From the first strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” to the closing notes of “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” graduation is a beautiful and moving occasion at Gesu School. On June 14th the eighth grade class of 2006 filed into the majestic Church of the Gesu. They were greeted by beaming parents and grandparents, friends and teachers, Trustees and supporters.

The students planned the ceremony themselves—there were songs and dances and speeches. And they did not forget to thank everyone who made this day possible, including all those smiling listeners.

Honorary speaker Father Stephen Thorne, the Director of the Philadelphia Office of Black Catholics, received an equally warm response from our graduates. He said that there would continue to be difficult times ahead in their lives, and reminded them to be survivors, not victims, of adversity. He noted that this would be the first of many graduations for them, and most of all, he asked them to become the fine men and women they are called to be.

The class of 2006 is off to a great start with most entering selective high schools next year!
FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Friends,

Please join us on September 8 to celebrate the completion of our major expansion and renovation project! Magic will be in the air. As we stretch to reach our remarkable $12 million campaign goal (we are 6% there), the mystique of Gesu’s success continues.

Last week a beautiful Nigerian mother exclaimed praises to the Lord, burst into tears and asked if she could give me a hug. Then she asked her 12-year-old son to express his thanks “the African way.” Although reluctant, he knelt down, put his hands together to pray and said, “Thank you.” They had just been told that Sr. Ellen could squeeze children’s hands into our 5th and 6th grades for September. The mother arrived from Africa several years ago—shoeless and poor. Having become well educated herself, she was unhappy with the large class sizes in her children’s public school. This family, North Philadelphia neighbors of our Maintenance Supervisor, welcomes the opportunity for a quality education at Gesu—a safe, faith-based environment.

Gesu School has needed more space for years, and our many new rooms and our larger chapel will enhance our ability to give our children the academic skills, self-confidence and personal faith they need to overcome the many obstacles in their lives. The children do, indeed, remain our mission.

Gesu’s “school song” is a gospel hymn, and when H.L. Rattiffl plays the introductory bars, all 430 children perk up, begin clapping and singing “God has sure been good to me . . .”

With blessings and thanks to each of you,

Christine S. Beck
President/CEO

REMEMBERING SUZANNE STACK

Gesu School lost a dear friend this spring, when Trustee Suzanne Stack died of cancer. Suzanne was an extraordinary woman, whose warmth and thoughtfulness were shared with our children in countless ways. She was best known for taking the entire school to a musical at the Media Theatre every December. In herGESU’S MOST LASTING LESSONS

Ashlei Tinsley, ’06 won an award for her essay “An End to Violence,” in the “Do the Write Thing” contest, sponsored by the National Campaign to Stop Violence. We are proud of her success, and proud of the values she learned at Gesu.

Ashlei’s essay calls for personal action and responsibility towards others. She recognizes that young people need creative outlets to express their hopes and fears. She believes that after school programs, activities and community organizations must broaden children’s horizons. Ashlei plans to change the world with lessons she learned at Gesu.

Among the good news we heard:

• Ashton Miller ’04, who works several days each week in Gesu’s after-school program, was recognized for his academic and personal qualities at St. Joseph’s Prep this spring.

• He received academic honors, was elected President of the Black and Latino Student Organization, and his classmates voted him Sophomore of the Year.

• Catera Rivers ’02 graduated from Springside School in June and is on her way to Spelman College. Thanks to Thomas Sharbaugh and Gordon Coney, Catera’s summer will be a productive one, as she interned at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius. She joins fellow alum and current University of Pennsylvania student Malik Lewis, who is returning to Morgan, Lewis & Bockius for a second summer.

• Michael Miles ’02, just graduated from Roman Catholic High School, where he served as President of Student Council this year. He will attend Eastern University this fall.

• Robert Warren ’05, a freshman at Charter High School of Architecture and Design, has been inducted into the National Honor Society.

Not all of the news is good. We received the tragic report that one of our graduates is lost forever. William Palmer, Gesu School ’01 and a Roman Catholic High School graduate, was shot to death at his job as a parking lot attendant. He was working long shifts and saving his pay to attend Cheyney University in the fall.

William was a solid student, with a strong desire to be a successful businessman. He began pursuing his dreams at the age of 15, when he created an on-line sneaker sales business. His senseless death is a heartbreaking reminder of the harsh and violent world our students inhabit, and the fragility of their dreams.
Building for Tomorrow Celebrations

Campaign Fundraising Reaches Goal

The miracle continues! As of July 1, dedicated Trustees and other volunteers have raised more than $8.6 million for Gesu School’s capital campaign, Building for Tomorrow. As a result of the generosity of many donors and the magnificent leadership of campaign chairs Win Churchill, Ralph Saul and Jay Sherrerd, renovations to the school will be completed on schedule for the opening of the school year, while a healthy endowment will ensure its future.

However, the $12 million goal must still be met by December 31, 2006. Donors of $1,000 and more will be recognized on a beautiful photo installation in Gesu’s first floor hallway. If you have not done so, please consider a gift to Gesu’s campaign—call Surette Baird in the Development Office for more information.

Grand Re-Opening and Ribbon Cutting Scheduled for September 8

On Friday, September 8th (rain or shine) at 1:00 p.m., the ribbon will be officially cut and visitors will pour into the renovated Gesu School for the first time. Please join us! It will be an afternoon of rejoicing as guests tour our new classrooms.

Highlights will include the Sherrerd Gymnasium, the Gerry and Margarette Lenfest Early Childhood Learning Center, the Kim Computer Lab, the Debbie Martinelli Resource Room, the Hubbard Lobby, and many other special rooms, including science, art, and after-school rooms. Plus, a beautiful new library and chapel.

As Gesu School begins a new era, we remain passionately committed to our mission. At the dedication, we will celebrate our donors’ faith that all children can learn, that quality education must start early, that education can break the cycle of poverty and dysfunctional families, and that justice requires action.

Block Party—Save the Date: September 9, 2006 (Rain date Sept. 10)

After all the hammering, welding, painting and the cranes and cement trucks, it’s time to celebrate! Please join Gesu’s families, friends and neighbors for a free day of food, fun and festivity.

From noon until 4:00 p.m. on Saturday, September 9th, our entire block will be given over to activities for children and families, and to music and dance performances. Zanzibar Blue will provide exceptional cuisine.

All are welcome!

Camp Butterfly

Summer vacation in North Philadelphia can mean long months of boredom, heat and poor supervision. Parks, field trips and reading on the back porch are not regular parts of life for all children. Thanks to the Perkins Foundation, however, Camp Butterfly changes everything!

Every summer, Gesu works with one extraordinarily dedicated woman to ensure a better experience for thirty of our younger neighborhood kids. Doris Harris turns her home, just down the street from our front porch, into Camp Butterfly, and provides organized, lovingly supervised field trips and activities all day long.

Summer for children lucky enough to participate in Camp Butterfly offers what they need most—new experiences and exposure to new ideas. They go to concerts, to museums, to the Aquarium—learning about a world far wider than Thompson Street. This year, they will take a long dreamed of trip to Washington DC (also supported by the Perkins Foundation). And, with daily reading activities, their academic skills won’t have a chance to rust.

Real Role Model

After 21 seasons with the Orioles and a record 2,632 consecutive games, Cal Ripken Jr. is known as a great role model. This hardworking, unassuming athlete has devoted years to coaching and mentoring young people. What a thrill when he asked to meet with an intimate group of Gesu parents and coaches to talk about children and sports!

Appearing at Gesu on April 20th, Cal emphasized teaching children values Gesu supports every day, like civility, respect and persistence. In sports, in school and in life, these are the qualities that really do matter. Listeners left with sound advice and autographed copies of Cal’s Parenting Young Athletes the Ripken Way.

The Ignatian College Connection

Gesu Trustee Father George Bar, S.J. is the Jesuit Community Superior at St. Joseph’s University, where he runs the Ignatian College Connection. He encourages, recruits, prepares and finds scholarship funds for minority and low-income students. This year’s participants included Gesu graduates Stephanie Neil, Emilio Willoughby, Latonya Weatherly, Latonya Weatherly, Jeremy Miles, Courtney Davis, Thomas Johnson, Leonard Jones, Cherish Gilson, Rafael Waitfield, Michelle Jackson, Michael Wallace, and Jahlil Edwards (not pictured).

Assistant Principal Father Neil Vor Schneider, S.J., Counselor Sister Pat McCannan, IHM, Cal Ripken, Jr., Chaplain Father Ray Donaldson, S.J., and Principal Sister Ellen Comvey, IHM share insights into mentoring.

The children in Gesu’s own summer camp program divided their day between academics and field trips, including a trip to the shore, thanks to the owners of Sugars Restaurant in Ocean City.
Sister Ellen to Celebrate 40 Years as an IHM Sister

When you enter Sister Ellen’s office, you see photographs immediately—photographs of hundreds of Gesu graduates. As Principal, Sister Ellen welcomed them to Gesu in pre-K, encouraged and disciplined them as they grew, and prepared them for high school and college. These young people send her pictures of themselves graduating from high school, attending college, and raising their own families.

On September 15, Sister Ellen will celebrate her 40th Anniversary as a member of the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. She has nurtured and challenged children in some of the most underserved neighborhoods imaginable, pouring her heart into Gesu since 1990.

Sister Ellen embodies the IHM belief that every child can learn. With creativity and energy, she has developed the wide range of programs that set Gesu apart as a model school. Countless children blossomed at Gesu because of the pre-K program, the resource room, the single gender classrooms, and the advanced writing and math programs.

Taahira Davis and Bill Shea joined students and volunteers celebrating Dr. Seuss Day throughout the school.