



GESU SCHOOL

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HIGH-POWERED BUSINESS EXECUTIVES' MILLION-DOLLAR GIFTS ARE HELPING RAISE FUNDS TO SUSTAIN GESU SCHOOL, "THE LITTLE SCHOOL THAT COULD"

Inspired by the unparalleled success of this acclaimed inner-city elementary school in Philadelphia, donors pledge gifts large and small to support its "Building for Tomorrow" capital and endowment campaign, which has raised \$9.6 million toward a \$12 million goal

PHILADELPHIA (June 2006) – Daryl Shore spent his childhood on the gritty streets of North Philadelphia in a neighborhood struggling with the effects of poverty, drugs and crime. But today he is an accomplished college graduate on a determined path to success thanks to Gesu School, the nation's only private inner-city Jesuit elementary school.

On the surface, Shore wouldn't appear to have much in common with venture capitalists, Fortune 500 CEOs, lawyers or philanthropists, but he shares their ambition, talent and the same goal: to secure the future of Gesu, the "little school that could." 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. Within a decade, it was heralded as a national model for urban education.

"Gesu is a gem of a school that's making a real difference by leveling the playing field for inner-city children," says Gerry Lenfest, a philanthropist and supporter of the school. "Education is their key to a brighter future. It only makes sense to support schools that work, like Gesu, and help give generations of children a chance to do well."

Lenfest is doing just that by committing \$2 million toward the school's \$12 million "Building for Tomorrow" fundraising campaign, which is funding facility improvements, an endowment and a think tank to share best practices with schools across the country. That amount mirrors the gift pledged by investment manager John J.F. "Jay" Sherrerd. And two \$1 million gifts have been made by the Agnes and James Kim Foundation (established by the founders of Amkor Technologies and Electronics Boutique) and by the Shea and Martinelli families.

It's not just large gifts helping to reach the campaign goal. Donors from all walks of life have pledged nearly five dozen gifts totaling \$9.6 million – an impressive achievement for a school that doesn't have selective admissions and doesn't receive significant support from any government or religious entity. But \$2.5 million more is needed.

"The building improvements we're making will help us bridge the substantial inequities seen in inner-city education," said Gesu School President Christine S. Beck, who is anticipating a September 8 ribbon-cutting as construction is completed and hoping to reach the \$12 million goal by December. "And creating an endowment will help us meet our commitment to generations of at-risk children so we can give them hope for a better future."

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The campaign is being led by co-chairs Sherrerd, Winston J. Churchill, a venture capitalist, and Ralph S. Saul, formerly the chair of CIGNA Corporation and president of the American Stock Exchange. These executives are three of nearly five dozen business leaders, education professionals, community leaders, parents and interested citizens who make up the school’s ecumenical Board of Trustees.

It’s logical to wonder why so many people are invested in an inner-city school serving 430 pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students – many of whom are being raised by single parents or other relatives in neighborhoods where drugs, guns and low expectations are all too common. The simplest and most encompassing answer is that the school works. At the core of Gesu’s success is its 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.

Regardless of the size of the donation or the weight of the donor’s background, everyone contributing to the campaign knows that it’s all about the children and how the special relationships they develop with teachers and staff help them succeed in every way. That’s how it was for Ebony James, a college senior who hopes to become a child psychiatrist and has been volunteering most years at Gesu’s summer programs since graduating in 1999. Or Desmond Shannon, who says the work habits he learned at Gesu have helped him immensely at St. Joseph’s Preparatory School. Or Catera Rivers, who maintained a 3.7 GPA at the prestigious Springside School for Girls and is expected to attend Spellman College on a full scholarship.

But it will be current and future Gesu students who will benefit most from the fruits of the campaign. When the long-overdue facility improvements are completed, the school will have 20,000 additional square feet of space, including the John J.F. Sherrerd Gymnasium, 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. Many other classrooms and new spaces will bear the names of generous donors.

An integral part of the campaign is the establishment of an endowment. By doing so, Gesu can reduce the need to spend excessive time and energy on fundraising – a constant necessity since the modest tuition payments cover only 23% of the school’s operating budget – and redirect its focus toward educating students and enhancing programs. Gesu also intends to build on its successful annual symposia and its position as a model school by creating the Gesu Institute for Inner-City Education, a forum for sharing best practices, benchmarking new ideas and helping to improve education in other communities.

For more information on the “Building for Tomorrow” campaign, visit www.gesuschool.org or call 215-763-9077.