded Shermetaro the opportunity to work with many great musicians and singers

in many settings from the Fox and Fisher Theaters and Andiamo Celebrity Showroom to many local and regional jazz clubs, as well as concert halls and amphitheaters.

But, he says with an authoritative wink, "the venue is never as important as the music and musicians that I'm playing with."



'THE BEST' BAND DIRECTOR

Also important to his musical career, says the near-octogenarian, was his high school and its band director.

"As a freshman at Notre Dame High School, I played piano in the jazz band and various percussion in the concert and marching bands," he said. "At the same time, I knew that the string bass player in the jazz band was a senior and was due to graduate. So I bought a book on the instrument and would go to the band room after class and practice and practice."

His perseverance worked out as he eventually earned the coveted string bass position from Larry Egan, who directed the music and band programs at NDHS for most of the school's 50 years of operation.

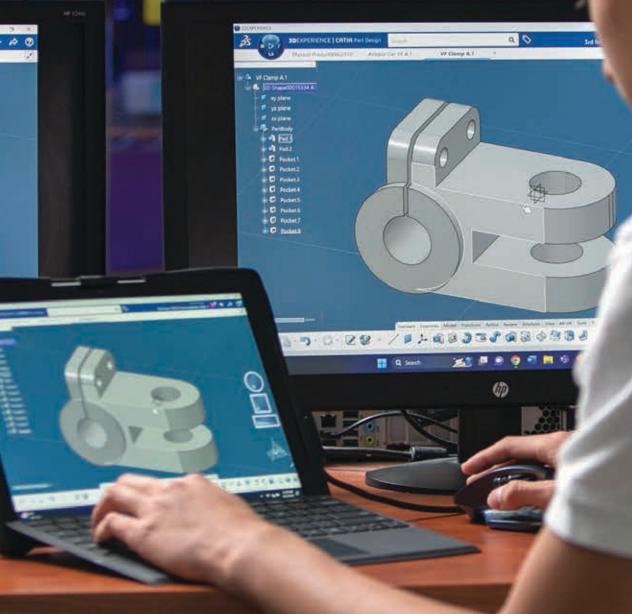
"Mr. Egan was the best," Shermetaro said. "Not only was he a really good trumpet player and conductor, he knew how to assess the talent of the individual members of the band and then select music that sounded great when performed. This is a point often overlooked by many band and choir directors. He was great."

(Top) Larry Egan was band director at Notre Dame High School for many years.

(Left) A regular member of a band that plays the local club scene, Chuck Shermetaro is shown at the keyboards in Marge's Bar, a popular establishment in Grosse Pointe Park, Mich.



Why consider Notre Dame Prep? For more course selection, more advanced challenges, and more opportunities to explore in the arts, STEM, athletics, service and leadership.



Learn about our Gateway scholarship program and merit scholarships for incoming ninth graders at **ndprep.org.**



ndprep.org



ince September 2010, Notre Dame Prep's lower school (pre-kindergarten through Grade 5) has been recognized by the International Baccalaureate Organization as a World School and as such is fully authorized to offer the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) to its students. The lower school joined Notre Dame's middle and upper schools also with International Baccalaureate-authorized programs of study.

Currently, Notre Dame Prep is the only Catholic school in Michigan and one of only two nationwide to offer all three levels of the International Baccalaureate program.

Diana Atkins, principal of the lower school, who has been at the school since it adopted the PYP, says the implementation of the innovative program significantly transformed its educational perspectives from the very beginning.

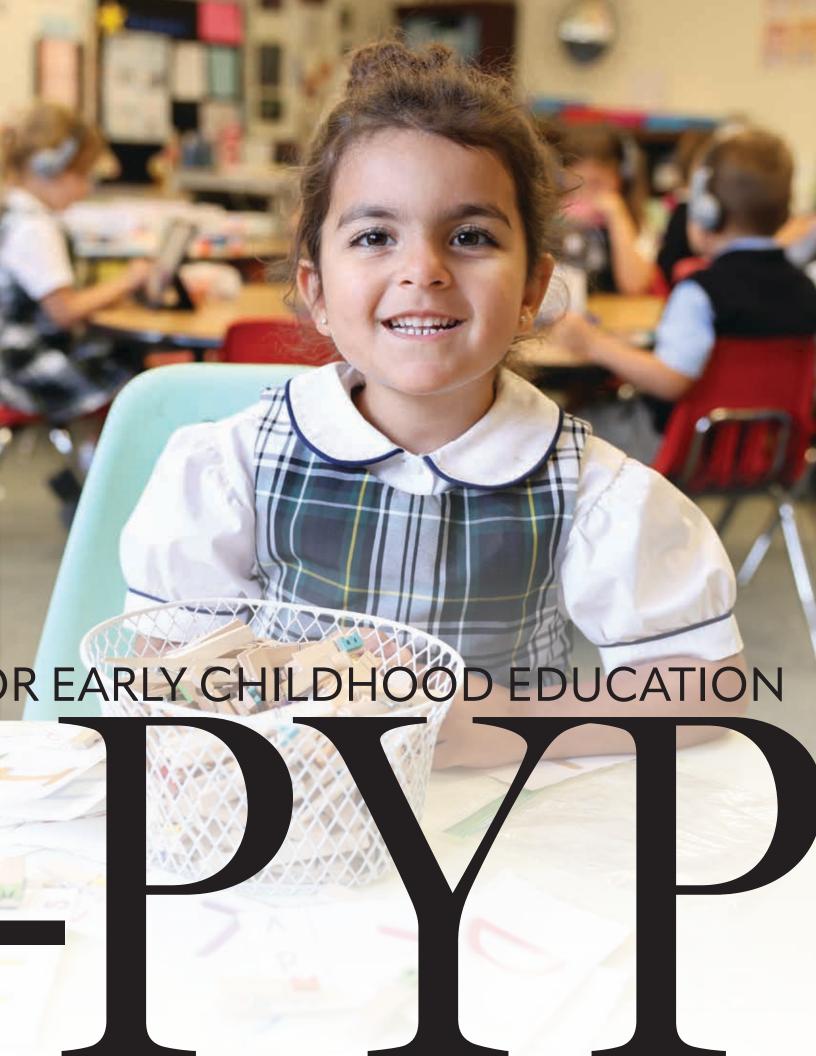
"By giving students a voice in their learning, the Primary Years Program has fostered a more engaged and reflective learning environment across the board," she said. "This shift was particularly evident, for example, in the introduction of student-led parent teacher conferences, where students take the lead in discussing their progress with parents and teachers. This approach encourages honesty and self-reflection, contrasting with traditional conferences that primarily focus on teacher evaluations."

Atkins added that overall, since it was introduced to the younger students, the PYP has promoted a much deeper, more collaborative approach to education, and a climate that she said has greatly benefited students, faculty and families alike.

A quick primer on IB-PYP follows...

As parents look for early childhood and elementary education options for their youngest children, it is worth noting that one of the most innovative early-education programs in the world exists today at a Catholic school in Oakland County.

THE RIGHT CHOICE FO



WHAT IS THE PYP?

The PYP prepares students to become active, caring, lifelong learners who demonstrate respect for themselves and others and have the capacity to participate in the world around them. It focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both within and beyond the classroom.

KEY FACTS ABOUT THE PYP

- The International Baccalaureate® (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP) was introduced in 1997.
- It followed the introduction of the Middle Years Program (MYP) and the Diploma Program (DP) – established respectively in 1994 and 1968.



- The PYP is taught to students aged 3-12.
- As of September 2023, there are 2,275 schools offering the PYP worldwide. As of February 2024, there were over 8,000 IB programs being offered worldwide, across more than 5,700 schools in 160 countries.

ORIGIN OF THE PYP

The PYP was developed through the vision and effort, sustained over 10 years, of the former International Schools Curriculum Project (ISCP).

Their goal was to produce a common curriculum, for students in the 3-12 age range, which would provide continuity of learning within each

school and ensure that the curriculum developed international-mindedness on the part of learners.

Since being introduced by the IB, the PYP continues to meet these initial aims of providing a curriculum that brings international-mindedness to the school community.

HOW THE PYP WORKS

The International Baccalaureate® (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP) is underpinned by six transdisciplinary themes around which learning is planned.

These are:

- Who we are
- Where we are in place and time
- How we express ourselves
- How the world works
- How we organize ourselves
- Sharing the planet

These themes are selected for their relevance to the real world. They are described as transdisciplinary because they focus on issues that go across subject areas.

The transdisciplinary themes help teachers to develop a program of inquiry. Teachers work together to develop investigations into important ideas, which require a substantial and high level of involvement on the part of students.

Through the PYP curriculum framework, schools ensure that students examine each theme.

CURRICULUM

The Primary Years Program (PYP) presents schools with a comprehensive plan for high quality, international education.

It provides schools with a curriculum framework of essential elements — the knowledge, concepts, skills, attitudes, and action that young students need to equip them for successful lives, both now and in the future.

Schools work with the five elements to construct a rigorous and challenging primary curriculum for international education.

The PYP aims to create a curriculum that is engaging, relevant, challenging and significant for learners in the 3–12 age range. The curriculum is transdisciplinary, meaning that it focuses on issues that go across subject areas.

THE PYP IS ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO:

- The written curriculum, which explains what PYP students will learn
- The taught curriculum, which sets out how educators teach the PYP
- The assessed curriculum, which details the principles and practice of effective assessment in the PYP

HOW HAS THE PYP CHANGED THROUGH THE YEARS?

In response to the challenges and opportunities found in our rapidly changing complex world, and in line with movements in global education to develop lifelong learners, a future-focused PYP has evolved. The PYP curriculum framework emphasizes the central principle of agency that is threaded throughout three pillars of the curricu-

lum: the learner, learning and teaching and the learning community. Through this evolution, the PYP provides a framework that is transformational and continues to meet the initial aims of developing internationally-minded people who recognize their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet.

More information on Notre Dame Prep's IB program and the rest of its academic offerings is available by contacting us at 248-373-1061 or admissions@ndpma.org. +





NDP soccer wins first state title in program history

Kickin' it to the top: NDP soccer shines in historic state finals victory

his fall, history was made at Notre Dame Prep, as the boys varsity soccer team advanced to the Michigan High School Athletic Association's (MHSAA) state finals for the first time in over two decades, marking only the second time in the program's history. It was a moment that left an indelible mark on the players, the coaches, and the entire school community.

Head coach and proud Notre Dame High School alumnus Rob Suffredini ND'87, who has spent 10 seasons guiding the team, reflected on the significance of the achievement. "This championship is a testament to the dedication and passion of our players," he said. "It's been 23 years since the soccer program has been in the finals, so to be part of the team that was able to get it done feels incredibly special."

The team won its first-ever championship after defeating Elk Rapids, 3-2. For the players, it's a moment they'll never forget, something they've worked so hard to achieve. For the school, it's a reminder of what's possible when the community comes together and supports each other.

"It's not just about the trophy—it's about the pride of NDP and doing things the right way," Suffredini said.

The victory wasn't just another win; it was a culmination of years of effort and teamwork.

"When the final whistle blew, the kids erupted into pure joy—jumping, hugging, and celebrating. It was chaos in the best possible way," said Suffredini. "For me, it was an overwhelming wave of pride and happiness. Watching their hard work culminate in such an incredible achievement is something I'll cherish forever."

Senior Will Lanham NDP'25, the team's captain, echoed the excitement of the day.

"It's awesome to make history for my school. It just means a lot with everybody here, all our peers, our athletics directors and everyone here. It's great to finally win it," he said afterward.

The road to the state finals wasn't easy, but the team was driven by a shared goal. Suffredini attributes the success of the season to the chemistry and work ethic of the players.

"While we've had talented teams before, this group played with one purpose and goal, especially the senior players, and that made all the difference," he said. "They were determined to win this championship and truly believed we were good enough to make it happen. This was a driven group! Yes, we had talent, but it was their belief in each other and commitment to the team's goals that set them apart."

Several players stood out throughout the season, including Lanham, juniors Jack Kilpatrick and Ben Liparoto, and defensive stars, like seniors Henry Graff, Alex Ruschak, and Ethan Janssen. But according to the coach, the entire team had a role to play.

"It was a complete team effort, top to bottom," Suffredini emphasized. "We had standout players, but honestly, every single player contributed to our success."

For the team and coaching staff, the season was full of memorable moments. The Fighting Irish finished with an impressive 23-2 record, facing off against five top10 ranked teams on their path to the championship.

"The win over De La Salle and Orchard Lake St. Mary's on Senior Night, the clutch goals and penalty kicks in the district final, the celebrations after big games—it's hard to pick just one (moment)," Suffredini said. "Top of the list is our district final victory over No. 3 ranked Detroit Country Day to avenge our regular season loss to them a few weeks earlier. Beating No. 2-ranked Flint Powers Catholic in the regional final was special as well."

Reflecting on the program's history, Suffredini spoke with pride about his connection to NDP. As an alumnus, returning to coach was an especially meaningful experience.

"It's like coming full circle, being able to give

back to the program that meant so much to me growing up. I've been coaching here for 10 seasons, and every season reminds me how special this place is," he said.

Much of what he teaches on the field is inspired by the lessons he learned as a player at NDHS in Harper Woods, which he hopes to pass along to the next generation.

"I learned early on about hard work, accountability, and respect for the game. It's awesome to see those same values coming to life in our soccer program," he said.

Keeping the school's mission, to work with God to form Christian people, upright citizens, and academic scholars, is always top of mind.

"I've always tried to align our program's efforts with the core values of the NDP mission—faith, character, and excellence," he said. "These are things we focus on every day. It's not just about being good players; it's about being great teammates and even better people."

Looking ahead, Suffredini is optimistic about the future of the NDP soccer program.

"I hope this championship shows future teams what's possi-



ble," he said. "It's proof that hard work and belief can take you to places you never imagined. My goal is to keep building on this momentum—developing players, creating a strong team culture, and setting high standards. The bar has been raised, and I can't wait to see where we go from here."

For NDP, the future of its soccer program looks brighter than ever, and the school will continue to rally behind its student-athletes as the team looks to repeat its championship run. +



NDP football wins first state title in program history

Another relentless performance on both sides of the ball caps outstanding season for the Irish football team as they defeat Frankenmuth, 42-7, in the MHSAA Division 5 final at Ford Field.

he euphoria of Notre Dame Prep's boys soccer first state championship on Nov. 2 had scarcely dissipated when the Fighting Irish community realized a second state championship Thanksgiving weekend when Coach Patrick Fox's now 12-1 football team earned the program's first state crown in school history with a 42-7 win over Frankenmuth at Ford Field.

"We've had a great year this year, said Fox, an alum of Frankenmuth High School. "We have great young men. I work with tremendous people, and I'm blessed to tell you that we're very proud of our accomplishments because we've done it the right way."

He also noted at the post-game press conference that the Irish program is from the bottom up.

"We're a developmental program and a lot of our players, like Drew (Heinbuch) and Sammy (Stowe), have been with the school since pre-kindergarten. We have great student-athletes and we have great young men. And we take the time to develop them, and they stay in our program."

One of those long-timers, quarterback Stowe, a junior, was unstoppable through the air, completing 15 of 21 passes for 293 yards and four TDs. He also had seven rushes for 21 yards against the previously unbeaten Eagles.

Stowe's four passing scores were all in the first half as he distributed two to Billy Collins and one each to Michael Wiebelhaus and Joey DeCasas.

Stowe says that like the rest of his teammates, he works hard and

"I'm blessed to tell you that we're very proud of our accomplishments because we've done it the right way."

remains humble, which he said is one of the keys to the team's success this year.

"[The offensive line] did an amazing job, what a great group," he said after the game. "The lights at Ford Field weren't too bright for our offense and I have playmakers like Billy and Drew who make me look good. Couldn't ask for a better offense."

Stowe also acknowledged the quarterback he backed up in years past.

"I got to sit behind Jacob Tuttle (Albion), one of the Notre Dame greats," he said. "He taught me everything I know."

Irish running back Collins certainly benefited at the title game from what Stowe's learned in the passing department. The senior caught four passes for 126 yards and two touchdowns to go with seven carries for 21 yards on the ground.

Collins was asked at the press conference whether the team's quick scoring attack offense can even be called "drives" since they seemingly only last 30 seconds or so.

He said the team is quick, but it all comes down to trust.

"I always trust our offense because we definitely have the ability to make huge plays," he said. "We have some truly fast guys and a fantastic quarterback in Sam who gets the ball down the field. We just trust our offense and our offensive coordinator, coach [Jason] Whalen and our entire team."

The Irish defense also was more than up to task, holding the Eagle offense to just 245 total yards (4.2 per play) and not allowing a score until there was only about nine minutes to play in the game with NDP up 35-0.

Wide receiver and cornerback DeCasas, a senior, talked about his emotions after the game finished.

"It's really exciting, especially when you consider I grew up with all these guys and my coach," he said. "I'm really proud of these guys."

Emotions also got the best of Fox after the game, who teared up a bit while talking about the alma mater he just beat.

"I played for the greatest head coach in the state, Ralph Munger," Fox said about his former mentor who ran the football program for 12 years at Frankenmuth. "He raised all of us a specific way, and because of that, I have a great life. I owe my life to that program. But now, today, these are my guys, and I was also happy to win big.

"I love the program I grew up in, and I hope my boys love their program just as much as I did." +



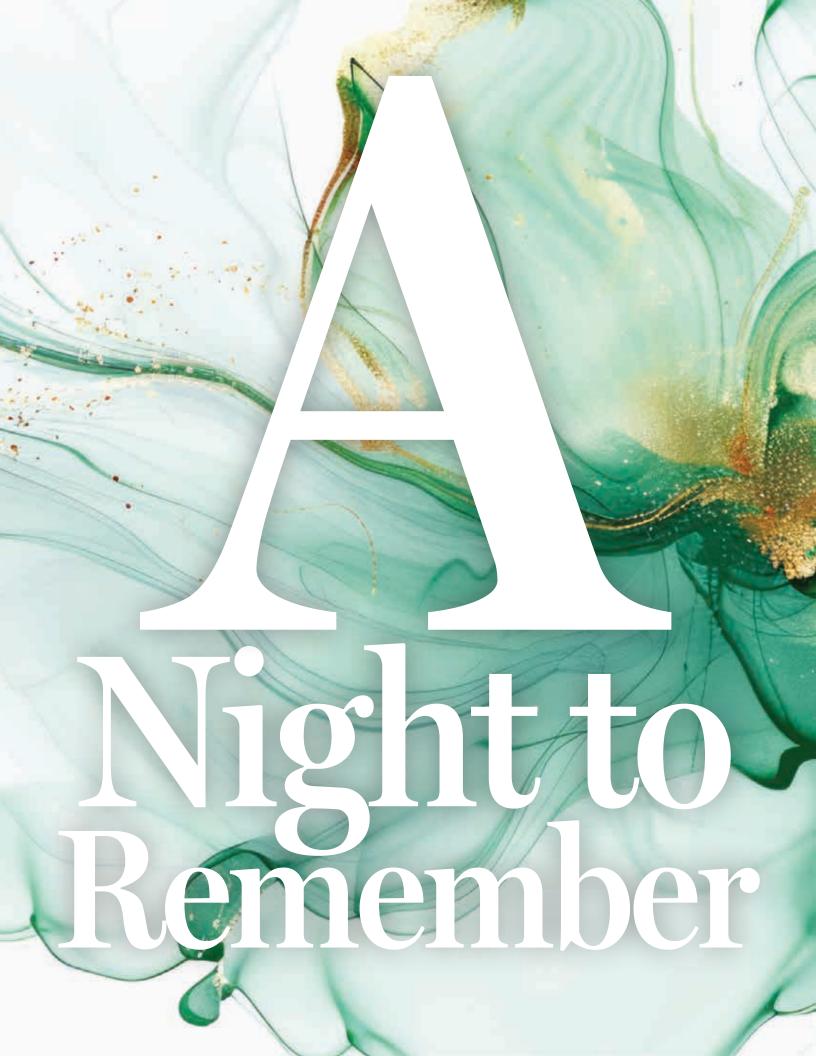












Celebrating 30 Years of Notre Dame Prep with the Irish Legacy Gala

I he adage, "everything old is new again" is taking on a whole new meaning this year with the Irish Legacy Gala. An event conceived by the Parents Club, the gala is designed to weave Notre Dame Prep's rich 30year history through a fun night of dinner, dancing, auctions and entertainment, all designed to benefit scholarships for future Fighting Irish students.

"The school used to put on a gala years ago and the parents in our community have been looking to bring it back," said event co-chair Luain Hajjar. "Because it is our school's 30th anniversary, it gives us a great jumping off point to celebrate our rich history."

The gala will take place from 6 to 11 p.m. on Saturday, April 5, 2025, at the Palazzo Grande in Shelby Township. Current families, alumni from NDP and its heritage schools, friends and retired teachers and staff, and current faculty, staff and coaches are encouraged to attend.

"The gala is really about bringing our school community together," Hajjar said. "We eventually want this to be the major social event of the year for our families to have a place to meet old friends and make new ones, plus it is a great way to benefit the school's annual fund."

Co-chair Nicole Rocco explained that each year moving forward, proceeds from the gala will be designated toward an area of most need to help offset the school's operating budget. Annually, tuition alone only covers about 80 percent of operating costs. This year, organizers selected the Gateway Scholarship program as the beneficiary. Gateway assists families looking to attend NDP but need a little extra help with tuition. In the 2023-2024 school year, nearly \$1 million in scholarships were awarded to families.

In addition to a strolling dinner and appetizers, attendees can look forward to both a silent auction, raffles and door prizes, all while dancing to the music of The Matt Kysia Band featuring alumnus Monica Notaro NDP'07, who performs for the Detroit Red Wings and Tigers games. Head of School Andrew Guest will also give brief remarks.

"The gala is more than just a celebration—it is a vital opportunity to come together as a community in support of our mission to nurture the minds and hearts of our students. By participating, you are helping to ensure that we can continue offering a transformative Catholic education, grounded in faith, academic excellence, and service. It is also a night of joy, connection, and fellowship, where we can celebrate the spirit of our school while strengthening the bonds that make our community so special. Together, we create the future of NDP—one that will continue to inspire the next generation of Fighting Irish," Guest said.

While Rocco was quick to keep many details under wraps, she and the other co-chairs agreed, this night is one that families will not want to miss out on. Currently, event organizers are soliciting corporate sponsorships, and high-end ticket items for the silent auction.

"All donations are accepted," Hajjar said.

Tickets can be purchased online at www.ndprep. org/gala and are \$125 per person. Sponsorships can

also be purchased online via the same link. For questions, including how to donate items, experiences, or packages for the auction, email ndpgalacommittee@ gmail.com.+



Scan the QR code for tickets.

SUTTONS BAY SCIENTISTS



WE STARTED THE DAY BY DOING COMPARATIVE WATER CHEMISTRY WITH A HYDROLAB

ince 1989, the **Inland Seas** Education Association (ISEA) has offered a variety of options for schools to introduce students to hands-on learning on and around the Great Lakes. ISEA focuses on how to protect the Great Lakes by understanding watersheds, exposing youth to Great Lakes careers, providing inspiration and gaining experience with technology and skills used in the field.

In a repeat performance for some of the students in Notre Dame Prep's International Baccalaureate (IB) biology class, a total of 30 students took a quick but very busy trip in September to Suttons Bay on the Leelanau Peninsula in northern Michigan to study water quality in the Great Lakes.

Last spring, a number of these same NDP IB biology students traveled to Suttons Bay as part of ISEA's Watershed Exploration Program focused on the ecology of wetlands.

According to upper school teacher Laura Elwood NDP'10, the fall trip was again an extremely useful and educational



experience for the students, who relished the time out in the field and away from the classroom.

"We started the day by doing comparative water chemistry with a hydrolab, a piece of equipment that tests for seven water quality measurements," she said. "Students actually took samples at school before we traveled north and then compared them to the samples taken from Suttons Bay."

The Inland Seas Education Association then assisted students as they worked as engineers to build underwater ROV (remote operated vehicles) that could complete three tasks: touch the wall in three different places, circle a pole in the water twice without touching it, and collect and bring back to the dock three objects, which represented water pollution.

"Our kids ended the day on the schooner Inland Seas where they split into separate research groups focused on the fish in the lake, the water quality and the composition of the bottom of the lake with a focus on

mussels," Elwood said. "They also worked in their groups to create a research question and collect data. Students then became 'experts' and presented their data to classmates in small groups with one student from each group."

Elwood added that the students also had an opportunity to raise the sails on the ship.

IB biology is a two-year, college-level, lab-based course in biology with topics covered including cells, plant structure and function, chemistry of life, genetics, ecology biotechnology, evolution and human physiology. +



Alum opens new popup clothing boutique in Grosse Pointe Woods after nearly 10 years of retail success

otre Dame Prep alum Taylor (Bolleber) Pettit NDP'10 recently opened up a new Bird Bee store in Grosse Pointe Woods. Billed as a lifestyle clothing

boutique offering a mix of modern bohemian, vintage-inspired and contemporary clothing, shoes, jewelry and accessories, it's actually Pettit's second storefront since she began her business nearly 10 years ago.

"I started Bird Bee in November of 2015 while working full time at an advertising agency," she told IRISH magazine in 2016.

Pettit eventually left the advertising job in May of 2016 to focus full time on her business, which was online-only at first.

She then moved into a retail store environment in downtown Detroit, which performed well, she said. Actually too well.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Eventually, however, as she was facing a lease on her Detroit store that was coming to an end after about seven years, and dealing with an around-the-clock work schedule, Pettit decided to go back to an online-only business model once again.

"Our lease renewal was coming up, so we ultimately decided to take a break," said the Grand Valley State University graduate. "Our downtown store was very successful, but you have to give so much of yourself in order to keep it running at that level. Working seven days a week for anywhere between eight to 12 hours a day definitely takes a toll when you do it for so many years."

As she worked on increasing an already impressive online shopping presence, Pettit began to "get the itch" to offer the in-person shopping experience once again.

Bird Bee's Grosse Pointe Woods location offers a well-curated, highquality selection of apparel and accessories, according to Notre Dame Prep alum Taylor Pettit NDP'10, left. She stocks the shop with neutral, trend-driven items at a moderate price point. "New arrivals are added periodically, so be sure to check back often," she adds.

MARRIAGE AND A MOVE

"It really helped that our customers were constantly asking us when we'd be opening a new location," she said. "Without wanting to commit to another long-term lease right away, we decided to at least be open somewhere as a popup store for the holiday season. Then this perfect little spot in Grosse Pointe Woods became available and ready for us to move right in."

Pettit also said that there were personal changes in her life that also influenced the move to this particular physical location, including a marriage.

"During early COVID, my now husband and I were looking at a living situation that could be more permanent outside of downtown Detroit," she said. "This led us to landing in Grosse Pointe Woods where we have been residents since July of 2021. After establishing our roots together, we eventually married in Palm Springs, California."

Another factor, she notes, is that Grosse Pointe is close enough to downtown Detroit where her husband works, and because they loved the area so much, the opportunity of bringing a Bird Bee storefront back to life in the area made too much sense for her.

Now, after several months, Pettit said things have been going great.

"It's been wonderful so far," she said. "We had such a great time with the grand opening and we're getting further acquainted with the community. Overall the feedback has been amazing!"







STRONG WORK ETHIC FROM NDP

Pettit credits her success in fashion retail and business to many things, not the least of which was her time in high school.

"One of the main things I look back on so fondly at Notre Dame Prep is how much it instilled a strong work ethic and routine in me," she said. "My parents provided that foundation for me early in my life and NDP helped expand on that. I always took pride in wanting to do well and I enjoyed being surrounded by like-minded hardworking students. Having a routine of balancing a heavy load of school work and extracurriculars teaches you time management skills that you carry with you throughout college and your career."

She says she loves when she encounters members of the NDP community.

"No matter where I go in life, I always seem to still be connected to so many alumni and students in so many different ways," she said. "If any of them make the trip out to Grosse Pointe and visit us at Bird Bee, let us know you're connected to NDP! I always love seeing people who come from a similar foundation as me, and we'd certainly love to see you stop in!"+

Bird Bee will be open Oct. 3 through at least the end of January 2025. It is located at 20315 Mack Ave., Grosse Pointe Woods, MI 48236

Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 11 a.m.-6 p.m. (Subject to change) Closed Sunday and Monday. Visit shopbirdbee.com.

Pettit's Bird Bee shop offers an array of clothing styles and colors.







Youthful government leaders from Notre Dame Prep's middle school made some noise, passed some laws and earned numerous awards in Lansing in September.

Thirty-five Notre Dame Prep middle school students traveled to Lansing in the fall participate in the YMCA Michigan Youth in Government Middle School Fall Conference held Nov. 17-19 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel.

According to Dr. LeAnne Schmidt, D.E.T., Notre Dame Prep's head debate and forensics coach, and language arts and U.S. history teacher in the middle school, this trip was the middle school's eighth to Lansing for the conference.

YMCA Michigan Youth in Government is a student-run, student-led model government program for teens across the State of Michigan. MYIG provides the content and resources for delegations to organize locally to prepare for regional and statewide events. The middle school program has three different areas in which students can get involved:



LEGISLATURE:

The Legislature program is a simulation of the Michigan government. Students write a bill on a state topic of their choice that they could see becoming a law. Students and their bills are assigned to a committee and either the House or the Senate. Throughout the program, the students, acting as senators and representatives, discuss their bill in committee and in chamber. Once the bill passes committee, as well as in the House and Senate, it is then put onto the youth governor's desk to be signed into law or vetoed.

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FORUM:

Students combine into teams of two to compete in a six-round debate tournament. Each year, students select a topic for the CIF debate and the Political Compromise programs. Recent topics included the banning of zoos, water diversion changes to the Great Lakes com-

pact and equipping schools with school resources officers. Students debate the merits of the assigned question in a formal timed debate and must be able to argue both sides of the issue.

POLITICAL COMPROMISE:

The Political Compromise Program's objective is to provide students a framework to learn about what quality legislation consists of as well as the cooperation and compromise required to create said legislation.

The following bullet points represent more awards and honors earned by NDP middle school students in Lansing:

- Eighth grader Leah Dekutoski was elected as lieutenant governor for the student legislature and introduced a bill that passed, but was vetoed by the youth governor. The combined legislature overrode the veto in a unanimous vote.
- Eighth grader Lily Buero was elected as blue legislature lieutenant governor.







- Eighth grader Steven Carter was named outstanding delegate for the legislature.
 - Eighth grader David Shorter introduced a bill that passed.
 - Eighth grader Sophia Schoenleber also introduced a bill that passed.
- Natalie Esseily won an outstanding overall delegate award because volunteer judges (capitol professionals), alumni, and coaches noticed her and commented about how kind and welcoming she was to her peers, and how helpful and professional she was. +

NDP ONE OF FIVE IN THE U.S. WITH AI PILOT PROGRAM



Notre Dame Prep's groundbreaking engineering and empathy course has been tabbed by Project Invent to create an artificial intelligence pilot program that will be tested along with four other schools across the country.

According to science teacher Louise Palardy, Notre Dame Prep's STEM specialist and manager of the school's robotics center, the school was chosen due to its early adoption of the Project Invent pedagogy and the fact that the engineering and empathy class has experienced a more than 150-percent increase in female student participation over the last year.

In addition to Notre Dame Prep, Bostonia Global School in El Cajon, Calif., Claremont International High School in New York City, Jordan High School in Los Angeles, and the Young Women's College Preparatory Academy in Houston, Tex., will be undergoing the same pilot program.

Currently in its fifth year, NDP's engineering and empathy course, which is based on the Project Invent academic model, remains an elective for the school's science students.

KILLER BEES ADD TO LEGACY WITH RECENT CHAMPIONSHIP

On Nov. 23, Notre Dame Prep's Killer Bees team not only competed in the Oakland County Competitive Robotics Association (OCCRA) championship event at Seaholm High School in Birmingham, they won the event and were named OCCRA champions. It's a huge honor for the team, especially since OCCRA is a fully student-led robotics program.

The win put an exclamation point on a stellar fall OCCRA season that saw the Bees earn five awards in total.

OCCRA is a two-month full-contact robotics competition, typically in the fall, where students build and control 120-pound robo-gladiators to achieve specific physical goals while opponents try to stop them. It's worth noting that Jim Zondag, the Stellantis engineer and longtime mentor of NDP's Killer Bees robotics team, started OCCRA specifically to help promote robotics in Oakland County.



According to NDP senior Ethan Dhomnic, who currently serves as club president for the Killer Bees FIRST Robotics team, OCCRA participants not only learn practical applicable knowledge, but also the skills of working collaboratively in groups, along with teamwork, good sportsmanship, and quick thinking on their feet.

"Our victory at the OCCRA Championship at Seaholm was exhilarating," said Dhomnic. "It was an awesome ending to an incredibly fun and enriching season. We had a blast winning with our alliance partner, team 469, Las Guerrillas, from International Academy. We also learned a lot by stepping up to face the season's challenges, working together effectively, and ultimately producing an award-winning robot."

HUGE NOVEMBER FOR NDP ROBOTICS

An extremely busy month of November for Notre Dame Prep's VRC teams yields a number of



successful tourneys that included qualifications for the big state championship in February.

The following summarizes the three most recent qualifier tournaments with teams from Notre Dame Prep:

Team 3333S, "Devious Shady," consisting of 8th graders Sam Tyler and Tommy Higdon and 7th grader Alex Lark, traveled to the Grandville High Stakes Tournament for middle school, held Nov. 2 at the Grandville Robotics Competition Center in Grandville, Mich., with 20 other teams in their age group.

According to Jerry Palardy, who mentors NDP's VRC participation, it was the team's first full VRC tournament, and they did not fail to impress.

"They finished fourth in qualifications, got picked by the No.-1 alliance, and won their quarterfinal match, 32-0, but then had to bow out in the semifinals on a tough call," Palardy said. "But their day wasn't over, and they won the Design Award for having a great notebook and nailing their team interview. They also won the Robot Skill Champion award with a combined score of 27."

Palardy said that winning those awards earned them a bid to the Michigan state championship in late February also to be held at Grandville.

NDP SENIOR SIGNS TO PLAY SOCCER AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

In an event held Nov. 13 in the main school gymnasium in front of her peers, senior student-athlete Emily Teolis from Notre Dame Prep signed a national letter of intent to play soccer at the college level. She will be attending Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Mich., in the fall.

High school athletic highlights and honors for Teolis:

- Three-Year Varsity Letter Winner
- 2024 All-State Honorable Mention
- 2024 All-Region
- 2023, 2024 All-District
- 2022, 2023 Team District Champion
- 2022 Team Regional Champion (Accomplishments as of November 13, 2024)

SOARING LIKE AN EAGLE



Kevin Carter Jr., a junior at Notre Dame Prep, has earned the rank of Eagle Scout, the highest award given by the Boy Scouts of America. According to BSA, only 4 percent of the nearly 3 million scouts nationwide earn Eagle Scout status.

Carter's achievement brings the number of NDP Eagle Scouts to well more than 20 in the past few years, joining recent alums Aaron McGhee NDP'22 and his brother, Evan NDP'22, who became Eagle Scouts in 2022.

For his Eagle project, Carter built an 8 foot x 8 foot octagon balance deck that was installed at the Subiaco Youth Retreat House, a Catholic organization sponsored by the Benedictine monks located in Oxford, Michigan. He said the balance deck, which will be used for team-building exercises for students on retreat, resulted from a conversation with a Subiaco youth leader.

FLOURISHING AT NOTRE DAME

Notre Dame Prep senior Erin Connelly has been nominated for a "Good

Citizen" award and scholarship that will be presented Jan. 14 by the Piety Hill chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The ceremony, which will take place in Birmingham, Mich., and include 15 other seniors from area schools also nominated for the state-level scholarship from DAR.

"I was honestly so excited to hear the news," said Connelly, who was encouraged to participate by NDP school counselor Vlado Salic. "I could not stop smiling and was very grateful that school administrators had recognized me for an honor this big."

Salic noted that Connelly has been a model student since arriving on campus as a ninth grader and deserves to win the award.

"Erin is a poster child for good citizenship, compassion, and a role model for her peers," he said. "She is magnetic with energy and passion when discussing intellectual ideas and social improvement. I also love that she believes in doing the right thing and doing things right the first time as she demonstrates this through seemingly endless grit and gumption."

NDP EARNS NATION'S HIGHEST **RECOGNITION IN AP SCHOOL HONOR ROLL**

The College Board recently announced that Notre Dame Preparatory School once again has been named to the Advanced Placement Program School Honor Roll, earning a rare Platinum distinction. Last year, NDP also received Platinum status from the College Board.

The AP School Honor Roll, which last school year replaced the previous AP District Honor Roll, offers schools recognition across four levels of distinction: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum, which typically is earned by only about 2 percent of schools nationwide.

"This is a big deal for our school or for any school getting such an honor," said Kim Anderson, upper school principal. "It's still another great indicator of how well we are doing as a school and that we continue to

feature phenomenal teachers who ensure our outstanding curriculum remains accessible for all students."

The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools whose AP programs are delivering results for students while broadening access. Schools can earn this recognition annually based on criteria that reflect a commitment to increasing college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credit, and maximizing college readiness.

JUNIOR CHOSEN FOR CITY YOUTH COUNCIL

For more than 20 years, young people in Rochester Hills have had the opportunity to sit on the city council dais, sharing their experiences and getting an up-close look at local government. Students accepted on the Rochester Hills Youth Council represent each city council district and typically are in grades 9 through

You can now add the name Lucas DiGrande, currently a junior at Notre Dame Prep, to that roster of young residents who have served or are serving as a member.

The voluntary council is made up of dedicated young leaders from area schools and provides them with the opportunity to participate in various civic initiatives and play a role in advising city officials on matters important to young people in Rochester Hills.



For DiGrande, it was a mix of excitement and relief when he found out he'd been accepted on the council for the current school year.

"I was excited to have the opportunity

to make a positive impact on my community and take my first step into local government and community service," he said. "The application process was pretty extensive, so seeing my efforts pay off was incredibly rewarding."

According to the city, youth members serve for one-year terms with the opportunity for reappointment. Terms run concurrent with the school year: Sept. 1 through Aug. 31. Applicants for the current term must live in Rochester Hills and be enrolled in high school for the 2024-2025 school year to be eligible.

ACING THE MISSION

ACEing Autism is a volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children with autism grow through the sport of tennis. It was founded in the summer of 2008 in Boston, Mass., as a familyrun organization that relies on the invaluable efforts of its volunteers and supporters.



Count Notre Dame Prep freshman Marisa Bitonti as both a volunteer and supporter.

An avid tennis player herself since she was very young, Bitonti found out about the organization during one of her tournaments.

"I got involved with ACEing Autism when I was playing a USTA tournament and I saw a regional program taking place and thought I'd really like to start a program in our area," said the Clarkston resident.

She conducted more research and was soon on her way.

"I reached out to the headquarters, which now is in Los Angeles, and discussed everything," she added.

"We had various Zoom calls about recruitment, strategic planning and marketing."

It all culminated Sept. 8 when Bitonti launched ACEing Autism Clarkston. a six-week program that saw a remarkable turnout for the opening day. She's hoping to manage and grow it for at least another couple of years and would like to "recruit" other NDP students in the effort.

Meanwhile, Bitonti, who came to Notre Dame Prep from St. Joseph Catholic School in Lake Orion, said she is looking forward to the rest of her first year of high school and plans to play tennis for the Irish in the spring.

"My first months of school have been great so far," she said. "I'm loving NDP!"

THREE NAMED NATIONAL MERIT **SCHOLARSHIP SEMIFINALISTS**

Notre Dame Prep seniors Ethan Dhominic, Marc Farah and Mary LaRocca found out in early September that they have been named semifinalists in the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program. It's the first phase of a multi-step process to award college scholarships totaling more than \$26 million to 6,870 high school seniors nationwide.

The pool of semifinalists represents less than 1 percent of all U.S. high school seniors, said a news release from the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.



Also, according to the release, "semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. About 95 percent of the semifinalists are expected to attain finalist standing, and approximately half of the finalists

will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the merit scholar title.

"To become a finalist, the semifinalist and a high school official must submit a detailed scholarship application, in which they provide information about the semifinalist's academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment and honors and awards received.

"A semifinalist must have an outstanding academic record throughout high school, be endorsed and recommended by a high school official, write an essay and earn SAT or ACT scores that confirm the student's earlier performance on the qualifying test."

WINNER OF THIRD ANNUAL WRITING SCHOLARSHIP AWARD **ANNOUNCED**



When Kaden Khami NDP'26 was rushing with his family to make their return flight home from a recent trip, he decided to check email on his phone. He's glad he did because the rising sophomore found out he earned the third annual Michael J. Kotzan Creative Writing Scholarship Award based on a creative writing piece he submitted last spring.

"I was overjoyed," he said. "I stopped in my tracks and told my parents right away. I was beyond excited and grateful for the scholarship, but seeing how proud my parents were was something else entirely. It was very rewarding to see my hard work come to fruition."

Khami's writing submission, called "The Sandman's Bridge," was judged as the top entry out of those submitted by then-ninth graders at Notre Dame Prep. The 2024 edition of the writing

award was based on creating a short story, 1,200 to 1,500 words in length, using only a picture prompt," said Kim Anderson, NDP's upper school principal, when the competition was announced in February. "The subject can be one of the student's choosing and it can take form in any genre: fantasy, science fiction, humor, romance, mystery, etc."

The selection committee was comprised of Notre Dame Prep faculty and members of the Kotzan family.

NOTRE DAME PREP VOLLEYBALL TEAM GETS NATIONAL HONORS FOR ACADEMICS



The 2024 Notre Dame Prep volleyball team was honored for academics by the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) and its sponsor INTENT, a tech, information and internet company. It's the 17th year in a row for the Irish, who ended last season in the MHSAA district final.

According to Betty Wroubel, Notre Dame Prep's head coach and school athletic director, no other high school team in Michigan currently boasts a longer continuous streak of earning the AVCA Team Academic Award.

AVCA said that college and high school teams that receive the team academic award must display excellence in the classroom during the school year by maintaining at least a 3.30 cumulative team grade-point average on a 4.0 scale. Notre Dame Prep's team scored a cumulative 3.730 GPA during the last school year.

In November 2023, NDP, which finished the season with a 40-9-2 record, fell to Orchard Lake St. Mary's Prep in the district final, 25-18, 25-12 and 28-26.

Wroubel said she is proud of her team's accomplishments both in the gym and in the classroom. Plus, she said team members put in long hours volunteering in the surrounding communities.

"The fact that year-in and year-out, our girls perform with distinction in both volleyball and academics is another clear example of our school's mission and the kind of student-athletes we have at Notre Dame Prep," she said.

A record number of volleyball programs earned the AVCA Team Academic Award, according to AVCA. More than 1,400 collegiate and high school volleyball programs maintained a yearlong grade-point average of 3.3 on a 4.0 scale (or 4.1 on a 5.0 scale), to earn the award for their classroom excellence during the recently completed academic year.

"We are pleased that the record-setting success of the 2023-24 season on the court has extended to the classroom, too, as evidenced by more programs earning the Team Academic Award than ever before," says AVCA CEO Jaime Gordon. "This is a great example of how committed our coaches are when it comes to helping their players reach their full potential as both students and athletes."

RESEARCH BY UPPER SCHOOL STUDENT CELEBRATED



Michael Hicks, Ph.D, is the George and Frances Ball distinguished professor of economics and director of the Center for Business and Economic Research in the Miller College of Business at Ball State University.

Recently, in a post on X, formerly Twitter, Hicks said the following after reading a research paper written by thensophomore NDP student Sehaj Gill:

"As a senior in high school, I won a contest for original research and saw my paper published in a small, regional history journal," he said. "Thought I was a prodigy. This paper blows away all child prodigies. From a sophomore at Notre Dame Prep."

What Hicks was referring to was Gill's paper, published in April of 2023 in the International Journal of Social Science Research and Review (ISSN 2700-2497), titled "Illuminate: Relationship Between Light Pollution, Quality of Life, and Innovation in Selected U.S. Cities." It was the first of three she's posted recently in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

Gill, who studies in NDP's International Baccalaureate Diploma Program, also manages the school's Insight Initiative Research Club, which recently hosted two conferences for young researchers. She believes that doing objective research and communicating effectively are important skills for everyone to learn, especially young people soon to be heading to college.

SAVE THE DATE: IRISH DAY OF GIVING

Calling all parents, grandparents, students, staff, alumni and friends. We invite you to mark your calendars for Friday, March 14, 2025, as we celebrate the distinctive nature of Notre Dame Prep and participate in our second annual Day of Giving. This special day is more than just fundraising; it's an opportunity to celebrate everything we cherish about our school--from the arts to athletics, academics to clubs.

Our Day of Giving is a chance for you to make a difference in the lives of our students and teachers. Whether you choose to make a donation, challenge friends and classmates, or support one of our many initiatives, such as the Gateway scholarship program, your generosity will have a lasting impact. Your involvement makes a difference and helps us continue our mission of providing a transformative education that empowers our students to excel academically and spiritually.

Last year's Irish Day of Giving raised over \$80,000 from close to 400 donations. Stay tuned for more details about the day. +

NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL

Class of 1967 58th Reunion

Save the Date: Oct. 25, 2025

American Polish Century Club, 33204 Maple Lane Drive, Sterling Heights, MI 48312

Contact Mike Maraone at 248-787-7386 for more information.

PONTIAC CATHOLIC

Class of 1975 50th Reunion

Save the Date: June 21, 2025

Sylvan Lake Community Center 2456 Pontiac Drive Sylvan Lake, MI 48320

Email: newbykl@yahoo.com for more information.





Notre Dame Prep mourns the loss of our dear brothers and sisters and invites our community to join with us in prayer.

1950-1960

Joan Ruth Horton SF'52 | July 26, 2024

1961-1985

Jack Accardo ND'73 | Nov. 26, 2024

Dennis Adams ND'64 | May 16, 2024

Dwight Adas ND'64 | Dec. 15, 2023

Sherry Avenell Balinski, wife of Adrian Balinski ND'83 | Oct. 17, 2024

Rick Brown ND'64 | Feb. 24, 2024

Richard DeMuro ND'71 | Jan. 24, 2024

Matthew Elwart ND'74 | Feb. 16, 2024

Ken Gonko ND'72 | Sept. 18, 2024

James Kouri ND'69 | May 24, 2024

Mike Traskai ND'71 | June 10, 2024

Lisa M. Tribuzio, wife of Joe Tribuzio ND '81 | May 30, 2024

Donna (Golembiewski) Wilhelm, wife of Robert Wilhem ND'64 | Oct. 7, 2023

Alfred Wroblewski Sr., beloved father of Alfred Wroblewski Jr. ND '83, John Wroblewski ND'96, father-inlaw of Nino DiPilla ND'79 and Michael Pudlik ND'86 June 9, 2024

1986-2024

Brandon France ND'01 | Aug. 30, 2024

Michael Pudlik, beloved father of Michael W. Pudlik **ND'86** | June 29, 2024

Paul Nahra, father of Paul Nahra ND'93 | Sept. 14, 2024

May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

If you would like our community to remember a loved one in prayer, please email prayers@ndprep.org.

Notre Dame Prep: (NDP); Notre Dame High School: (ND); Pontiac Catholic: (PC); Oakland Catholic: (OC); St. Frederick: (SF); St. Michael: (SM)

NOTRE DAME HIGH SCHOOL

Carey Grzadzinski ND'72

retired from Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory in 2016. Bought a new boat, truck and camper, traveled from Key West to Arctic Circle twice, Atlantic to Pacific twice, and Nova Scotia to Yuma. Now I'm held up at my ranch in Southeast Idaho with a few critters and running my music shop restoring and building violins and cellos.

John Hart ND'74 retired in 2023 from more than 42 years as a commercial lending executive. His wife retired from her 45-year career in nursing earlier this year. The couple celebrated by taking a cruise in March. They also celebrated 39 years of marriage in June and spent a week in New York. John says, "Our children are doing well in their careers. My daughter is a nurse midwife working at Henry Ford Health and my son is a senior manager at Plante Moran. We are enjoying our retirement and taking care of my 96-year-old mother-in-law who lives with us. Wishing all the best to my fellow Class of 1974 and the Notre Dame community."

Thomas Krawczak ND'72 has been married to Sheila (Rhoades) for 41 years. They have two sons and three granddaughters. He enjoys hunting, fishing, and living the dream. The couple lives in rural Jackson County. Thomas is retired after a 30-year career on the radio in Albion, Hastings, Jackson and Lansing (inspired by Fr. Bryson, the "rock and roll priest" of Notre Dame High School). "Hello to Steve Heiser, Greg Ulewicz, John Schroeder and the rest of my buddies in the class of 1972."





William Lucas ND'73 has been retired for one year and survived a heart attack in 2023. He is doing well and enjoys skiing and living in Colorado.

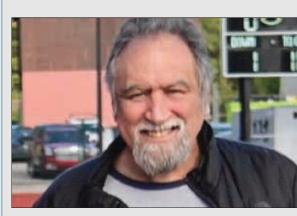
Michael Maraone ND'67 has enjoyed retirement from executive financial leadership positions that extended over a career of more than 40 years. Retirement affords more quality time with family, four grandchildren, traveling by land and sea to domestic and international destinations, golf and genealogy pursuits. He relocated from Novi to Rochester in 2022. He

has been married to his wife, Pam, for the past 49 years, and is looking forward to visiting Italy in 2025 for the couple's 50th anniversary! He is also eager for the class's 58th reunion to be held on Oct. 25, 2025. To keep classmates updated on the reunion's developments, please email maraone.mf@gmail. com.

Neil P. Murphy ND '68 has been a practicing attorney since 1984 with an office in Lakeside Mall.

Timothy Nawrocki ND'67

and Brenda Nawrocki became grandparents for the first time two years ago and recently welcomed another grandchild! Both are boys named Jackson and Liam. Tim is now retired from civilian dental practice after 32 years of community service and is retired from the U.S. Navy Dental Corps Reserves as a captain (O-6) and is enjoying flower gardening as his main pastime. Tim has achieved Advanced Master Gardener status with MSU! He is actively helping in planning a Class of 1967 reunion for all of his classmates in 2025. All the Nawrocki family is doing well.





John Saba ND'75 said since retiring from teaching in 2020 due to

cancer, he is now, by God's grace and mercy, five years cancer free. "I am able to get back in the classroom as a substitute teacher, so that is what I'm presently doing. Many fond memories and great wishes for my fellow classmates from the 1975 class of Notre Dame, especially those from our football team."

Craig Schoenherr ND'73 retired two years ago after 43 years at O'Reilly Rancilio law firm. "I couldn't be happier! Retire ASAP and enjoy life!"

Jim VanSlambrook ND'66 and Holly VanSlambrook have been married for 50 years on Feb. 23, 2024. The couple has three children and six grandchildren between the ages of 10 and 17. "We are truly blessed!"

Dennis Wahl ND'62 is retired and living in Royal Palm Beach, Fla.

Brian Walby ND'68 says, "Hello to all my 1968 classmates. I am living in Shelby Township. My wife, Sandy, son Brian, and daughter Michelle live locally with four great-grandkids. Let's get a reunion!"

NOTRE DAME PREP

Sarah Brown NDP'01 is the executive director of her nonprofit legal services organization, Mountain State Justice, balancing management duties with a consumer law practice. Her three kids keep her busy, mostly on the sidelines of a soccer field. Sarah also remains active in the

community, including as a board member for the local YWCA. This summer, she introduced her West Virginian husband and children to the beauty of Michigan's UP with an epic trip that included two nights of backpacking at Pictured Rocks.



Christelle (Penkala) David NDP'02 and Bertalan David III welcomed Oliver Michael David on Oct. 15, 2024. He joins siblings Bertalan IV (6) and Evelyn (3).

Katelyn (Obear) Castle NDP'13 graduated with her master's degree in school counseling from Central Michigan. She currently works for Ferndale Public Schools serving as a school counselor.

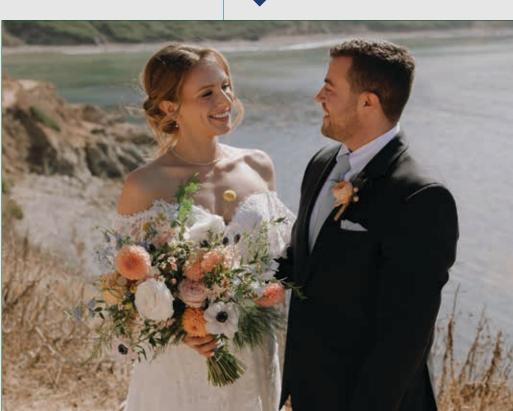




Stephanie Ketty NDP'01 made her mark in October 2024, showcasing her latest work with a three-part tour at some of New York's most acclaimed locations for emerging artists. Her first stop was with Visionary Projects a global art platform, followed by Art Walks 2024 hosted by Max Mara that supports a powerful mission "artist-as-activist", raising money for New York's Coalition for the Homeless, and finally the launch of her incredible residence at the iconic NoMo Soho, where she will display 16 works across the hotel for guests to enjoy and purchase.

Lisa Savagian NDP'12 married her soulmate, Joey Dennis, on Sept. 28, 2024. The happy couple received the sacrament at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic





Church in Hermosa Beach, Calif. They are both research scientists living in San Diego, Calif.

Daniel Koch NDP'15 recently completed his master's degree in electrical and computer engineering from Purdue University and achieved five years of service working as an electrical component engineer at Caterpillar Inc. in Peoria, Ill.



Maria Mikulec NDP'13 began a career with wigs and makeup for professional theatre after graduating. She is a proud member of IATSE (International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees) and has worked with some of the biggest Broadway national tours ("Wicked," "The Lion King," "Hamilton," "Les Miserables," to name a few). She's also been doing special effects makeup for haunted attractions and had her work featured on Prime Video, Fox 2 News, and The Detroit News. Most recently Maria designed wigs and makeup for "Alyce," collaborating with NDP creatives past and present.

David Greenwell NDP'20 and Valerie Nowosielski NDP'21 got engaged this past May.

Sajel Nuwamanya (Tremblay) NDP'08 moved to Chicago to join the faculty at Lawndale Christian Health Center Family Medicine Residency.

Sarah Schlunegger (Yahrmatter) NDP'09 and her husband, Neil, welcomed their second baby into the world on March 23, 2024.

Tyler Yanik NDP'12 and Abby Yanik NDP'16 welcomed their first child, James Joseph (J.J.) Yanik on Nov. 1, 2024. Baby JJ, mom and dad are doing great.





PONTIAC CATHOLIC

Daniel Nackerman PC'75

graduated from Michigan State University and devoted his career to designing new communities and building housing for the poor and unhoused. He served as CEO/Executive Director at four agencies in California and Utah. Daniel has been married for 42 years to Ann Long PC'75. They have five kids.

ST. MICHAEL

Hervie Lavoie SM'65 was awarded the Medical Fitness Association's highest honor at this year's award ceremony on Nov. 19. The Hank **Boerner Pioneer** Award is presented to an individual who has significantly advanced the medical fitness industry.



ST. FREDERICK

Frank Palopoli SF'59 graduated from Michigan State University in 1963. Joined General Motors in 1968. Worked in Canada and England. Managed three different General Motors plants before promotion to manufacturing manager for North American Operations. He attended Harvard University and retired in 2000. Frank has homes in Michigan and Florida, and has been married for 62 years. He has three children, and five grandchildren. His wife, Colette Schafer Palopoli, graduated from St. Frederick in 1960.

John Soderberg SF'57 just opened an antique store to go along with his bookstore. "Just can't stop living the good life. Thank you Sister Emily Joseph."

Alumni unite

Grads from NDP and heritage schools return to campus for weekend bash

The Notre Dame Prep community "shook down the thunder" on Giddings Road in October as more than 300 alumni joined students and staff to cheer on the Fighting Irish during a thrilling homecoming weekend. Festivities capped off with a 49-14 varsity football win over the Ferndale Eagles.

Those in attendance included graduates of Notre Dame Prep, Notre Dame High School, Pontiac Catholic, Oakland Catholic, St. Michael and St. Frederick High School.

"It was such a fun evening to come together as one community in support of our outstanding student-athletes," said Elizabeth Crosson, director of alumni relations. "Seeing our alumni and their families back on campus is what makes homecoming so special."

Families gathered at the Fr. Colin House for the traditional pregame tailgate featuring a variety of activities including bounce houses, face painting, photo ops and camaraderie, followed by dinner in the Alumni Tent at William Kozyra Alumni Field. Those in attendance also received complimentary alumni T-shirts.

In addition to tailgating, this year, the Notre Dame Alumni Association brought back its popular 5K Fun Run on Saturday. The event featured more than 130 runners ranging in age from elementary school to 75

and older.







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Many alumni, parents and friends are already supporting the next generation of students by including Notre Dame Prep in their estate plans.

BEQUESTS THROUGH A WILL OR TRUST

One of the easiest ways to create a legacy with Notre Dame Prep is through a bequest in your will or trust. You can leave a specific amount, percentage or the residue of your estate.

BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS

Naming the school the beneficiary of a retirement account, insurance policy or bank or brokerage account only takes a few moments and allows flexibility if your plans change in the future.

