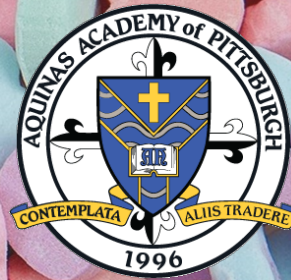


The Dumb Ox

February 2025



What's Behind this Door? Aquinas Academy Past and Present

By: Felicity Koble

Beginning with six rented classrooms in a parish CCD building, Aquinas Academy's thirty years as a school have seen outstanding growth—not only in attendance, but also in campus size. Built in the 1940s, the Aquinas campus was the original home of St. Catherine's Parish (now Sts. Martha and Mary). Despite a plethora of building campaigns, three of the original buildings remain, leaving newcomers and veteran Aquinas students wondering: what exactly is behind these old doors?

Between the Rhodora and the lower school lies the Early Years building with its colorful glass windows and painted porch. While many students remember it as preschool and kindergarten, once upon Aquinas it was a convent. "The first classroom I taught in," Mr. Flynn said, "was a nun's bedroom." The building later became the high school in the early 2000s, when St. Catherine's moved to Wildwood Road. "Believe it or not," Mrs. Mitros said, "I taught in Mrs. Heisler's old classroom." Even the basement boiler room (christened the Dungeon) was a classroom (and a cafeteria) once. When asked to name the weirdest space he had ever taught in, Mr. Malchano asserted that "the Dungeon definitely takes the cake." Mr. Flynn agreed that the Dungeon had "the worst chalkboard ever." Today the Early Years building boasts various resources for younger students including a library, expanded preschool, and Atrium.

Similar to the Early Years building, the rectory sits in front of its counterpart. "The priest was still living there [when the school started]," Mrs. Mitros explained, "The back porch was his bedroom." Once the parish moved, the back porch, living room, and front wing, that Mr. Malchano affectionately branded as "Hagrid's Hut," became classrooms. The basement became the "Physics Cave" and Mr. B's art room for a few years. The first floor housed everything from Mr. Malchano's AP Euro class in the Back Porch to Mrs. Sukits's second grade in the front. These days, the rectory hosts the popular Back Porch Café, the maintenance office, storage, and the Prop Shop. Nevertheless, the rectory is slightly past prime, and Mr. Dechamps shared that the "the next building to come down is the rectory" as Aquinas expands.

Last and certainly not least is the chapel and Rhodora. Built in 1948, the chapel was officially St. Catherine's Parish until 2004. Soon after, Aquinas renovated the basement to create a new high school space in 2006, then built the Rhodora in 2008. Prior to this, Mr. Dechamps remembered playing basketball in other local gyms. He hopes to build a new gym in the future and to improve Dolan Field (built in 2003). In the near future, however, he said that he is "really excited to launch the chapel campaign," and provide much needed expansions and renovations.

Aquinas has *never* stopped changing—just look at all the Memorare campaigns. "It was always a question of space," Mrs. Mitros explained, "how can we utilize what we have to get a little more out of it?" The last ten years saw the construction of a brand new high school and lower school building in 2014 and 2023 respectively, linking the Aquinas community under one roof for the first time since the 1990s. Despite the continual fluctuation of the campus, the mission and character of Aquinas Academy has stayed constant. Aquinas students can count on truth, beauty, and goodness in their classes whether in a dungeon or a state-of-the-art STEM lab. Mrs. Mitros agreed, "It really is a great story."



Editors

Anne Dolan

Alice Rothfus

Publisher

Sam McGowan

Writers

Caitlyn Abbett

Madison Bradley

Brynn Burnsworth

Lucy Flynn

Jack Hoerster

Abigail Irvin

Ashlin Knox

Felicity Koble

Claire McMann

Katherine Repasky

Alexa Risdon

Julianna Shemer

Laila Tuffiash

Guest Writer

Clara Yuo

Aquinas: The Winter Seasons

By: Alexa Risdon



It has been an exciting season for Aquinas winter sports. The girls' basketball team has had a successful season with a section record of 8-3. Tess Duer, junior and captain of the team, stated, "With some girls graduating or not returning, a lot of people questioned if we would be successful this year." She is proud of the hard work and effort her teammates have put in this season. Mr. Kur-

zawski accepted the position as the new head coach of the girls' team. Tess noted that Coach Kurzawski "has a really good balance of being serious and trying to win, all while reminding us that Jesus is at the center of all of it. He also wants us to have fun."

The boys' basketball team has an outstanding section record of 8-1. With some of their best games against higher division schools such as Carlynton, South Park, and Springdale, the boys were leading in the WPIAL ranking for highest scoring. Jonah Burchill, a starting junior, mentioned, "Jake [Guillen] and Sam [Duer] are our leading scorers. Richie, Jack, Ian off the bench along with Clayton as a starter, are all sophomores who contribute immensely." Jonah also commended the team captains, Jake Guillen and David Zaharko, for providing leadership, and always helping



their teammates on and off the court. The boys are looking forward to a possible run at states with Nazareth Prep, Neighborhood Academy, and Serra Catholic being their main competition.

The fencing team has been working hard all season. Meghan McGee, a junior on the team, brought up how those two and a half to three hour practices can be quite beneficial. She says, "Since there are so many aspects to fencing, we have time to work on footwork and bladework and combine them...and we do have time for recovery." The fencers have a few injuries, with two of the four girls out, but the team is working to make a comeback for playoffs. Meghan voiced her opinions on the playoffs, saying, "I'm a little worried about the team with all our injuries. The newer players are doing really well, eliminating some competition. Overall, I like our chances." The fencing team has had a great season so far, and is looking forward to finishing off strong. Aquinas' winter sports teams have had some great seasons, and the successes will continue down the stretch. Go Crusaders!

Cowboy Boots in the Courtroom: Meet the New Mock Trial Coach

By: Clara Yuo

The high school mock trial team has added a new face to its coaching staff. Mr. TJ Belsterling, easily recognizable by his authentic cowboy boots, has become a regular presence in the courtroom during trial and in the basement during practices as an assistant to head coach Mr. Wax.

Mr. Belsterling brings years of experience and success in Mock Trial competition. Coached by Mr. Wax at Quigley Catholic, Mr. Belsterling won three PA Mock Trial state titles. In 2016, he led Quigley to a 7th place overall finish at Nationals and earned a Top Ten Attorney award amongst all Nationals competitors. Mr. Wax praised Mr. Belsterling's success, saying, "In high school, he proved his expertise for four straight years. He was outstanding in every role that he was in. As a witness he couldn't be broken; as an attorney, he couldn't be outdone."

In addition to debate and Mock Trial, Mr. Belsterling has long held a passion for landscaping. While still a junior in high school, he started his company, Daily Landscaping, in order to pay for his college education.

After graduating from Quigley Catholic in 2016, Mr. Belsterling attended the University of Dayton, where he triple majored in English, Catechesis, and 7th-12th Grade Education. Mr. Belsterling then taught English, Religion, and Mock Trial for one year at a Dayton high school before moving back to the Pittsburgh area. He revived his work at Daily Landscaping while simultaneously serving as the director of Middle School and Young Adult Ministry for Holy Spirit Parish.



In 2023, Mr. Belsterling married his wife, Elisabeth Belsterling, and also turned his career in a new direction. By this time, Daily Landscaping had expanded into a mid-sized company with over eight employees. Mr. Belsterling therefore chose to resign his position at Holy Spirit Parish to focus exclusively on his rapidly growing business.

Having purchased a home only fifteen minutes from Aquinas Academy, Mr. Belsterling was eager to accept the role of Mock Trial assistant coach when Mr. Wax offered it to him. However, Mr. Belsterling says that coaching "isn't nearly as good as competing." He constantly threatens to "shave and come back" when the attorneys make mistakes in trials.

Mr. Belsterling hopes that Mock Trial can teach students lifelong skills which will last beyond the courtroom. He says, "You can make [the story] whatever you want it to be in the courtroom. I hope Mock Trial helps young people understand that there is nothing stopping you from doing anything you want."

With a large number of freshmen joining the Mock Trial team, and lofty ambitions for the returning seniors, the team has been grateful for Mr. Belsterling's additional expertise and constructive criticism. Freshman Peter Koble stated, "Mr. Belsterling is instrumental and much appreciated, guiding us to be our best in and out of the courtroom. Junior Luke Crawford said, "He'll say 'good job,' and then rip you apart for five minutes. But he is a great coach."

Mr. Wax spoke readily when asked about Mr. Belsterling's character. "He is the most accomplished person who has ever worked with me. Not only that, I can think of no one better to be a model for young adults."

Stylin' in Spirit

By: Ashlin Knox

Every year, Aquinas participates in an annual spirit week leading up to the high school winter formal. Spirit week wraps up the stressful season of midterms, and heralds the beginning of quarter three. This year the theme for spirit week was "The Hope of Glory" and involved many fun-filled activities and dress themes each day.

Starting off the week strong, all students dressed like true Yinzers wearing their Pittsburgh merch. Lower and middle school students went out bowling and made lasting memories. On the other hand, the high school started their morning on freshly resurfaced ice. Junior Henry Hynds said he "liked skating because it was fun to do with friends, and the food was really good." Mr. Volkwein said, "I do feel like fewer kids skated than in years past," but luckily there was a wonderful display of snacks organized by parents for the students to enjoy. Sophomore John Dolan enjoyed ice skating because not only does he play ice hockey, but he "had a great time slinging walkers into everyone, mostly Henry though."

Then on Tuesday, the feast of our patron St. Thomas Aquinas, students dressed to the theme of country v. country club, and celebrated a special Mass with incense. The theme included the common dress of jeans and a flannel v. khakis and a polo. Junior Louis Bentivegna enjoyed the theme because "it was something I could do easily." Adding to the excitement, Tom's Coffee Truck made an appearance. As soon as the bell rang, there was a rush of students around the sidewalk forming a line out in the winter snowfall. Despite the efforts of a hard working barista, so many orders inevitably took a long time to fill.

Additionally on Tuesday, senior Katherine Repasky and junior Ava Lefnesky, who are the academic and ambassador prefects, organized Family Feud as a fun activity for the high school color teams to compete in at the end of the day. Two teachers from the math department, Mrs. Crawford and Mr. Volkwein, hosted the game. Mrs. Crawford said, "hosting it was the best day of my life," and Mr. Volkwein believes, "Aquinas should do it again in the future."

Next up was Wednesday, with the intriguing dress theme of rhyme without reason. There were many amazing duos, trios, and whole faculty sections dedicated to great costumes. This was Mr. Volkwein's favorite theme for the week mainly

because, "the whole math department did it together," whereas "country v. country club was a day where everyone already had some clothes for it." An example of some of the costumes was a handful of the female faculty dressed up as "Queens in Jeans," with tiaras and jeans. Despite looking fabulous in her tiara, Miss Ali McGrath said "I deeply regret it."

The week wrapped up with Thursday and Friday's themes of surfin safari and blue and grey day. On Thursday, senior and fine arts prefect, Brynn Burnsworth, hosted the long awaited yearly talent show in which students through middle and high school could display their talents. Brynn worked with senior J.J. Ortiz, Mr. Salinas, and Mr. Austin. She said it was a pleasure to work with them because "it was nice to have a lot of support and feedback all the time." Mr. Austin said, "there were some great acts, and the band, the Odyssey, played songs that brought me back." He added that the "Yuo family was super fun, and the middle school acts brought a lot of enthusiasm as well." Brynn reiterated that the acts were "really impressive, and the middle schoolers were brave." The talent show was a definite highlight to the school year of 2025. Finally on Friday, students dressed down in comfy blue and gray attire, and spent crusader period hyping up their friends at the pep rally that afternoon.



God's Kindness Spreads

By: Lucy Flynn

The Red Door is a ministry in downtown Pittsburgh that offers help to those in need by providing them with clothes, food, and beverages. Once every month, Aquinas helps the organization distribute items to the homeless. The Red Door ministry has been around since the Great Depression and volunteers serve two meals every day, six days a week. The Red Door relies on donations and funds to keep this charity going, and they expect nothing in return for their kindness. Anne Dolan has been serving at the Red Door for three years. She believes that volunteering helps you focus on the gifts that you have and can share with others. Anne says, "When you serve others, that is the only thing that is in your mind; it helps you be in the moment. The Red Door is a tangible way to help the community."

Jack Hoerster, the service prefect, has also been an active participant in the Red Door. He sets up dates once every month where Aquinas has the opportunity to participate in this ministry. He says that one of his favorite things about coordinating the Red Door visits is seeing Aquinas give back to the community. Jack states, "I can only hope that everyone else loves it as much as I do. It's normally on Saturdays from 9-12 where people help to make sandwiches, pack some lunches, and help serve beverages to those in need. This wonderful service not only gives to those in need but helps bring about meaningful connections between people."

Another mission similar to this is Gift of Mary, a community organization serving homeless women. This ministry offers food, clothing, and products for women. The missionaries who work at the Gift of Mary help protect and heal homeless women who are in distress. This ministry offers refuge to all homeless women and provides a sense of community and faith.

This month is all about love and spreading God's kindness which is what these ministries are all about. It is always a blessing to help those in need and give back to the community to make people's lives better.



Aquinas Marches For Life

By: Madison Bradley

On January 24th, 2025, members of the Aquinas community attended the March for Life in Washington D.C. This march is a peaceful protest for preborn babies' rights. It has been held annually since 1974 in response to the Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion. It was started so pro-life supporters could effectively express their views and opinions to others. Some Aquinas students attended this year's march on the day off from school. Senior Anne Dolan remarked, "I loved attending the March again. I went freshman year, and it was incredible to recreate that experience. Seeing friends and family I knew was so fun. Of course, advocating for the rights of the preborn is such an important cause; I feel honored to be able to partake in such an amazing event."

One way influential views are shared publicly at this event is through the speakers. March attendees stated that this year's speakers were very inspirational. They included vice president J.D. Vance and many others. One that really stood out to was pro-life social media influencer Beverly Jacobson, who founded the organization Mama Bear Care. Her speech was about her daughter Verity, who was prenatally diagnosed with Edwards Syndrome. Ms. Jacobson spoke about how she was not excited about her pregnancy due to the diagnosis, but after hearing how the next step would be abortion, something awoke in her, and she decided to keep her daughter. Ms. Jacobson's daughter is now eight years old and was on stage with her. It was an impactful speech.

The March for Life is a great bonding experience for people with the same views, especially for our Aquinas students. Senior Clara Yuo says "I had a lot of fun on the bus ride there with my friends. We got to advocate for an issue we feel strongly about while also growing closer to each other." The March for Life is also in D.C., a hot spot for politicians, so some of our students got an opportunity to meet with them. "I liked running into friends and family at the march! I also loved visiting the Capitol building and speaking to senators," says senior Alice Rothfus.

Even though *Roe v. Wade* has been overturned, pro-life activists continue to hold the March for Life to raise awareness and to support mothers in need.



An Enchanted Night

By: Brynn Burnsworth

A popular tradition for most high schools is an annual winter dance, and Aquinas Academy is no stranger to these dances. This year the theme was “Enchanted Forest.” Held from 7:00 -10:00 p.m. in the gym, the dance was a memorable night where students danced the night away.

While the winter dance is usually less formal than homecoming and the spring dance, the prefects wanted the decorations to look good nonetheless. Using decorations from the previous year’s spring dance, along with help from Ms. Fetchko, Mr. B, and Mrs. Swift, student volunteers and prefects were able to create something spectacular. With a few hours of work, the gym became enchanted. Senior J.J. Ortiz stated, “It honestly looked much better than I thought it would. I was so happy with the outcome!” Claire McMann also added that she “loves that the prefects do this.”

Once the decorations were all put in place, the only thing left to do was wait until 7:00 p.m. When people arrived, they were greeted with music from the returning DJ. The DJ, who was also the DJ for spring dance last year, brightened the night. Students seemed to all agree that he had improved a lot since last year. His Amazon gift card bit only seemed to be mentioned once or twice, and the songs he played were great. While some students may like the old “Aquinas dance” music, many enjoyed the change. “The newer songs and his talking made the night so much more fun,” said Ari Buchanan.

Once the night was over, it took prefects about forty five minutes to clean everything up. Overall, students agree that this was one of the best winter dances yet! Eli BouSamra stated, “That dance was a perfect last winter dance.” Nolan Thiel added to that saying, “That was probably the best dance I’ve been to.” Overall, it appears that the dance was a hit and students cannot wait for the next one!



Snow Trouble

By: Laila Tuffiash

One of the most striking differences between Aquinas and other schools is how the administration handles snow days. While other schools will often have classes through an online platform such as Google Classroom, Mr. Deschamps believes that there is no substitute for in-person learning, so when the roads are too icy to drive on, Aquinas students get to relax at home and enjoy the snow.

Faculty member Mr. Kuniega appreciated Mr. Deschamps’ approach to snow days. He recalls that at a previous school he “would have five or six of these ‘flexible learning days’ a year, and I would always have to re-teach everything when the students came back to the classroom because they didn’t retain any of it. Virtual learning days shouldn’t count as school days because they just don’t work.”

The majority of students agreed. “I like how we can just enjoy the snow days and not have to worry about virtual work,” said junior Marielle Dillner. “I like that I don’t have to worry about school and can sleep in on snow days,” agreed freshman Sofia Peniche.

The problem with an absence of virtual learning days is that if the two snow days built into Aquinas’ schedule are used, the school will have to make up days at the end of the year. Although everyone would like a snow day without virtual learning, some people expressed concern over having to make up days. In an effort to avoid this, and to allow middle and high school students to complete their midterms, Mr. Deschamps ran full days of school on the Tuesday and Wednesday of midterm week. Almost every school district cancelled on those days due to extremely cold weather, but Mr. Deschamps made it work. Students could dress for the cold weather instead of wearing their uniforms and were instructed to dress warmly. An organized student drop-off and pick-up routine was established because every bussing district cancelled.

Some students were very pleased with how Mr. Deschamps handled the two frigid days. Junior Felicity Koble expressed that she “loved the dress down days,” and was “really pleased that we pushed through those days so we didn’t have to make up our midterms at a later time.” Senior Clara Yuo agreed by adding that she was “happy I didn’t have to make up midterms later,” While students such as Felicity and Clara were delighted with having school, some students were not so fond of having school on those days. One student was concerned that “having school on those days put too much pressure on parents. Some parents work late, which makes it very hard for them to pick up their kids.”

The topic of snow days can be controversial, but as the weather gets better, there will be less concern over them.



Hitting the Slopes

By: Caitlyn Abbett

Every winter season, Aquinas Ski Club members put on their coats and head for the mountains of Hidden Valley, where they enjoy a night on the slopes, skiing or snowboarding with their friends. The students depart from Aquinas at 2:30 p.m. during Friday club period, and return to the school at 10:00 p.m.

Mr. Kuniega, who has been skiing for over ten years and previously ran the ski club at Greensburg Central Catholic for two years, is now chaperoning the Aquinas club. He loves the opportunity for both high school and middle schoolers to attend, and he enjoys helping the kids who have not gone before.

Many people were worried about the weather, since the first ski trip got canceled due to warmer temperatures. However, the second week had much colder air. Mr. Kuniega commented, "Given the conditions (rain and warmer temperatures for the past week and a half), I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of skiable areas. For that kind of weather, the conditions were still enjoyable, and there were some good runs to be had. I'm looking forward to the next two trips, and hoping we get another February cool-down to layer on some extra snow before spring time."

The students had a great night, whether it was their first time, or if they were returning from last year. Junior Marielle Dillner exclaims, "I have done ski club since freshman year, and I love it! I get to ski with my friend and unwind on Fridays." Senior Ari Buchanan, who has been in Ski Club since sophomore year, also had a fun experience. She says, "I love being with my friends while doing something fun! I also really liked going down Upper Comet."

On the contrary, senior Mary Osburg found the hills more challenging due to the conditions. "The snow was more like ice, which made going down some of the harder hills, like

Imperial, insane." Senior Alice Rothfus, who was new to Ski Club, shared, "My first real skiing experience was pretty fun; I loved going on the ski lift, and Angel's Elbow was my favorite hill. As for the food, it was too expensive, and there were no gluten free options."

Aquinas students look forward to Ski Club every year, and the students and faculty always have a good time. Whether they are seasoned professionals launching off the stunt hills, or beginners putting on skis for the first time, the students find it to be a highlight of the school year.



Sister Mountains

By: Claire McMann

Winter Fridays at Aquinas Academy are usually spent on the slopes at Hidden Valley, but could its sister mountain, Seven Springs, potentially be the better option? Both are located in the Laurel Highlands, are owned by Vail, and are popular resorts to skiers and snowboarders in PA. However, they have several differences that distinguish the two from each other. Hidden Valley has 110 skiable acres with 31 different trails. Seven Springs is comparably larger with 285 acres and 33 trails. Hidden Valley is a

friendly terrain to skiers who are just starting out due to two-thirds of the trails being green or blue. Seven Springs is also considered a good mountain for beginners. They offer a variety of beginner-friendly terrain and have dedicated learning areas for newer skiers and snowboarders. Additionally, Seven Springs and Hidden Valley offer a variety of ski and snowboard lessons with instructors that cater to novices, making it easier to get used to the sports if you are just starting out.

Senior Brynn Burnsworth, who started skiing her freshman year, says Hidden Valley was one of the first mountains she skied on and was very easy to get accustomed to having never skied before. Brynn shares that "Ski Club was a super fun way to ease into skiing, and I really didn't need any lessons with most of my friends being regular skiers. By my junior year I was able to ski on mountains like Snowshoe in West Virginia due to all the trips to Hidden Valley in high school." Brynn also commented that having been to both Seven Springs and Hidden Valley, she appreciates Hidden Valley more because of all the memories made there, and the smaller, homier feel the mountain gives off.



However, not every student agrees with this. Senior J.J. Ortiz, a frequent skier, remarks that Seven Springs is overall a better mountain because of the variety of trails and the size. He also enjoys the different variations of food options the mountain has. This includes an upscale restaurant named Helens, Slopeside (with a more family atmosphere), the Bavarian Lounge, the Foggy Goggle, Gingerbread Dreams (the sweets and ice cream shop), a coffee place, and a pizza parlor.

As for pricing, Seven Springs lift tickets sit around \$99 for weekday tickets and \$109 on the weekends. Hidden Valley is a tiny bit less expensive, with weekday lift tickets being \$95 and weekend tickets being \$105. Seven Springs no longer offers season tickets apart from the Epic Pass. For Hidden Valley, the price of a season pass for the 2024/2025 season was \$949.

Some big ski families at Aquinas have purchased homes at either of the mountains. Senior Anne Dolan notes that her family home has been around since her dad was a kid. She has spent a lot of time going up there while growing up and says, "We share it with my dad's two brothers, and their families, so at any given time there can be up to 14 kids in the house. It's amazing that it's ski-in and ski-out whenever the weather is nice. Hidden Valley is super family friendly—we can send out the younger kids in packs, and they know every slope and don't get lost."

While both Seven Springs and Hidden Valley offer excellent experiences for skiers and snowboarders, Seven Springs is definitely a larger scale mountain, making it ideal for those seeking a lot of variety in their ski trips. On the other hand, Hidden Valley provides a more intimate option for those looking for a more relaxed, family-oriented atmosphere.

Baby, It's Cold Outside!

By: Jules Shemer

When the temperature is low and there is ice on the roads, avoiding outdoor activities tends to be a common response. Students and faculty members share what they love to do indoors with their friends during these frigid months.

When asked her favorite thing to do inside with friends, Mrs. Whetzel commented, "I belong to a book club that meets once a month. Ironically, it's always very stressful for me to finish reading the assigned book in time for the meeting. But I love meeting with my friends, drinking a hot cup of coffee and chatting about the book."

Junior Brad Moore, who is not as fascinated by books, replied, "I love drawing, painting, and doing karaoke with my friends." Freshman Annette Bentivegna said, "Drinking hot cocoa and playing a board game." Mrs. Meland answered, "Drinking tea and playing Bananagrams."

Some Aquinas students prefer a low-key, chill hangout with friends. Junior Gio Spotts said, "I like to relax and do nothing with my friends." Senior Mary Osburg stated, "Going to Chipotle and then watching a movie is my favorite indoor combo." Junior Tess Duer replied, "Watching horror movies and eating lots of food."

If you do not want to be stuck in your house any longer than necessary, there are countless indoor activities to do in Pittsburgh. Thanks to the history of Pittsburgh and the world, there are around 100 museums to go and learn something new. The Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens are labeled as the #1 Indoor Activity in Pittsburgh on TripAdvisor. Junior Alexa Risdon shared her thoughts regarding her recent visit to the Conservatory, "I loved it and I would definitely go again. My favorite part was definitely the room with the fountains."

For people who are not into plants, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and Carnegie Science Center are good options. They are labeled by TripAdvisor as Pittsburgh's #2 and #7 Indoor Activities, respectively. For all the athletes, there are still Penguin games to catch at PPG Paints Arena. PPG also hosts concerts for all music lovers. Christian band Elevation Worship is coming to PPG on February 28th and country singer Kelsea Ballerini will be live on tour on April 12.

Even though it is cloudy and frigid, there are still many ways to hang out with friends while having fun and staying warm.



Aquinas' Community of Love

By: Katherine Repasky

Throughout the whole of Aquinas Academy, February is not just about red roses and valentines, but instead seen as the perfect time to celebrate love, community, and faith in a way that combines fun with meaningful and faith-filled traditions. Similar to all holiday celebrations, the school ensures that Valentine's Day is not simply another fun event on the calendar but a time for students to come together in a spirit of joy and reflection on the meaning for celebration.

For the youngest students at Aquinas Academy, Valentine's Day is filled with excitement and fun! The lower school hosts classroom parties where students exchange valentines, make creative Valentine's Day boxes, and participate in fun games. Mrs. Repasky, the lower school director, explains "It is a fun way to celebrate and gets all the kids excited and shows the importance of caring and sharing love with their neighbors." Lower school classrooms foster a sense of friendship and kindness, reminding students that Valentine's Day is about more than just candy; it is a day to appreciate those around them and share their joy.

One of the most beloved school-wide traditions when holidays occur is accessory days. Specifically for Valentine's Day students get to add a bit of red and pink to their usual uniforms. By wearing accessories, such as socks, hair bows, ties, and shirts, students can have fun with the day and enjoy celebrating as well. Beyond the parties and decorations, Aquinas Academy emphasizes the deeper meaning behind the holiday.

The school encourages students to reflect on the life of St. Valentine, the saint who inspired the celebration. Wearing red is not just for fun but also a reminder of his sacrifice and faith. As junior Ava Lesnefsky explains, "Wearing red helps us keep in mind the martyrdom of St. Valentine, the true inspiration for the day!" By incorporating faith into the festivities, Aquinas Academy ensures that students celebrate with both joy and reverence. By learning about Saint Valentine's life and his commitment to love, we can all better understand the true purpose of this holiday and strive to spread kindness to others in our own lives.



Boba Bliss

By: Abigail Irvin

Recently, the boba shop Fantastea opened a store near Aquinas. Boba, or bubble tea, is a traditional Taiwanese beverage that has risen in popularity over the past few years. Classic boba is a mixture of ice, chewy tapioca pearls, and milk tea, but there are many different flavors and toppings for the drink.

Fantastea is locally owned and opened last year. It is located on Route 8, about five minutes from Aquinas. The shop is small with a cute, cozy ambiance. It is well-decorated and clean. There are only two tables, but the shop is connected to a restaurant called PhoEverMore, and customers can order boba from Fantastea while dining. The boba shop itself is not a good place to bring a large group of friends to hang out, but two to four people can easily sit down in the shop.

I ordered a matcha milk tea with honey boba. Junior Meghan McGee ordered a pineapple black tea with honey boba, and both of us enjoyed our drinks. Meghan commented, "It was really good. The menu is easy to understand. The tea was well flavored with pineapple and the honey boba is the best I've ever had." The milk tea was not too sugary and well flavored. The boba was neither chewy nor hard; it was just right.

The shop owner working that day was very friendly and personable. Senior Ashlin Knox recounted that from the first time she walked in the shop, the owner was very kind. She said, "He is a hard worker and always treats people with kindness, no matter how busy he gets." The owner even told her that the reason the shop is closed on Sundays is because it is the Lord's Day.

Although the owner was the only one working, the wait for our two drinks was only about six minutes. We were the only ones in the shop, but there were also boba orders from the PhoEverMore restaurant.

There are many menu options to choose from. Both of our drinks were \$5.99, which was well-priced for the size and quality of the boba. I would give Fantastea a 10/10. The shop is cute and cozy, and the location is convenient. The quality of the boba and service make Fantastea one of the best boba places in Pittsburgh.



Generoasta is a local coffee chain in Western Pennsylvania. The shop has many offerings beyond the standard coffee and tea including sandwiches, wraps, smoothies, and baked goods.

I paid a visit to Generoasta's Wexford location on a cold Sunday morning. The place was spacious and had many seating options—booths, small tables, comfy armchairs, and a large table at the center where different groups of people could eat. There was a moderate number of customers there, so it was not too busy. There was a dog inside the building, which could be a pro or a con for people. It could have been a service dog, however the dog had no vest to signify that. Senior Anne Dolan commented, "That's unsanitary. Some people have severe pet allergies. Service dogs should be the only exception." Mrs. Whetzel said, "I love dogs, and I love the idea of dogs being at restaurants. Despite this, American dogs are ill-behaved, and shouldn't be welcome in restaurants." Senior Enzo Flati, in disagreement with Mrs. Whetzel shared, "I've only been attacked by dogs in other countries. I love American dogs!"



According to an employee, their most popular drinks are Dark & Stormy, Bright & Sunny, Blonde Bombshell, and Lat-in Lover. Each of these drinks are priced at \$5.30 for a small. The Dark & Stormy is essentially a mocha. The drink had a good balance of chocolate and coffee, and the sweetness complemented the bitter coffee. The Blonde Bombshell is a caramel latte. The beverage was very delightful—it did not taste bitter, but it was not overly sweet. Their cappuccino, costing \$3.85, was not pleasant. It was too bitter; some more milk could have probably fixed that. All three of these drinks were extremely hot. If you are ordering a hot drink from Generoasta, I would recommend taking off the lid and letting it sit for a few minutes before enjoying the beverage. Senior Mary Os-burg tried their London Fog (priced at \$4.35), which is Earl Grey tea with vanilla and milk. She described it as “delectable. Earl Grey tea reminds me of the beach.”

When it comes to cafe drinks, Generoasta can be hit or miss. Their coffee is very bitter, making their black and unsweetened coffee hard to finish. However, the coffee's bitterness pairs well with sweetened drinks. Generoasta coffee is for people who like specialty coffee drinks that are not lacking in any coffee flavor. As for the ambience of the establishment, it is a nice place to meet with friends. The interior of the place is very rustic, giving it a homely feel. Generoasta is going to get a 7/10. It is a decent place to try-out with a friend if you do not have dog allergies, but there are better coffee shops in the area.

The One Who Pulls the Strings

By: Jack Hoerster

Every Aquinas student knows about the fickleness of the copier machine and the torture teachers must go through every time they print out tests and quizzes. But is it truly a copier error, or is the copier more complex than we ever imagined? Alas, it is time to expose the truth once and for all about the hidden life of the Aquinas copier. Many candidates were asked about their opinions on the elusive copier, and each teacher came back with different answers.

First up is none other than the Head of School himself, Mr. Deschamps. He holds a strong opinion, stating that the copier is a “critical tool” that “saves a lot of time.” Mr. Deschamps claims that the stapling and hole-punching mechanisms are his favorite tools the machine provides, despite the fact that the hole-puncher fills rapidly and requires constant emptying. These features save him an exorbitant amount of time in the long run. Even though he is quite capable at making tests and quizzes for his Morality class, Mr. Deschamps humbly rated his skill with the copier at a 5/10. He claims this is because he “knows there are things he has no idea how to do” on the copier, which is a very intricate answer to such a question.

Next up is a remarkable tag-team, composed of two STEM masters. Mrs. Mitros and Mrs. Kaffenens both had wonderful things to say about our sassy printer princess. Mrs. Mitros is the master of printing out thick AP practice exams and is able to fix common issues, like paper jams, which “happen frequently.” Mrs. Mitros stated that the copier is “great when it works” and “if the copier was a person, it would know more of the school’s secrets than anyone else in the building...there’s nobody that doesn’t hang around the copier.” All in all, Mrs. Mitros put her skills at 6/10. However, Mrs. Kaffenens was recommended as a 10/10 with the copier (but she put herself at 9/10). Her opinion is that the new copier is better than the last one, as the old one jammed more frequently, had toner issues, and other complications. Her favorite feature of the copier is that it can run specifics per page within a packet, meaning each page can have its own individual toner levels and other such specifics. Mrs. Kaffenens used to work two different secretary jobs, so she is incredibly proficient with the copier.

Mrs. DeMeo also had an insight into the copier. Recently, the copier needed a new drum for toner, so Mrs. DeMeo decided to replace it herself. Little did she know that the powdered toner started to fall out of one side of the drum as she was replacing it. Soon, there was black powder all over the floor, the carpet, and on Mrs. DeMeo’s yellow pants. Funnily enough, Mrs. Januck had even said to Mrs. DeMeo, “Be careful. Don’t get toner on yourself.” Mr. Flynn had to vacuum the powder up manually. Mrs. DeMeo wistfully remarked “I went in all nice and clean.” This little malfunction came to be known among the faculty as the “Toner Incident.”

Last, but certainly not least, is Mrs. Allen, who coined

the idea that the copier is a “sassy, high maintenance, little machine that rules our lives.” Despite this opinion, she is known among the teachers to be a guru, or “printer whisperer” if you will. She is able to clear out the hole puncher, reclose the paper trays, and is easily capable of changing the staples. She has placed her skills at a precise 7.3/10. Mrs. Allen believes the copier has a “mind of its own” and it “doesn’t listen,” describing the copier as a toddler having a tantrum. She was excited to get a new copier, but now she misses the old one. Some of the issues she provided were that the new copier needs its parts constantly replaced and that it stubbornly prints pictures in the same size, despite any changes to the file. “I just gave up,” Mrs. Allen said after a while. However, she claims the copier helps her grow in virtue, especially patience. This copier is making the faculty more virtuous by the packet.

The copier is a tool, and Aquinas is intentionally a low-tech school. We do not need some expensive, super-fancy copier that can print a thousand pages a second. All we need is something that gets the job done, and our brave little toaster is the most perfect copier we could ever ask for. As Savannah Deschamps put it, “After all, there’s only one Sassy Queen of the high school.”

Thank you to: Savannah Deschamps, who supplied the idea for this article and served as an editor, to Ms. McGrath, who thinks we should all go back to typewriters, to Mrs. Mitros, who was the first one interviewed and explained that there was a difference between the printer and the copier (the printer is in the shed), to Mr. Deschamps and Mrs. Mullican, who made sure the article sounded comical without being satirical, and especially to Anne Dolan and Alice Rothfus, who greenlit the article in the first place.



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

Aquinas Academy

2308 West Hardies Road

Gibsonia, PA 15044



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Writers' Favorite

Rom-Com

Abigail: My Big Fat Greek Wedding

Anne: Notting Hill

Alexa: She's The Man

Alice: To All The Boys I've Loved Before

Ashlin: The Notebook

Brynn: Anyone But You

Caitlyn: 10 Things I Hate About You

Claire: To All The Boys I've Loved Before

Clara: Leap Year

Felicity: La La Land

Jack: Groundhog Day

Jules: Princess Diaries 2

Katherine: (500) Days of Summer

Laila: The Princess Bride

Lucy: Return To Me

Maddy: Serendipity

Sam: While You Were Sleeping

Snips & Quips

"Maddy, I can confirm I don't get bullied for my socks."
-Clara Y

"Do you want to be bullied?"
-Alice R

"What's the name for the carts that carry prisoners to the guillotine?"
-Mrs. Whetzel

"Mario Carts."
-Savannah D.

"I wonder when my life will expire."
-Caitlyn A

"Wait, I have it in my planner."
-Brad M.

class talking about different guns
"What in the 2nd Amendment is going on?"
-Jack H.

"We should learn about how God has an amazing plan for our liv-"
-Anne D.

"MONEY."
-Clara Y.

"I guess you're in the cult now"
-Mary C.
"Does the cult have hors d'oeuvres?"
-Mark C.

*talking about Elle Woods from *Legally Blonde**
"The blonde ditz that went to Harvard? Do I remind you of her?"
-Mr. Blume

"She's a pick-me ghost."
-Tess D.

"Would you join a revolution?"
-Mrs. Whetzel
"I'd start one."
-Daniel H.

"I did go to a party for Valentine's Day. Coincidentally, it was with 8 priests."
-Mr. Kuniega

While touring the U.S. Capitol Building
"If Clara could write fan fiction on the Senate, she would."
-Anne D.

"I'm fine. It's the juniors you need to worry about."
-Ivo (a junior)

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