a dozen reasons
to choose Catholic Schools

1. We offer an education that combines Catholic faith and teachings with academic excellence.
2. We partner with parents in the faith formation of their children.
3. We set high standards for student achievement and help them succeed.
4. We provide a balanced academic curriculum that integrates faith, culture and life.
5. We use technology effectively to enhance education.
6. We instill in students the value of service to others.
7. We teach children respect of self and others.
8. We emphasize moral development and self-discipline.
9. We prepare students to be productive citizens and future leaders.
10. We have a 99 percent high school graduation rate. 97 percent of our graduates in the Diocese of Baton Rouge go to college.
11. We cultivate a faculty and staff of people who are dedicated, caring and effective.
12. We provide a safe and welcoming environment for all.
Taking pride in our schools

Once again we celebrate Catholic Schools Week. What a great occasion to honor our history, our legacy, our accomplishments, our clergy and religious, our administrators (diocesan and school-wide), educators, benefactors, volunteers, parents, students and alumni!

In August, when I was visiting one of the shelters for people displaced by the flooding, a woman asked me if I was a Catholic priest, to which I said: “Yes.” She went on to say, “I am not Catholic, and where I grew up in New York, everybody knew that the best Catholic, and where I grew up in New York, everybody knew that the best Catholic school was a Catholic priest, to which I said:

From The Bishop
Bishop Robert W. Muench

The truth be known, formal schooling was a ministry begun by the Catholic Church, as was caring for the sick and the elderly through hospitals, housing and other facilities, as was formal ministry to the poor. In our own diocese we are not only proud of our Catholic schools, but also the ministry of Catholic Charities and the St. Vincent de Paul Society (diocesan and parish), the outreach of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady (including Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady of University and the many FMOL sponsored facilities and programs).

Our Catholic schools help our students to be formed as well as informed. They unambiguously and unabashedly teach, witness and share our faith. They deal not only with the measurable, but with the immeasurable.

For they not instruct, they inspire; they not only teach facts, they inculcate ideals. They impart the meaning of life in this world and the next.

Happy 2017 Catholic Schools Week, everyone! God bless you all.

Students living out the mission

Catholic schools began their service in America well before 1776, as the first Catholic school was founded in 1606 by Franciscans in St. Augustine, Florida. Since that time, Catholic schools have been recognized for evangelizing hearts, educating minds, encouraging talent and embracing the future for the students in their care. As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, let us reflect on the good work that Catholic schools have provided in the development of students, strengthening of community and building of Church.

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge are exceptionally strong in their ministry to evangelize hearts. Recent data gathered using the Assessment for Catechesis and Religious Education (ACRE Test) indicates that students in the Diocese of Baton Rouge continue to score above the national norm in all areas of faith knowledge. Additionally, students in our diocese log approximately 200,000 hours in service to people in need each year.

Catholic schools in the diocese certainly educate minds, which is verified by data on academic accomplishment. The Class of 2016 scored well above both state and national averages on the American College Test (ACT Test).

Likewise, elementary and middle schools students took the ACT Aspire for the first time last year, scoring above-average on the vast majority of the subject tests in all grade levels.

Collaboration between schools and a strong focus on the rigor of the instructional program supports academic excellence in our schools.

Catholic schools foster the development of the whole child as they encourage talent through various programs. Several opportunities for such development are evident, through various programs. Several opportunities for such development are evident, and students are able to further identify and develop their talents by enhancing...
Father Cayet Mangiaracina selected Distinguished Clergy member

Father Cayet Mangiaracina OP, parochial vicar at Holy Ghost Church in Hammond and the Distinguished Clergy for Catholic Schools for 2016, has been a “people person” for his approaching 54 years of ministry.

In 2006, Father Mangiaracina was assigned to Holy Ghost as parochial vicar. In 2011 he was assigned as parochial vicar for St. Joseph Church in Ponchatoula. When the Dominicans left St. Joseph in 2013, Father Mangiaracina returned from Holy Ghost.

The roots of his faith and vocational call stem from his Catholic education.

He attended Catholic schools in New Orleans – St. Anthony of Padua School through eighth-grade and Jesuit High School.

“St. Anthony of Padua Parish was staffed by the Dominican fathers and brothers and the school by the Dominican sisters. I remember thinking while in school that I would like to do what I saw the Dominican priests serving in ministry doing. The fathers and sisters had a great influence upon me,” said Father Mangiaracina.

He attended Loyola University in New Orleans for two years and Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, for one year. In August of 1956 he entered the Dominican novitiate in Winona, Minnesota.

Father Mangiaracina is known as affable and eager to help people, according to Holy Ghost School administrators.

Donna Wallete, Holy Ghost principal, said, “Father Cayet has been described as a ‘priest’s priest’ by his peers because of his dedication and service to the Catholic faith and community.” Wallete said his presence is particularly meaningful at Holy Ghost.

“Father Cayet is a constant figure for the support of clergy, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students and all who are part of Holy Ghost School as well as St. Thomas Aquinas (in Hammond). He participates in all Holy Ghost School events and serves on numerous committees for the church and school.”

Working with people is a highlight of his ministry, Father Mangiaracina said. “Meeting and ministering to people has always been a joy to me. Celebrating the sacraments and being present to the people and school kids give me renewed energy,” said Father Mangiaracina. “I make it a point to welcome parishioners before each vigil and Sunday Masses. My favorite non-original response to the question, ‘How are you?’ is, ‘Better than I deserve.’” (Financial advisor Dave Ramsey said it first.)

Father Mangiaracina expressed his see MANGIARACINA PAGE 7B

St. Alphonsus recovering from flood waters

When students and teachers left the campus of St. Alphonsus School in Greenwell Springs on the afternoon of Aug. 11, they had no idea that things would never be the same. In a typical Louisiana summer pattern, weather forecasters warned viewers of a slow moving system that would dump an abundance of rain on the Baton Rouge and surrounding areas. Few could have imagined that the event would be a once-in-a-thousand-years deluge creating billions of dollars of destruction and unprecedented disruption of families and businesses.

The Great Flood of 2016 was a life-changing event for the faculty, staff and students at St. Alphonsus School. Principal Dr. Cindy Ryals said she is overwhelmed by the help she received to clean, mop and restore the flooded campus.

Middle school teacher Julie Guillot described the community action to help the school reopen 11 days after the flooding as resilient and faith-filled.

“The St. Alphonsus School community chose hard work and perseverance over defeat and self-pity,” Guillot said.

The refurbishment is still a work in progress at St. Alphonsus School. The refurbishment is still a work in progress at Holy Ghost School.

Expansion of facilities and programs has enabled schools to provide cutting-edge learning experiences for students, especially through the use of technology. The daily implementation of rigorous and relevant educational experiences have challenged students to develop habits of higher level thinking as they prepare for their futures in a global community.

As we celebrate Catholic Schools Week, we are especially grateful for the leadership of Bishop (Robert W.) Muench and for the support of clergy, administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students and all partners in the work of the schools. With strong stakeholder support, Catholic schools will continue to be gifts to generations within the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

VERGES ▼

from page 2B

As nationally accredited institutions, schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge embrace the future through their commitment to continuous improvement.

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97% of Class of 2016 enter college upon graduation

More than $66 million in scholarships awarded to Class of 2016

Catholic school students achieve higher (24) than national (21) and state (19.5) averages on ACT

National-normed Terra Nova test scores exceed national average in all subject areas

ACRE test scores of faith knowledge above national norm for all domain and grade levels

Approximately 207,000 service hours to our community in the 2015-16 school year

Expanding Programs for Exceptional Students to four locations

The dedicated religious and lay faculty led by example, not only at school but also in our communities. They taught me to look beyond my needs to the greater needs of my community and to give back.

Daniel Mattingly
2016 Distinguished Graduate

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ASCENSION | ASSUMPTION | CENTRAL | EAST BATON ROUGE | IBERVILLE | POINTE COUPEE | ST. JAMES | TANGIPAHOA | WEST BATON ROUGE
Fabre learned at an early age the importance of caring for others

Paula Fabre learned at an early age the importance of taking care of those less fortunate. As a child, she would often accompany her father to assist at the St. Vincent De Paul Society, either collecting or distributing clothes and other needed goods.

“It became a part of me,” said Fabre, who is the principal at St. Francis Xavier School in Baton Rouge. “It is not seeking a way out, it is practicing our faith, striving to get the best education possible, using it to be of service to others.”

Fabre’s commitment of service, especially to the less fortunate, has carried over to her professional life. As principal in an inner city school, she understands her complex roles of educator, taskmaster or simply a sympathetic ear.

Because she has been able to balance those scales with extraordinary aplomb she was selected the 2017 Distinguished Administrator of the Year for the Diocese of Baton Rouge.

“I am humbled, honored and excited to bring this shared honor to our entire (St. Francis) family,” said Fabre, who earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Southern University. “This would not have been possible without (St. Francis pastor Father Ed

Landry integrates faith into classroom

“It was quite a shock.”

That’s how Roslyn Landry described her emotions when she found out she was selected the diocese’s Distinguished Educator for 2017.

“I didn’t even know I had been nominated,” the third grade teacher at Most Blessed Sacrament School in Baton Rouge said.

The school’s principal, Cheri Gioe, nominated Landry for the award, explaining that she was a dynamic and engaging teacher who “infused her teaching with our Catholic faith on a daily basis.”

Landry noted being able to incorporate lessons that instill values and morals is a gift of Catholic teaching. She said she tries to integrate religion ideas in every subject.

“For example, when we discuss healthy eating and the body in science, I can explain how we are made in God’s image,” she said.

One of Landry’s favorite lessons focuses on the school’s third-grade retreat. Every grade at MBS has a service project, and for the third graders, it involves the Bishop Ott Men’s Shelter.

“We help collect toiletries for the shelter,” said Landry.

The students begin by writing and presenting commercials to the student body to encourage donations of soap, shampoo and other items for the men staying at the shelter.

But they do more than that. They also donate all of the ingredients for vegetable soup and bread. During their retreat days, the students prepare the food for the shelter.

The children also tour the shelter and learn how it operates as well as the need for assistance in the community, Landry explained.

“Third grade is the first year they start learning about the St. Vincent de Paul ministry,” she said.

While she enjoys being a teacher, Landry didn’t start out wanting to work in education. However, the more she studied her love of art, the more people began to mention the job possibility to her. As she began to look back on her years in school, she also injects that philosophy into her staff, setting lofty standards with the expectation those teachers and staff members will help each student reach their potential.

“I cannot expect others to buy in to a philosophy that is not evident in the leader,” she said. “The faculty and staff reflect our shared belief in making decisions that are the best for our students.”

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“educating the mind, body, and spirit of each student to know, love, and serve God, self, and others in a safe and caring environment.”

Nondiscriminatory Admission Policy
Students at St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge continue to benefit from two additions to the learning environment. With skills learned in the Andrea Clesi McManus ‘74 STEM Lab and the Innovation and Design Lab, SJA students entered recent competitions and brought home top honors.

The STEM Lab enhances St. Joseph’s focus on science, math, engineering and technology, while the Innovation and Design Lab provides project-based learning opportunities which emphasize 21st century skills of communication, collaboration and creativity.

A team of students won the Big Pitch, a high school competition sponsored by Capital One and hosted by Junior Achievement and the American Advertising Federation of Baton Rouge. The SJA team was among seven area high school teams competing in the Nov. 16 event, part of Baton Rouge Entrepreneurship Week. SJA’s winning team brought home $7,500. The students now advance to the state-level competition in New Orleans in March. For grabs is a $10,000 grand prize.

In December, SJA captured first place in the 2016 Shell STEM Showdown. Participating students brought home a $3,500 award to enhance the school’s STEM curriculum. The contest, part of the Great Minds in STEM program, was held at the University of New Orleans.

The students competed in two challenges: building a motorized crane using limited materials and building a robot, then programming it to run through a series of mazes.

One of SJA’s teams captured third place in the crane challenge. Throughout the competition, participants were judged on safety and cleanliness of their work areas and other factors which combined for the final score.

Students at SJA embrace a methodology for innovation that combines creative and analytical approaches and requires collaboration across disciplines,” principal Dr. Michele Lambert said. “This process, which has been called design thinking, draws on methods from engineering and design and combines them with ideas from the arts, tools from the social sciences and insights from the business world.”

To build on the successes of the STEM and Innovation and Design Labs, SJA applied for and was recently chosen as one of approximately 1,000 schools worldwide to implement AP Capstone, an innovative diploma program that allows students to develop skills that are critical for college success, including research, collaboration and communication.

The program consists of two courses taken in sequence: AP Seminar and AP Research. Developed in direct response to feedback from higher education faculty and college admission officers, AP Capstone complements the in-depth, subject-specific study of other Advanced Placement courses and exams.

SJA will introduce AP Seminar in the fall.

The AP Seminar course, typically taken in 10th or 11th grade, equips students to look at real-world issues from multiple perspectives. Through a variety of materials, students tackle complex questions, understand and evaluate opposing viewpoints, interpret and synthesize information, and construct, communicate and defend evidence-based arguments.

In the subsequent AP Research course, students design, plan and conduct a yearlong, research-based investigation on a topic of individual interest, documenting their process with a portfolio. Students build on skills developed in the AP Seminar course by learning how to understand research methodology, employ ethical research practices and collect, analyze and synthesize information to build, present and defend an argument.

Students who earn scores of three or higher on AP Seminar and AP Research assessments and on four additional AP exams of their choosing will earn the AP Capstone Diploma. This signifies their outstanding academic achievement and attainment of college-level academic and research skills. Students who earn scores of three or higher on both AP Seminar and AP Research assessments will earn the AP Seminar and Research Certificate.
From page 6B

LAN LD Y ▼

From page 58

becoming a teacher began to feel natural.

“I had so many wonderful teachers influence me,” she said.

Landry graduated from Delgado Community College in New Orleans with an associate's degree in art. She later earned a bachelor's degree in education from the University of New Orleans.

A native of St. Bernard civil parish, Landry’s first teaching job was in Catholic education at Our Lady of Prompt Succor School in Chalmette. She taught fifth grade at the school for 10 years before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, forcing her family to evacuate. Eventually they relocated to the Baton Rouge area.

“I had a real sense of family at my old school. It was just wonderful,” said Landry.

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“I had a real sense of family at my old school. It was just wonderful,” said Landry.

“When I interviewed for a position here (at MBS), I told Mrs. (Marie) Cloessner (who was principal at the time) that I was hoping to find a family again,” she added.

Landry noted that it was in the middle of the school year (at the start of 2006) when she started looking for a teaching position. She noted typically that's a difficult time of the year to find an open spot, but Landry was hopeful, and she placed everything in God's hands.

“It was so exciting when she (Cloessner) called to offer me the job,” Landry said, adding that she was told in her interview that she would find a family at MBS.

“It’s true. I've found a family again,” she said, smiling.

Renovations to the gym at St. Thomas More School in Baton Rouge include an expansive and architecturally pleasing foyer. The makeover also included new and larger restrooms and a refurbished concession area. Photo by Rachele Smith | The Catholic Commentator

STM dedicates gym

On Jan. 12, St. Thomas More School (STM) blessed and dedicated its newly renovated gymnasium which once served as the church. The student body along with faculty, board members, parents and friends attended.

St. Thomas More pastor Father Tom Duhé and parochial vicar Father Eddie Martin opened the ceremony with prayer and blessing of the gym. Dr. Judy Armstrong, principal, followed up with a thank you to everyone who put so much time and effort into making the gym renovation a success. This could not have been done without the support of our entire STM community, she said.

Milton Graugnard, chair of the STM school board facilities committee, was one of the driving forces of the renovation and prior campus construction of the library, administration building, fifth- and sixth-graders classrooms, and second computer and science labs. Graugnard said, “The completion of the gym renovations, along with other parts of our campus construction, is a continuation of our facilities strategic plan upgrades that assists our school parish to keep our facilities to the standards of our excellent Blue Ribbon education. Each stakeholder who contributed to these efforts, financially and with time and talents, are to be commended.”

SJA ▼

From page 68

“We are excited to offer this innovative program to our students,” Lambert said. “Not only does it help prepare students for college and beyond, but it aligns

wonderfully with our emphasis on 21st century skills. The program also gives our teachers more leeway with curriculum choices so students can access more challenging coursework and sharpen their reading and writing skills.”

2016 National Blue Ribbon School

SJA is one of only nine schools in the country to be named a National Blue Ribbon School four times.

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photo provided by St. Alphonsus School

St. Alphonsus staff and faculty members happily review a care package sent from a group of teachers in Florida.
Preparations are almost complete as teachers and students at St. Michael High School in Baton Rouge get ready to embark to Washington, D.C. to participate in the March for Life. More than 60 students and faculty at SMHS will join more than 400 others from 10 church parishes and schools in the Diocese of Baton Rouge area as they fill nine buses on Monday, Jan. 23 and get on their way.

The trip involves much more than just participating in the march. Leaders from St. Michael spend about 10 months preparing and developing the curriculum to be used on the bus, which includes activities, movies to watch, flash mobs and journaling to name a few. Nashville Dominican Sisters, priests and seminarians will be on each bus. This allows the students to witness others who have given up their life to serve Christ.

Once in Washington, the group will visit Arlington National Cemetery, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Saint John Paul II National Shrine and attend state and national youth rallies. The trip will culminate as the group joins thousands of others to march for the lives of the unborn on Jan. 27.

The school began embarking on this important journey in 2008, with the goals being personal conversion, vocation decrement and pro-life advocacy. This will be the eighth year that SMHS campus ministry director Emily Froeba has served as a leader on this trip and her second as director.

“I see the difference this journey makes in the lives of young people and the joy it gives the students who attend,” Froeba said. “They fall in love with God and the church as it is a true transformation of their faith. It is what gives me the passion to be so involved in this trip year after year. The ultimate goal is that students will recognize the beauty of their life, the beauty of the church, the beauty of God and the beauty of faith as they are on this journey.”

Sacred Heart of Jesus School pre-kindergartners Addison Massey, left, and Major Robinson enjoy the art center in the school’s Early Learning Center outdoor classroom.

Sacred Heart of Jesus School in Baton Rouge is putting the finishing touches on a new outdoor classroom for the school’s Early Learning Center, which houses pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students.

The classroom includes a color wheel, an art center, a weather station and a tracking panel.

Each piece of equipment provides a variety of lessons that cover English/language arts, mathematics, science, social studies and physical education.

Kindergarten teacher Amy Pickenheim said she is excited to take her daily weather report outside. Each morning a “meteorologist” student gives a weather forecast based observation and information through the school’s WeatherBug account, underwritten by the Sacred Heart Men’s Club.

“The students will love giving their weather report outside and using the new weather center’s charting system,” said Pickenheim, adding that the students create monthly graphs based on the weekly logs.

St. Michael Campus Ministry Director Emily Froeba, right, works with students on final details for the March for Life trip. Photo provided by St. Michael High School

St. Michael students putting final touches on March for Life pilgrimage

Sacred Heart School

Sacred Heart School enjoys outdoor classroom

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Pickenheim and her partner teacher Priscilla Melancon, along with pre-kindergarten teachers Sarah Carroll and Marcia Williamson, are all researching and developing lessons for the equipment.

“The art center has two clear panel easels that will accommodate four students,” said Carroll, “and we know those will be very popular.”

From drawing classmates’ portraits to creating numbers and letters and free draw, the art centers will be very busy, she said.

Pre-kindergartners got a sneak peek at the new classroom recently.

“They can’t wait to have the outdoor classroom become part of our learning,” said Williamson.

To provide shade for the space, three Little Gem magnolia trees and two Drake elm trees have been planted, along with new sod. The Early Learning Center also has a raised garden. Equipment for the outdoor classroom was made possible by a grant from The Westerman Foundation.
Catholic school Distinguished Graduates selected

Every year each Catholic school in the Diocese of Baton Rouge selects one of its alumni as its distinguished graduate. The 2017 honorees will be recognized at a dinner Monday, Jan. 30 at the Renaissance Hotel in Baton Rouge.

Ascension Catholic

Kevin Gautreau believes a Catholic education offers more than just a formal education. “It provides the beliefs of the Catholic Church on a daily basis. Children need guidance and Catholic education offers them the opportunity to be better Christians,” said Gautreau.

As the Distinguished Graduate for Ascension Catholic School in Donaldsonville, Gautreau volunteers his time to ensure Catholic education flourishes.

He serves as a board member of the Ascension Catholic School Board and as a member of the school’s advisory board. In addition, he has offered his time as a mentor and long-time coach to many students.

Gautreau, who works as the president of Gulf Coast Express Carriers, Gulf Coast Express Leasing and Gulf States Truck & Trailer Repair, also serves with many organizations in his church parish and community.

A member of the Class of 1987, Gautreau was described by school administrators as a leader and organizer, who is “willing to take a leadership role and responsibilities that go with each role.”

He is the president of the Purple & Gold Club and a Third Degree Knights of Columbus. In addition, Gautreau has served as the past exalted ruler of the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks, the past president of the Riverdale Country Club and a past usher at Ascension of Our Lord Church.

Catholic School of Pointe Coupee

Father Andrew Merrick, Distinguished Graduate of Catholic School of Pointe Coupee, continues the mission of a Catholic education of helping people become all God has called them to be through his role as vocations director for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, co-chaplain for Catholic High School in Baton Rouge and parochial vicar at Christ the King Church and Student Center at LSU.

“The purpose of Catholic education is to form the entire person – mind, body and soul – to become the sainthood that God has created us to be,” said Father Merrick, who graduated from Catholic of Pointe Coupee in 1990.

“Catholic educators have the responsibility to cultivate the natural and supernatural (given via the sacraments) gifts that God has given the students and staff that attend Catholic educational institutions. Catholic educators must pursue excellence in all fields, but it is essential that this pursuit, and all things, are grounded in the faith and Gospel principals,” he added.

Father Merrick, who is known for his gift of being able to relate with others and strives to help people with their relationships, has served in several church parishes in the diocese.

He has volunteered in various ways in Catholic schools, parishes, the community and has participated in mission trips and March for Life.

Catholic School of Pointe Coupee principal Colleen K. Cailet pointed out that Father Merrick displayed leadership qualities from a young age.

“While in high school, (Father) Andrew was a leader in the classroom, athletic arenas and in our campus ministry class. He has always displayed the character of a servant leader, so it is no real surprise that he followed God’s call to become a priest,” said Cailet. “I know that in each school or parish that he has led, Father Andrew has promoted the Gospel values as they were taught to him.”

In 2016, Father Merrick received the Son of St. Ben Award from St. Joseph Seminary College in St. Benedict, which is given to an alumus within the past 20 years who displays outstanding leadership qualities and commitment to service.

While Father Merrick was a student at LSU and deciding his purpose in life and fully turning his heart over to God, his Catholic education played a vital role in drawing him closer to the Lord, and ultimately, to the priesthood.

“Father Merrick dis -

Father Andrew Merrick

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“The Lord put on my heart memories of high school retreats,” said Father Merrick. Those graces, and other confirmations that God was calling him to the priesthood, is what allowed Father Merrick to leave everything and follow him.

He noted that God’s call to trust him with everything is God’s call for everyone.

“The fundamental call of every Christian is to turn ourselves over to God. The more we can do this we become effective instruments of God’s grace,” said Father Merrick.

Catholic High School

Maurice Coleman’s dedication to Catholic High School has earned the 2014 Grizzly Great Hall of Fame member the school’s Distinguished Graduate Award.

Coleman, a 1982 grad, has volunteered in numerous capacities at CHS, including serving on the school’s Foundation Investment Committee, Foundation Board and Men’s Club.

“We chose (Coleman) because of his long term service to Catholic High through his participation in various boards and committees, membership in our support group, ” said Father Merrick.

St. Jean Vianney School

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Maurice Coleman

(Coleman) is a man of outstanding character and this is demonstrated through his faith-filled and wise counsel," Harvey said. "His participation on boards and committees provides an educated and faith-filled perspective that serves the mission of Catholic High School. His dedication to the values and ideals of Catholic High is seen in every interaction with him. No task is too big or too small and he accomplishes all with a warm smile and positive attitude."

Holy Family School

Brad Bass’s legacy on the baseball field is unchallenged: one state championship, two state championship appearances, seven consecutive playoff appearances, 18 playoff wins, two semifinal appearances, several individual coaching awards and an overall total of 157 wins.

Yet for the Catholic High School coach what goes on outside of the lines is equally as important, according to Michael Comeau, principal at Holy Family School in Port Allen. Bass was selected as Holy Family’s Distinguished Graduate.

“(Bass’s) faith and strong belief in the value of a Catholic education have been the forefront of his major life decisions,” Comeau said. “His passion for investing in those around him is evident in everything he does. He works hard to instill more than athletics to his team by organizing group volunteer opportunities and modeling faith through his actions. He knows the value of stopping his busy schedule to make time for the Lord.”

Comeau said Bass has been a supporter of Holy Family for the past 20 years and added that his involvement with the church influences everything Bass does today.

“Brad lives his life dedicated to the Gospel values and it shows everyday,” Comeau said. “He is proud of his Catholic education at Holy Family School.”

At Catholic High, Comeau said Bass works diligently to instill confidence, faith and pride in every athlete he coaches and he is a staunch believer in coaching the entire person rather than just the athlete.

“He truly builds trusts in every player that he coaches and every student that he teaches,” Comeau said. “He considers them family.”

Holy Ghost School

For her commitment to church, school and community, Kathy Pittman has been chosen Distinguished Graduate for Holy Ghost School in Hammond.

Pittman is a retired director of the alumni association at Southeastern Louisiana University. She has been a strong promoter of higher education at SLU, and in 2016 the SLU Alumni Association Service Award was renamed the Kathy L. Pittman Service Award in her honor.

In addition to her support of the Lions, Pittman also firmly believes in the value of a Catholic education.

“For four generations, my family has attended Holy Ghost School and shared the belief that a Catholic education provides quality academics and valuable life lessons in honesty, integrity and respect for others,” she said.

As a Holy Ghost School grandparent, Pittman regularly volunteers on campus and inspires the students to further their education and embrace their faith, according to school administrators. Pittman also serves at Holy Ghost Church in many ministries and volunteers with the Holy Ghost
and St. Thomas Aquinas Parents Associations.

She is also a board member for several organizations, including the New Orleans Area United Way, Tangipahoa Economic Development Foundation and the Council for Support and Advancement of Education District IV. She is also a lifetime member of the Southeastern Alumni Association.

Pittman received several notable awards, including Hammond Citizen of the Year, Woman's Health Foundation Outstanding Woman, the Mother Seton Award for St. Thomas Aquinas High School and the Sigma Tau Gamma White Rose Award.

Mater Dolorosa School

People's physical and spiritual well-being matter most to Keli Saragusa Johnson, Distinguished Graduate for Mater Dolorosa School in Independence.

Johnson is the physical education and computer instructor at Mater Dolorosa and health education/diabetes coordinator for West Feliciana Parish Hospital in St. Francisville.

“Keli has a firm commitment to Catholic education,” said Linda Wisinger, principal of Mater Dolorosa. “She not only graduated from Mater Dolorosa School, but has enrolled her daughter in our school. She volunteers at all events and attends Mass not only on Sundays, but often on our weekly Wednesday Masses.”

Wisinger noted that Johnson works with students in many schools in the community to train them how to take care of their diabetic needs and concerns.

“She helps at not only all school-related functions, but also church and community functions,” said Wisinger. “She stepped up to take our PE/Computer position when our last teacher left, and even though she has another job, gives endlessly to fulfilling the position she undertook at MDS. She is also our room mother coordinator and all time best volunteer. No matter what is asked of her, she does it.”

Johnson has volunteered for the past two years to coach the MDS girls’ basketball team. She also runs the fall fest and helps with any functions the school is involved in, according to Wisinger.

“Keli is a single parent of a second-grader at Mater Dolorosa,” said Wisinger. “She has two jobs that require much of her time, yet she still finds time to spend quality time with her daughter and bring her up with Catholic values and beliefs.”

Johnson’s athletic talents are prominent. When she attended Loranger High School, she helped the girls’ basketball team win the state championship in 2000. She was a member of the Point Club and named Miss Loranger High School Athlete. She was the Fellowship of Christian Athletes Player of the Year and was awarded the U.S. Army Reserve National Scholar Athlete Award.

As an adult she received the Mother Seton Award for MDS.

While a student at the University of Mobile, where she received a full scholarship, Johnson was named to the Dean’s List, and received the Coach’s Award and played on the All American Team for the Gulf Coast Athletic Conference.

Johnson said in everything she does, she wants to lead her daughter by example on how to be successful and, above all, faithful in life.

Most Blessed Sacrament School

An active Most Blessed Sacrament Church in Baton Rouge parishioner his entire life, James Wallbillich has served as an altar server, volunteer, peer minister and was active in youth ministry.

His dedication not only to his faith but also his school led to him being selected as Most Blessed Sacrament’s Distinguished Graduate, principal Cheri Goe said.

“(Wallbillich) was an exceptional student and role model,” Goe said of Wallbillich, a 2008 graduate of MBS. “He lives as Jesus did, sharing our faith with others.”

“James has a rich faith,” she added.

Our Lady of the Lake College

A pioneer in helping establish the first coronary care unit in Baton Rouge, retired nurse Arlene Folmar has been selected as the Distinguished Graduate for Francisican Missionaries of Our Lady University.

Folmar, a 1956 graduate of Our Lady of the Lake College with a degree in nursing, spent the early years of her career at DePaul Hospital and Hotel-Dieu Hospital in New Orleans, both operated by the Daughters of Charity. In the 1960s she came to work at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center, which was then located in downtown Baton Rouge but in the process of planning its move to its current Essen Lane location.

Folmar was instrumental in developing OLOL’s CCU, which was the first to be established in the area and at that time one of few in the state of Louisiana. She also was involved with planning and orienting all nursing employees to the new OLOL facility.

Folmar went on to become the assistant director of nursing and also developed the

Catholic Schools Week 2017
Arlene Folmar

Michael Shingleton

quality assurance program.

“(Folmar) is an example of humble service to the community,” said Dr. Tina Holland, president of Our Lady University. “She has worked hard during her career, dedicating her life to serving those most in need.

“Her life has been a busy one, yet she has always remembered to support her roots, staying active in her church and participating as an active member with the (OL) alumni association. She has relished living the ‘mission.’”

Folmar, who is retired, remains active in a variety of community causes, including assisting in nursing home ministry for 10 years at St. George Church in Baton Rouge and serving as a CASA volunteer.

She also played a major role in launching an OLLIE Senior Learning program chapter in St. Francisville.

“Attending Catholic institutions my entire life has given me so many gifts: discipline, responsibility and working collaboratively with others,” she said. “It influenced the person I became.”

“I am tremendously grateful to the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Sisters who came to Baton Rouge to establish a health care ministry I am so grateful to be part of the mission and the legacy of these sisters.”

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, a network of 117 university-affiliated learning programs, recognized Folmar as a founding member of the Lagniappe Studios Unlimited in Baton Rouge. She was also instrumental in founding a chapter in St. Francisville, which is the only other chapter in south central Louisiana.

“(Folmar) is a joiner and quiet leader,” Holland said. “One thing she says that she learned from her many years in Catholic education is how to get along with people. She is still great friends with people that she went to school with.

“(She is the glue that holds her community together and she still helps to organize lunches among her groups of friends, helping people to stay connected. She is a hard-working and humble individual who exemplifies this institutions’ Franciscan values of service, reverence and love for all of life, joyfulness of spirit, humility and justice.”

Our Lady of Mercy School

Michael Shingleton, Distinguished Graduate of Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge, carries his Catholic values and heart for service with him into the media industry.

“We wish to recognize Michael this year because of his recent return to the Baton Rouge community and his promotion to co-anchor at WBRZ News,” said Chris Porche, interim principal at Our Lady of Mercy.

“Michael’s charisma, professional excellence and leadership in the community reflect Our Lady of Mercy School’s three-fold mission of prayer, knowledge and service,” Porche said.

Awards Shingleton has received include the 2011 Associated Press Award for spot news, 2012 Associated Press Reporter of the Year, 2012 Regional Emmy Award, part of a pair of Associated Press Best Newscast Awards.

The Distinguished Graduate has also been actively involved in the community. Most recent events that he emceed include the Walk for ALS, Roux Rally Gumbo Cook-Off Benefitting Youth Oasis; and United Heroes Telethon benefitting fallen police officers.

Redemptorist St. Gerard School

Hazel LeBlanc’s life has always centered around St. Gerard Majella Church and school. It has been a place she has called home for most of her life, and even today she remains committed to serving her church.

LeBlanc, who struggled with epilepsy her entire life, was selected as the Distinguished Graduate for Redemptorist St. Gerard School.

“What distinguishes a school graduate above all is that person’s appropriation of the Redemptorist missionary charism: the gift of the Holy Spirit that causes one to place one’s life in service to the proclamation of the Gospel to the poor and the needy in order to follow Christ more perfectly,” said Father Sam Maranto CSSR, who was a longtime pastor at St. Gerard.

“This vocation characterized the life of Hazel LeBlanc, family, friends and members of St. Gerard Majella Parish will tell you.”

“Despite a neurological disorder that has the potential of limiting one’s life, (LeBlanc) has poured herself into the ordinary life and mission of St. Gerard by taking leading and participating roles in many church activities and groups.”

Father Maranto said those activities have included prayer, Scripture study and

The Catholic Commentator

Arlene Folmar

Michael Shingleton

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Distinguished Graduate, school administrators at Sacred Heart described her as someone who “directs her school with compassion and wisdom” as well as someone who is well-respected in the community of her alma mater.

For Ragusa, the decision to return to Catholic schools, this time as an educator, follows her views not just on scholarship and classroom activities but also on other issues.

“I believe Catholic education provides a strong foundation for children not only in academics, but more importantly in faith and character,” she said.

Part of that emphasis on faith and character is service. Ragusa volunteers as a eucharistic minister at her church parish at St. Joseph and as a member of the Council of Ministries.

In 2012, she was chosen Principal of the Year in Ascension Civil Parish. Ragusa has a master's degree in education plus 30 semester hours.

St. Aloysius School

Rene Richard Waldrop, Distinguished Graduate for St. Aloysius School in Baton Rouge, demonstrates how one can achieve success, yet be selfless, generous, humble and spiritual.

An adjunct professor at Auburn University and attorney with Munice & Mattson Attorneys, Waldrop serves as an advisor for Phi Mu sorority. She also does ministry with St. Michael Catholic Church in Auburn and she has served as a past board member of a crisis pregnancy center.

Waldrop spearheaded Our House, a community outreach home for men, women and children living in an impoverished area in Auburn.

“The mission of Our House is to show the love of Jesus to children and their families in our community, and to provide a Christ-centered, home environment in which they can grow spiritually, academically and socially,” said Richard. Additionally, Waldrop leads Bible studies for middle school-aged girls and mothers in her community.

Waldrop said her education at St. Aloysius, where she graduated from in 1985, is what instilled in her the importance of community service.

St. Alphonsus School

Rebecca LeSage has spent much of her teaching career in the same building where her educational foundation was formed.

LeSage, a 1981 graduate and an 18-year educator at St. Alphonsus School in Greenwell Springs, was selected as the school’s Distinguished Graduate.

“(LeSage) is passionate about helping her students succeed,” St. Alphonsus principal Dr. Cynthia Ryals said. “She goes above and beyond for her students, comes in before or after school to tutor or review for a test. She is always enthusiastic and upbeat and an excellent role model for our students.”

LeSage has moderated the Young Astronauts Club, Quiz Bowl team and currently moderates the spirit club. She is also a eucharistic minister at the school.

“I believe in paying forward the foundation of my Catholic faith,” LeSage said. “St. Alphonsus played an important role in my life in helping me become the person I am today.

“My hope is that I can give back to my school by touching the life of another young student in the same way through my teaching.”

LeSage said she believes her Catholic education also brought her closer to God. She said several of her friends attended public schools and added that although they received a “great education,” as she did at St. Alphonsus, “there was something I received through my Catholic education that was different.”

“I learned on a daily basis why and what it meant to be a Catholic in a world that doesn’t promote Christianity, much less Catholicism,” she added. “It taught me to trust him in times of need and in times of joy. It taught me forgiveness and how to love.”

LeSage said she was honored as well as humbled when she learned of being the school’s Distinguished Graduate recipient.

see GRADUATES PAGE 148
She was quick to point out that such an honor will help her serve as a better role model for her students.

“I feel I have distinguished myself in my school and community by being involved in the very entity that raised me,” said LeSage, who was previously selected Teacher of the Year while working in the public school system.

“Being a teacher at the school that I attended has been such a meaningful experience.

“This award is set apart because I feel it cuts to the core of who I am as a teacher and most of all as a Catholic.”

St. Elizabeth School

Described as a humble man who does “amazing things for others while seeking no recognition,” J. Wilfred Daigle was named the Distinguished Graduate for St. Elizabeth School in Paincourtville.

In choosing Daigle, school administrators called him a model husband, father, grandfather, parishioner, volunteer and alumni who is “always working for others and the good of the community.”

A retired pharmacist and active real estate broker, Daigle has been involved in many aspects of St. Elizabeth Church and School and the community of Assumption (Civil) Parish for several decades. He was the first president of the SES Father’s Club and a former member of the school board. In addition, he served as a member of the Assumption Parish School Board for 30 years.

Presently, Daigle is an active St. Jude Children’s Hospital volunteer. He and his wife have raised thousands of dollars for St. Jude during the past 17 years, which includes starting the largest St. Jude bike-a-thon in the country. The couple began the fundraiser in honor of a former SES student who died from cancer as a high school student.

Not one to idle, Daigle continues to use his skills as a pharmacist, serving as a volunteer at the St. Vincent de Paul Pharmacy. He recently received a plaque for 10 years of service; however, his desire to help others using his pharmaceutical skills actually began many years before when he voluntarily headed the Assumption Community Hospital Pharmacy and would routinely go to his own pharmacy after hours to fill prescriptions for his patients before 24-hour pharmacy chains existed.

Daigle is also a member of the St. Elizabeth Church Parish Council & Maintenance Committee, the Harvest Festival Committee and a member of KC Council 1099.

A 1952 graduate of SES, Daigle said he is a firm believer in Catholic education.

“It is the foundation on which I have worked, raised my children and lived my entire life,” he said.

St. Francis Xavier School

Helping first-grade students grow in their excitement and knowledge of the Mass is one of the ways Betty Bajoie Bickham, Distinguished Graduate of St. Francis Xavier School in Baton Rouge, teaches them important faith lessons as well as how to succeed.

St. Francis Xavier principal Paula Fabre spoke about how Bickham, a 1962 SFX graduate, consistently demonstrates integrity, respect and a helpful attitude.

“She has excelled in her service to our school in the role of classroom assistant, and has helped in many areas,” said Fabre. “Even though retired, she has offered to come back and help and has done so. She volunteers to help with church activities as well. She reflects Gospel values daily.

“She deeply cares about others. Her wonderful personality sets her apart from others. She has a joyous spirit that is contagious,” Fabre said.

Honors and awards Bickham has received include the Brotherhood/Sisterhood Award and the Mother Seton Award.

Fabre noted that Bickham was chosen
because of her consistent reflection of the Catholic faith and her active participation in the community.

Bickham enjoys helping SFX first-graders learn about the Mass by helping them to participate in it.

“By participating in the Mass, it brings them where they can understand it better,” said Bickham. “I tell them your role (in the case of lectors) is being introduced to the sciences helped me pursue the career I am in today.”

Caillet was a Girl Scout for 12 years and participated in several community service projects, ultimately winning the Bishop Stanley J. Ott Service Award and the Spirit Alive Award. Those values have followed her throughout her career, and as a member of the medical profession she has participated in school-based clinics and advocated for children in Jackson, Mississippi.

She continues to volunteer at St. Jean during the school’s social studies fair and Louisiana Day.

Caillet, who earned her degree in biochemistry at LSU, was salutatorian at St. Joseph’s Academy and a winner of the Pediatric Resident Award at UMMC.

“My parents and teachers instilled in me from a young age that through hard work and dedication you can obtain your goals in life. I have always followed this rule and as a consequence I was able to achieve many of my goals and aspirations,” said Caillet, who has a strong devotion to her family, friends and to helping others.

She included among her achievements graduating from medical school and residency with “high academic and moral standards.”

“I look forward to the next phase of my life which is completing my pediatric gastroenterology fellowship and being an academic doctor,” Caillet added. “I am thankful to God for all of my gifts and know that without him, none of this would be possible.”

St. John Interparochial School

A successful businessman, community volunteer and Mardi Gras enthusiast, Edward Earl Comeaux has been named the 2017 Distinguished Graduate of St. John Interparochial School in Plaquemine.

Comeaux, a 1976 graduate of the school, is the founder of Comeaux Brothers Construction, a residential and general contractor company that has been in business for 33 years.

In 2013, Comeaux and his brothers started Iberville Civil Parish’s first night-time Mardi Gras parade, the Krewe of Comogo.

“By participating in the Mass, it brings them where they can understand it better.”

St. Francis Xavier School

The education Dr. Aimee Caillet received at St. Jean Vianney School in Baton Rouge helped form the foundation that has allowed her to pursue her dream in the medical field.

Caillet, currently in her third year of pediatric residency at the University of Mississippi Medical Center in Brandon, Mississippi, is a 2002 graduate of St. Jean and has been selected as the school’s Distinguished Graduate.

“Receiving a Catholic school education helped me grow as a Catholic and a scholar,” she said. “Learning Gospel values and other catechism teachings while being introduced to the sciences helped me pursue the career I am in today.”

Dr. Aimee Caillet
in other ways. He is a board member of the Iberville Chamber of Commerce and a member of the Knights of Columbus Council 970, the St. John Alumni Association and the ICC Rooftop Committee.

A father of three St. John graduates and the grandfather of one current student, Comeaux continues to give back to his alma mater, offering help and guidance to various school projects whenever possible.

“His dedication to our school is a testament to his belief in our mission,” said Schlatre.

For Comeaux, serving others is instinctive and something he learned through Catholic education.

“As at St. John, I received a strong academic background and was taught to be a good person, respect others and live life the right way,” he said.

St. John Primary/ St. Theresa Middle School
Attending Catholic schools for 12 years, Patrick Reames, the Distinguished Graduate for St. John Primary and St. Theresa Middle School in Ascension Civil Parish, said he learned valuable lessons in the classroom and felt prepared for any educational challenge he encountered.

It’s one of the reasons he and his wife chose Catholic education for their own children.

However, Reames said there are other lessons he wants his children to learn, ones he found were inherent in his own education and ones that have stayed with him and helped him become the person he is today.

“These are the examples set forth by teachers and administrators of how to live a life that brings you closer to God, not only through words, but actions, also,” Reames explained.

A detective with the Ascension Parish Sheriff’s Office, Reames has taken to heart the lesson of living a life for others by choosing a profession in law enforcement.

“He is a kind person who is willing to do anything he can for others,” school administrators said in choosing Reames, a member of the Class of 1990.

As an active parent at St. Theresa Middle School, Reames has helped provide security for the school’s fair and supports the athletic program.

Reames graduated from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge and is a 2005 graduate of Southeastern Louisiana University.

St. Joseph School
St. Joseph School in Ponchatoula gave Savanna Balado, its Distinguished Graduate, the spiritual nourishment she needs to witness her faith on a global level. "Miss Balado has shared her strong faith in God in the community, church parish and school,” said St. Joseph principal Danette Ragusa. “She proudly shares her amazing relationship with God and it is easy to see how he is working in her life when she speaks. All her words and work are for the glory of God and she humbly helps as his disciple to share his good news and love with others. Her service has been heard in her school setting, church parish and now globally.” While at St. Joseph, Balado, who graduated in 2007, demonstrated her athletic gifts. She won the sportsmanship award and was selected the MVP in volleyball and basketball in 2007.

A 2011 honor graduate of Ponchatoula High School, Balado was a member of the National Honor Society and received the Louisiana High School Athletic Association All American Award for volleyball and basketball.

She was a core member of the youth group of St. Joseph Church in Ponchatoula for four years. She received her bachelor’s degree in biology from Southeastern Louisiana University.

The roots of her Catholic education fueled Balado’s missionary zeal.

She is a missionary with Heart’s Home, a Catholic non-profit organization in which young adults dedicate one or two years of their lives promoting a culture of compassion around the world through a range of charitable and cultural efforts.

“For the past year now, I have been here in Argentina on mission with Heart’s Home. For me, Heart’s Home has been a place, a family where I can truly release myself into the heart of God, while at the same time, learn, grow and enter into the person God has created me to become,” said Balado.

Ragusa said Balado has used her education and talents serving those in need.

“Miss Balado is an excellent example of a graduate who is living out our mission statement,” said Ragusa. “Her selfless dedication to helping others and truly living her life as she is being called by God to do shows her zeal for her Catholic faith through prayer and service.”

“Her service to the St. Joseph youth ministry and Heart’s Home for the past four years shows her complete faith in the unending love of God and her ability to serve others,” Ragusa said.
God’s plan for her and her willingness to be completely open to his plan for the good of others.”

St. Joseph’s Academy
Paula Pennington de la Bretonne learned her core values at St. Joseph’s Academy in Baton Rouge and has continued to be an example to others by the exemplary way she has led her life. de la Bretonne, a 1971 SJA graduate, is the school’s Distinguished Graduate.

“(de la Bretonne) instilled the same values in her children that she learned at SJA,” school principal Dr. Michele Lambert said. “Forty-five years after graduating from SJA, she continues to serve the dear neighbor. She is a long-time supporter of SJA and continues to live the charism of the (Sisters of St. Joseph) through her day-to-day actions.”

Lambert cited how de la Bretonne recognized a need for a state-of-the-art science facility at St. Joseph’s and became the major donor that led to the construction of the Irene W. Pennington Center, which opened in 1999.

“de la Bretonne started the Irene W. and C.B. Pennington Foundation, which supports the arts and humanities, community development and public safety, disaster resilience, emotional and social learning, human services, medical and mental health and the environment in the greater Baton Rouge area.”

“She makes it her mission to help others through the work of her foundation,” Lambert said.

St. Jude the Apostle School
“His bravery and patriotism is unmatched.” That’s how school administrators at St. Jude the Apostle School in Baton Rouge described their Distinguished Graduate, Alec Daniel.

Daniel, a 2003 graduate of St. Jude, is currently a full time student at LSU. Prior to enrolling in college, however, Daniel followed a different path, opting to serve his country first.

After graduating from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge, Daniel enlisted in the U.S. Army. He was deployed twice to Afghanistan, serving one-year assignments both times.

Sgt. Daniel served as a sniper team leader, completing six years of active duty before enrolling at LSU to pursue a degree in business administration.

Daniel received many awards for his military service, including the Afghanistan Campaign medal (twice), the Army Commendation award (twice), the Army Achievement medal, the National Defense Service medal and the Global War on Terrorism medal.

In addition to serving his country, Dan-

SPARKING INTEREST – The fourth graders at St. George School in Baton Rouge recently participated in a demonstration by Entergy representatives while learning about electricity. Students were shown real-life examples of how dangerous electricity can be and discussed important safety guidelines to follow around electricity. Students saw how electricity travels through wire fences, tree limbs, metal ladders and water. The students and demonstrators also discussed how these items are conductors of electricity. The activity culminated with a hot dog that simulated their finger if they were to touch electricity without the proper safety equipment. The Arcs and Sparks program by Entergy was a fun and engaging way to wrap up their electricity unit of study. Photos provided by St. George School
GRADUATES ▼
From page 17B

Elise Moran

Joseph Cefalu III

Danny Moran also serves her extended community. She volunteers with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, cooking meals for the men’s shelter. She also offers her assistance and talents to St. Pierre’s Center for the Arts, a Lafayette-based organization that uses art therapy to improve the quality of life for people with developmental disabilities.

Moran said her Catholic education prepared her for life. She credited it with giving her the spiritual tools needed to prepare for a bright future and foster a better understanding of what it means to be faith-filled and live a life of service.

St. Michael High School
The success of the next generations is the measure of success for Joseph Cefalu III, Distinguished Graduate for St. Michael High School in Baton Rouge.

“A Catholic education helps teach and mold our youth by utilizing positive morals and values that are not necessarily incorporated in other education systems,” said Cefalu. He is a 2005 graduate, attorney with Breazeale, Sachse & Wilson LLP and co-founder of Club BLUE, a young professional’s group associated with the Boys & Girls Club of Greater Baton Rouge.

“Club BLUE members, including myself, serve as mentors of Boys & Girls Club children, spread awareness of the difficulties facing youth in our area and help raise funding to provide the club children free after school and summer care, among many other things,” said Cefalu. “Being a part of Club BLUE and watching it grow has been one of the most fulfilling things I have done.”

St. Michael principal Ellen Lee said, “Joseph embodies the mission of St. Michael High School by seeking the truth, living the faith and serving like Christ in his everyday life. On top of juggling the demands that come with a successful career, Joseph makes time to volunteer for Club BLUE. Joseph’s commitment to serving the youth of the community through his volunteerism makes him outstanding among our alumni.”

Among Cefalu’s achievements include being chosen the Super Lawyers Rising Star for 2016 and 2017.

“Joseph is a hard-working professional who recognizes that his gifts and talents were meant to be used in service of others. He showed tremendous initiative by seeing the need for and co-founding Club BLUE, which mentors and supports children in need,” said Lee.

St. Peter Chanel School
St. Peter Chanel School in Paulina principal Paula Poche only had to look to her own staff to identify the school’s Distinguished Graduate.

Sue Beier, a 1984 graduate and a 24-year educator at St. Peter, was chosen for her dedication to Catholic education and to the school, Poche said.

“Her commitment to the school and her Catholic faith has instilled many values and morals in each child she has taught,” Poche said. “She has touched many children’s lives and instilled them to start loving Jesus.”

Beier has not strayed far from home, returning to St. Peter immediately after graduating from college to launch her teaching career. She has volunteered countless hours with the Beta Club Spring Festival and many other social committees. She is also involved with the church’s parish council and served as chairperson for the committee that raised more than $1 million to build a multi-purpose gym.

SEE GRADUATES PAGE 19B

St. Aloysius Catholic School

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GRADUATES ▼

“...” Sue Beier

St. Thomas Aquinas High School

Scott Henderson, Distinguished Graduate for St. Thomas Aquinas High School in Hammond, spent his childhood helping with his family’s business, Berry Town Produce and Liuzza Produce Farm. Those fertile grounds helped Henderson be successful and a faith-filled servant in the community.

“My family, specifically my parents, are my role models for business and faith,” said Henderson, a 2005 STA graduate.

“The resilience, ambition, integrity and heart it takes to run a small business was developed through my Catholic education. Without leaning on prayer daily, I would have given up. My whole life, I’ve been around teachers, coaches and parents who care more about others than themselves. That’s how my businesses are built ... that’s what a Catholic education means to me,” said Henderson.

Ashley Chitwood, STA principal, said, “Scott’s faith, determination and compassion have helped him successfully open several restaurants and create a service organization to encourage community outreach by his employees and customers. “Scott’s dedication to the mission of St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic High School after graduation has been evident in his personal success, but most importantly in his community outreach.” 

Henderson was awarded the 2015 Hammond Chamber of Commerce President’s Award. Last May the Hammond Daily Star readers voted him as the Daily Star Future 40.

Through the Salad Station, one of his restaurants, Henderson strives to serve the community through a volunteer platform for team and family called #lettuce-help.

“We have raised money for Alzheimer’s, breast cancer, schools, the food bank, under privilege kids for school supplies, visited nursing homes for Christmas and participated in a number of fundraising runs. We are very proud of the generosity of our guests and team members,” said Henderson.

St. Thomas More

Only weeks after being appointed parochial vicar at St. Thomas More Church in Baton Rouge, Father Edwin Martin witnessed catastrophic flood damage overwhelm the community where he grew up, forcing many residents and church parishioners to evacuate the area.

He immediately stepped into action, offering assistance, cooking meals and providing comfort to anyone in need. During the months that followed, Father Martin’s unselfish efforts continued, extending beyond flood recovery and touching every aspect of his ministry, making him a natural choice as this year’s Distinguished Graduate for STM, according to school principal Dr. Judy Armstrong.

A member of the school’s Class of 1971, Father Martin pursued his higher education goals, married and had a family. He worked as a chemical engineer and later started a business with his wife, Jenny. Despite his work and family commitments, he continued to give back, coaching football, creating a Teens for Life group and teaching religious education, RCIA and confirmation classes. Father Martin and his wife also founded missions to Honduras and Liberia. In 2010, he was ordained to the diaconate, and in 2013, the Knights of Columbus chose the Martin family a Family of the Year.

That same year, however, after 37 years of marriage, Father Martin’s wife, Jenny, passed away following a terminal illness. As he worked through the grief, Father Martin decided to enter the seminary, returning to a childhood thought about becoming a priest. In 2015, the Franciscan Works Mission presented him with the St. Francis of Assisi Award, and last May, he was ordained a priest, ultimately honoring the wishes of his deceased wife.

SEE GRADUATES PAGE 20B
OLOM introduces STEAM program to sharpen critical thinking skills

As part of their plan to reach all learners, Our Lady of Mercy School in Baton Rouge recently implemented STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and math) as an after-school enrichment program. The primary goal of the program is to cultivate the student’s knowledge of these academic subjects, thus further challenging students beyond what is offered in the classroom. It involves critical thinking components and problem solving with integration of the school curriculum.

The program is offered weekly to students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade for a fee in addition to tuition. Groups are sectioned off by grade level with each group exploring various levels of enrichment. There are 130 students enrolled in the program for the spring semester. Students are challenged in critical thinking and problem solving through the use of technology, learn through play and creative expression. Throughout the experiments and activities, teachers encourage the students to keep trying and to come up with ways to “make it work” if at first the student does not succeed.

STEAM is more fun than traditional learning styles and makes more sense to all types of learners because it is based on the natural ways that people learn. The framework of the lessons is engaging, hands-on and reality-based, allowing students a unique style of learning. One parent said, “My daughter loves the projects and crafts. The fact that it was also an educational experience was the icing on the cake for us as parents. She learned a lot!”

Some examples of activities from the fall session of STEAM included:

- Building structures of cups, but not being able to touch the cups with their hands
- Turkey balloon rockets
- Making a boat – will it sink or will it float?
- Paper chain challenge – using one piece of paper to make the longest chain
- Painting like Michelangelo
- Square roots with square cheese crackers
- How many water drops can a penny hold?
- Paper airplane challenge
- Using iPads to take pictures and create a presentation with objects around school that begin with the letters A to Z.

Near the end of the fall session, several grade levels encouraged STEAM leaders incorporate religion to the program. OLOM middle school science teacher Nessie Galliano spearheaded the initiative with her STEAM students.

Together the students and teacher developed a project with the intent to spread good will throughout the Mercy campus during the Advent season and the “Good Deed Rock” project was created. The project entailed STEAM students decorating and hiding small rocks around the main side of campus. Students who found the rocks were instructed to complete a good deed for a fellow student or faculty member and log their deed on the Google form created by STEAM students.

The last part of the project was to hide the rock once again for another to find, continuing the spread of good deeds. From concept, to implementation, to fact-finding, students were challenged in a new way thanks to this enrichment experience.

The STEAM after school enrichment program is part of the academic student support services directed by student services coordinator Kristy Monsour. Teachers from every academic discipline at Our Lady of Mercy School serve as moderators for each grade level of the program.

Can eyes that look the same as yours make you see differently?

Kids are amazing. They often inspire us the see the world in a different way. And at Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital, we are constantly striving to ensure they receive the best medical care possible. Like offering more than 20 pediatric specialties including critical care and operating the area’s only 24/7 pediatric ER. Yes, kids are amazing. We’re here to do amazing things for them. www.ololchildrens.org

GRADUATES ▼

From page 19B

Faced with many of life’s difficulties and joys, Armstrong noted Father Martin is known for telling others that for every cross, “we find blessings and grace to infuse us with the strength and courage to not only endure but to flourish.”

She called Father Martin’s faith-filled daily actions “an inspiration to so many,” and stated that he is always willing to help his alma mater.

“He participates in faculty and student retreats and prayer services, visits with students at lunch and carpool, talks with classes and even assists in coaching football and (the school’s fundraiser) ‘Dancing to the Eagle Beat,’” she said.

A supporter of Catholic education, Father Martin sent his own children to Catholic schools.

“Public education equips a student to pay bills. Catholic education equips a soul to flourish in this world and attain everlasting life,” Father Martin said.