

CRISTO REY'S DRAFT DAY

BY LOU PONSI

CRISTO REY ORANGE County High School kicked off the 2025-26 school year in its traditional celebratory fashion – holding its annual Draft Day.

Held Aug. 29 at Angel Stadium, with the green grass on the expansive baseball field serving as a backdrop, Draft Day is festive event where Cristo Rey students take the stage in front of cheering relatives and supporters after being “drafted” by one of the 60 corporate partners in attendance.

The signature event exemplifies Cristo Rey’s work-study model allowing students from largely underserved communities to receive a quality Catholic education.

Cristo Rey’s corporate work study program enables students to gain valuable professional experience while earning a portion of the cost of their education.

Every student is placed in a professional job, where they spend five full days a month during business hours, all four years of high school, allowing them to earn nearly half of the cost of their education.

At the same time, the students will

have built a professional resume before graduating high school.

Cristo Rey families pay an average of \$1,000 a year in tuition, with donors bridging the gap.

Entering its third school year since establishing a school in Santa Ana, Cristo Rey has 212 students, up from 140 last year and 69 students in its inaugural year.

The goal is to have 400 students, said Steve Holt, founding president of Cristo Rey Orange County.

“We are committed year-round to supporting and providing awesome opportunities for our students,” Holt said. “We believe that talent is universal, and opportunity is not. And so, our students are so excited to have the opportunity to show you what they can do with your high expectations and your high levels of support.”

The Catholic high school on West McFadden Avenue in Santa Ana is Cristo Rey’s first in Orange County and one of 41 Cristo Rey schools across the country. The national network chain of schools began in Chicago in 1996.

The network of schools has collectively graduated more than 31,000 students with a 93% college enrollment rate.

“Cristo Rey made it possible for me to get this education,” said junior Justin



CRISTO REY STUDENTS CELEBRATE THE SCHOOL'S ANNUAL DRAFT DAY HELD ON AUG. 29 AT ANGEL STADIUM. PHOTOS BY ART CORDERO

the firm. “I think this is a really good model. I didn’t have this type of experience in high school so I think it’s great for kids to get hands-on experience that will put them above their competitors coming out of high school looking for jobs.”

When his twin son and daughter were graduating from eighth grade two years ago, Frank Ferguson was looking for a school more suited to their needs.

After researching, he settled on Cristo Rey.

“It was important that I try to find a Catholic environment,” Ferguson said. “I interviewed a lot of places and then we zeroed in on Cristo Rey, solely because of its work program.”

While his son opted to attend public high school for his sophomore year, his daughter Mika wanted to return to Cristo Rey.

“My daughter was very shy,” Ferguson said. “It took about six or eight weeks when we started to see a personality change. She was a leader. She was talking. And she was getting great comments from the work-study program. By the end of the year, she was a different person. I don’t have enough good things to say about the quality of the people who are administering the program at Cristo Rey.” ✚

Rosales, who transferred to Cristo Rey at the start of his sophomore year and performed his work-study in the cancer center at Providence St. Joseph Hospital.

“I thought this was really good experience for me,” he shared.

This year, Rosales was selected to do his work study at Sperry Commercial Real Estate.

“Many students like me don’t have the opportunity to have this real work experience,” the student said.

The Law Office of Juan Laguna drafted Cristo Rey students for the second year in a row.

“We always like to give back and so some of these people wouldn’t have this opportunity, just given their situation,” said Joseph Laguna, whose father owns



FAMILIES AND FRIENDS CHEER ON CRISTO REY STUDENTS DURING THE ANNUAL DRAFT DAY EVENT.



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