

**GESU SCHOOL CELEBRATES FACILITY RENOVATIONS & PROGRESS MADE
TOWARD \$12 MILLION CAMPAIGN;
DONOR PLEDGES TO MATCH NEW DONATIONS UP TO \$1 MILLION**

Philadelphia Mayor John Street joins children, teachers, staff, dignitaries and supporters at a dedication ceremony to mark completed renovations and \$10.1 million in funds raised for “the little school that could”

PHILADELPHIA (October 2006) – Children who entered the doors of Gesu School this fall were greeted by more than just the sight of new, larger rooms and the smell of fresh paint – they savored a taste of a promising future thanks to the generosity of dozens of donors who have contributed \$10.1 million toward a \$12 million “Building for Tomorrow” campaign to support this “little school that could” in North Philadelphia. Major donors to the campaign, which is funding facility renovations, an endowment and the Gesu Institute, include investment manager John J.F. “Jay” Sherrerd (\$2 million), philanthropist Gerry Lenfest (\$2 million), the Agnes and James Kim Foundation (\$1 million) and the Shea and Martinelli families (\$1 million). Donor Al Martinelli was so impressed by the school that he announced the “Martinelli Million-Dollar Challenge,” pledging to match any new campaign gifts, dollar for dollar, up to \$1 million.

At a dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony, Philadelphia Mayor John Street, dignitaries, teachers, staff, children and supporters celebrated campaign progress and got a first-hand look at the building improvements, which have added 20,000 square feet of space and provided multiple opportunities to enhance the learning experience. Facility improvements and additions include the John J.F. Sherrerd Gymnasium, Gerry and Marguerite Lenfest Early Childhood Center, Debbie Martinelli Resource Room, James and Agnes Kim Computer Center, multi-purpose rooms, upgraded music and art facilities, and spaces for tutoring, counseling, mentoring and meeting.

“As we celebrate the new and renovated spaces at Gesu – a safe haven and a beacon of light for children who deserve equality in education – we’re really celebrating the learning and opportunities and enrichment that will happen within,” said Christine S. Beck, Gesu’s president and CEO.

Raising \$10.1 million is an impressive achievement for an independent school that doesn’t have selective admissions and doesn’t receive significant support from any government or religious entity. But to help the school bridge the significant inequities found in inner-city education, nearly \$2 million more is needed. At the dedication, Beck thanked everyone who has helped drive the campaign forward thus far, including co-chairs Sherrerd, venture capitalist Winston J. Churchill and Ralph S. Saul, formerly the chair of CIGNA Corporation and the

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.

"This is a day of hope in this neighborhood and a day of promise for our children," Beck added. "If anything can break the cycle of dysfunctional families, of poverty and of violence, it is quality education. Now we'll have more opportunities for that fire of curiosity to be lit within each child to love learning and to reach his or her potential."

The school has come a long way in a short period of time. 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.

It's logical to wonder why so many people are invested in an inner-city school serving 450 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 high school graduation rate is under 50%, three-quarters of Gesu's graduates attend competitive high schools, more than 95% go on to earn their high school diplomas, and a growing number pursue a higher education.

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

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