



GESU SCHOOL

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MUSIC AND LAUGHTER WILL FILL THE STREETS OF A NORTH PHILLY NEIGHBORHOOD AS GESU SCHOOL CELEBRATES ITS FUTURE WITH A FUN COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY

PHILADELPHIA (June 2006) – As schools throughout the region usher in a new year, the 1700 block of Thompson Street in North Philadelphia will throb to the sounds of music and laughter – instead of jackhammers and construction trucks – when Gesu School throws a community-wide block party September 9 from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. to celebrate completion of renovations to its 83-year-old building.

Leaders at the acclaimed North Philadelphia elementary school are inviting neighbors, students, alumni, faculty and friends to join them for a day of fun, music, games, prizes, live entertainment, raffles, street performers and southern-style food donated by Robert Bynum of Warmdaddy's and Zanzibar Blue. The blow-out is being held as a thank-you to everyone for their patience with the disruptions posed by \$5.6 million worth of renovations made throughout the past year.

"We are so excited about our new spaces, which give us additional tools to address some of the inequities found in inner-city education and provide a better experience for the 430 pre-K through eighth-grade students we serve," said Christine S. Beck, president of Gesu School, which has been heralded as a national model for urban education. "We really appreciate everyone's patience this past year as they dealt with the inconvenience of the construction and can't wait to bring the community together to celebrate!"

The much-needed facility improvements are adding 20,000 square feet of space, including the John J.F. Sherrerd Gymnasium on the school's new fourth floor, the Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest Early Childhood Center, the James and Agnes Kim Computer Lab, the Debbie Martinelli Resource Room, multi-purpose rooms, upgraded music and art facilities, and spaces for tutoring, counseling, mentoring and meeting. The renovations are being made possible by "Building for Tomorrow," a \$12 million fundraising campaign launched in 2005 by the school and co-chairs Winston J. Churchill, Ralph S. Saul and John J.F. Sherrerd to fund the facility improvements, establish an endowment to secure the school's future, and create a think tank to share best practices with schools across the country. To date, Gesu has raised \$9.6 million, and leaders say they hope to complete the campaign by December 2006.

"The campaign has generated a lot of excitement as people see how much can be accomplished to benefit students who face sometimes overwhelming obstacles to a quality education," said Churchill, who also serves as chair of Gesu's ecumenical Board of Trustees. "This block party should be a great way to kick off the new academic year and bring us closer to our goal of raising \$12 million to secure the future for many more students."

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This is not the first time Gesu has invited neighbors to celebrate with the school community. In 2003, nearly 1,000 students, faculty, staff, trustees, alumni, families and neighbors came together to commemorate Gesu's 10th anniversary as an independent school. That party featured food from Warmdaddy's, live bands, stiltwalkers and puppets, an African drumming demonstration, face painting, a moonbounce, carnival games and raffle prizes including several bicycles.

Established as a parish school in 1868 and facing extinction in 1993 when the parish was closed, Gesu was saved by a diverse group of business and community leaders who converted it into an independent Catholic school in the Jesuit and IHM traditions. Headed by a dynamic team of leaders and trustees who all believe in the school's mission and approach, Gesu has attracted widespread media attention and recognition for its success in educating children against all odds.

At the core of those accomplishments is Gesu's philosophy that every child can learn and flourish given the right support. The school brings an entrepreneurial approach to governing and fundraising, sets high academic expectations and offers programs that include early learning, single-gender classes in grades three through five, intensive literacy and resource programs, counseling, peer mediation, mentoring and after-school programs, advanced technology instruction and several innovative cultural arts programs.

The results from these ongoing efforts are dramatic. Despite living in often difficult circumstances and in a neighborhood where the public school graduation rate is under 50%, more than 90% of Gesu's graduates attend competitive high schools, 95% go on to earn their high school diplomas, and a growing number pursue a higher education.

For more information on the block party or the "Building for Tomorrow" campaign, call 215-763-9077.

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