GESU SCHOOLS
Educational Excellence in North Philadelphia in the Jesuit and IHM Traditions

Gesu Salutes Its Shining Stars

"How can I possibly deal with this sudden departure of a loved one? Celebrate the time, the moments you have. And acknowledge those and accept those for what they are."
—Tim Russert, October 22, 2007

SCHOOL COMMEMORATES LIVES OF THREE BELOVED TRUSTEES

The Gesu community suffers a great loss with the recent deaths of Sigrid Berwind, Jay Sherrerd, and Tim Russert.

Sigrid Berwind

Sigrid Berwind, a dedicated Trustee for over 10 years, died in March after courageously battling cancer for 17 years. Mrs. Berwind loved Gesu and took a personal interest in its lives; her many generous donations to the school included significant contributions to the Sponsor A Child Program, culminating with the sponsorship of nine students in 2007-2008. Trustee Keith Pienker recounts a time when she called Mrs. Berwind her hero because of Mrs. Berwind's generosity. "Sign told me that what she had done was nothing she declared the teachers and the volunteers to be the real heroes."

For many years Mrs. Berwind welcomed Gesu's students to her beautiful farm for a day complete with pony rides and lunch—an unforgettable experience for children who had never been to the country before! Years later, alumni fondly recall outings to Mrs. Berwind's farm among their favorite Gesu memories.

Jay Sherrerd

Jay Sherrerd, a giant in the field of investment management and a longtime Gesu trustee, died just a few weeks before he was to be honored as the co-recipient of the Gesu Spirit Medal. Creator of the Gesu School Annual Fund and a key proponent of the school's growing endowment, Jay also spearheaded major fundraising activities for Princeton and the Episcopal Academy. In 2007, he received the Lifetime Achievement in Philanthropy Award from the Philadelphia Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

Among Mr. Sherrerd's countless contributions to the school, the Sherrerd Gymnasium, built in 2006 as part of the Building For Tomorrow capital campaign and school renovation, is by far the students' favorite. According to Chris Beck, President & CEO, Mr. Sherrerd was an angel to the school, often bestowing gifts in times of greatest need.

Tim Russert

Acclaimed political analyst and journalist Tim Russert died suddenly on June 13th. Mr. Russert served the school as a Trustee for many years, later continuing his involvement as an Advisory Trustee. As the moderator of the school's first Annual Symposium on Inner-City Education in 1997, he set the tone for the symposium's serious examination of tough issues in inner-city education, a tradition which has continued for 14 years. Gesu School honored Mr. Russert by awarding him an honorary degree in 2005 to complement his extensive collection of honorary degrees from Jesuit universities.

In 2005, Mr. Russert received the Magis Spirit Award from the Jesuits of the Philadelphia-Camden Area, in honor of his exemplary contributions to the Jesuits' ministries, including Gesu School. Prior to the award's presentation, Mr. Russert addressed Gesu's 8th grade students, delivering a speech that was both warm and humorous and Mr. Russert shared the importance of his Catholic education with the 8th graders, saying, "What did they teach me at St. Bonaventure School? What do they teach you at Gesu? You learn how to read. You learn how to write. And you learn right from wrong. That's the secret of life."

GESU SPIRIT MEDAL BESTOWED ON STARS RALPH SAUL AND JOHN J.F. SHERRERD AT GESU CELEBRATES!

More than 400 guests helped Gesu celebrate its 125th year as an independent school at the Philadelphia Museum of Art on May 15th at Gesu Celebrates 125 Years with 125 Stars! An evening dedicated to the rising stars of our city, it was only fitting to recognize the shining examples of two of Gesu's most dedicated champions, Ralph Saul and the late John J.F. Sherrerd, with the presentation of the Gesu Spirit Medal.

The Gesu Spirit Medal honors individuals who have shown extraordinary commitment to Gesu School through their loyal advocacy and actions, and who have made a significant contribution to Gesu's success as a model inner-city elementary school. Ralph Saul and Jay Sherrerd, both longtime Gesu Trustees, have been integral to the growth of Gesu's fundraising endeavors. Most recently the pair co-chaired, with Win Churchville, the school's successful $2 million capital campaign, Building for Tomorrow. The campaign funded Gesu's 2006 major renovation and expansion, and grew the school's endowment to help ensure Gesu's future.

Summer 2008
FROM THE PRESIDENT

DEAR FRIENDS,

Each Gesu school day begins with children reading or singing over the loudspeaker. Even kindergartners take a turn. The combination of scripture, African American heritage and history represents the many values within our school and sets the tone of love, faith and safety.

In addition to the usual flood of e-mails and meetings related to all things surrounding governance, fundraising, personnel and finances, my days are filled with many varied and often unexpected challenges — and, of course, many joys.

- In recent weeks visitors from schools in Wilmington, New York, and Syracuse came to learn from us, ask many questions, and they left feeling inspired.

- Watching an aunt step up and take in three children who had to be removed from their mother’s care helped bring comfort to a heart-wrenching situation.

- An 8th grader who had always been expelled numerous times took a leadership role in this year’s Writer’s Jam performance. A life transformed, without a doubt.

- A kindergartner girl comes into my office and says, “Remember me? I’m the artist.” Her drawing was, indeed, posted on my bulletin board — a person lying dead on the street next to another person with a gun in hand.

Most of our Gesu students face the same hardships as anyone who lives in the inner-city. Drugs, violence, incarceration, low incomes are part of our children’s lives. We are proud that over 90% of our alumni graduate from high school on time in four years.

Why, then, are half of Philadelphia’s high school students dropping out before they earn diplomas? How is it possible for our big cities to have such dismal high school graduation rates? This should be not acceptable, simply not acceptable, by any standards.

Because of your commitment as donors, volunteers and advocates, we are able to offer our children a quality and enriched education in a safe, nurturing environment.

Thank you!

Cheri
Christine S. Beck
President and CEO

WHERE ARE THEY GOING?

100% of the Class of 2008 is headed to either an independent, parochial, charter, or magnet high school

- Academy of Notre Dame
- Archbishop Prendergast High School
- Bodine High School for International Affairs
- Cardinal Dougherty High School
- CHAD (Charter High School of Architecture & Design)
- DVC (Delaware Valley Charter)
- Freire Charter School (2)
- Hallahan Catholic Girls High School (3)
- Mastery Charter School (2)
- Maya Angelou Charter, MD
- Mercy Vocational High School (2)
- Monsignor Bonner High School
- Northeast Catholic High School
- Paul VI High School
- PET (Philadelphia Electrical & Technology) Charter High School
- Philadelphia High School for Girls
- Philadelphia Montesori High School
- Roman Catholic High School (3)
- Science Leadership Academy
- Springside School for Girls
- St. Joseph’s Preparatory School (4)
- West Philadelphia Catholic High School (2)

WE NEED PEACE

By Joseph, Grade 6

We need peace in the world today.

All the violence is shameful.

People can’t come out of the house and not be worried.

It’s crazy how our world is falling apart.

Everybody is in danger.

Don’t know if you’re gonna get shot.

Don’t know if you’re gonna get stabbed.

Everybody needs to say...

I will.

I can.

Stop the violence.

We need peace.

We need to stick together.

We need to do something.

We need to be strong.

If we don’t do something we will be no more.

We need peace.

HISTORIC AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN SCHOOL AND JESUITS

AS THE ONLY JESUIT-SPONSORED ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN THE MARYLAND PROVINCE, GESU HAS A UNIQUE ARRANGEMENT WITH THE JESUITS.

On May 9th, members of the Gesu School family gathered in the school’s Pierre Toussaint Chapel for the signing of the Sustaining Agreement between Gesu School and the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus. The agreement formalizes Gesu’s 140+ year identity as a Jesuit-sponsored elementary school, while also affirming the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary as co-stewards of the school.

A PARENT’S PERSPECTIVE

"The Sustaining Agreement between Gesu School and the Jesuits is a profound agreement that impacts not only our children but the community at large. The fact that the Jesuits have agreed to remain part of the life of the students gives continuity to the shared interest in their education.

"Having had three children go through Gesu and with one child currently at Gesu, I have seen the difference between Catholic and public education. In this day and age, with education being so pivotal in making career choices, I know that my children are now more capable, and can stand toe to toe with any of their peers in the job market. The Jesuit aspect teaches children critical thinking. My children can see their peers and recognize when they have made some bad choices.

"One of the things I love about Gesu is that it’s small enough that it still feels like a family. Graduates come back and share their successes. Just the fact that the Jesuits have chosen to remain part of the experience is wonderful.”

- Bernardine Briscoe, Gesu Parent and Trustee

The Briscoe family has lived in the Gesu Parish since 1984.

ALUMNI RETURN FOR REUNION

Graduates flourish in various fields

On May 17, over 50 alumni from the classes of 1990–2007 gathered at the Sheraton Classroom, a facility on a floor that didn’t even exist when many of the alumni attended Gesu. Many other alumni who could not attend sent updates to share their latest adventures. Here's a sampling of what some Gesu grads have been up to...

Karenne Parker ’27 is a rising sophomore at the Shipley School. Her goal is to become a pediatrician.

Ashley Miller ’05 just graduated from Saint Joseph’s Prep and will attend Princeton University on a full scholarship. He was also accepted to the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.

Michael Miles ’04 is a sophomore at Eastern University where he is majoring in Youth Ministry. He will most likely attend the seminary after graduation.

David Ellis ’00 is a graduate of Morey Vocational and Community College, where he studied nursing and lab technology. She currently works in a specimen lab. Her goal is to go back to school and receive her B.A. in nursing.

Jared Smith ’01 is a graduate of Roman Catholic High School and Clark Atlanta University, where he majored in Public Relations. He is now a recruiter for the Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

Terra Drakewood ’96 is studying Sociology at Temple University, while also working and raising her siblings. She is a graduate of Benjamin Franklin High School.

Jamal Stoker ’96 graduated from Saint Joseph’s Prep and King’s College. He now works as an auditor for Deloitte & Touche.

Shannon Kennedy ’93 is a graduate of Central High School and Johnson C. Smith University, where she studied Elementary Education. She currently teaches for the School District of Philadelphia.

Notice a trend? Despite numerous obstacles, over 90% of Gesu’s graduates complete high school within four years. On average, only 5% of their peers city-wide graduated on time during 2003–2005.*


ATHLETIC CORNER

Sprinting to the Finish

Science Lab Coordinator Pat Leaf caught seventy-four students on the track team this year. The athletes, who practice on the school’s rooftop playground, in the stairwells, and on rainy days in the new Sheraton Classroom, made an excellent showing at the Archdiocesan Championships, especially for a team without a safe track nearby on which to practice. The Gels Minors’ 4x100 Meter Relay Team of 7th graders Jasmine and Ciera, 6th grade Courtney, and 5th grader Nia snatched 3rd place at the Archdiocesan CYO Championships with a time of 55.07; missing 2nd place by just four hundredths of a second.

Meanwhile, Jasmine and Ciera each took 5th place in the Minors’ 100 Meter Dash and the Minors 200 Meter Dash respectively. At the PennRelays, 7th graders Deja and Amelia, 6th grade Courtney, and 5th grader Nia placed and in the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Junior Girls’ 4x100 Meter Relay.

Students Run Philly Style

Ever run a half-marathon? A full marathon? Soon several Gesu students will be able to claim such accomplishments. Through training and support from the program Students Run Philly Style, rising 7th graders Jasmine and rising 8th graders Najiah, Bethel, and Sharice have their sights set on the 3.1 mile Philadelphia Distance Run in September. Kwadee ‘10, the only two students who meet the age requirements, have their sights set on the Philadelphia Marathon in November. Under the leadership of teachers Erin Anka and Linda Hartl, as well as volunteer Mr. Jeremy, the team practices together three days a week during the school year and twice a week over the summer. The program, which has been shown to improve both health and self-esteem, is run by the National Nursing Centers Consortium.

Three Cheers

Trustee Fr. George Burke, SJ has been named President of Saint Joseph’s Prep. We are very excited to have Fr. Burke close to us again in North Philadelphia. Advanced Math Teacher and Chaplain Fr. Ray Donohue, SJ has been named pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Durham, NC. Although we are sad to see Fr. Ray go, we wish him many blessings in his new assignment.

Associate Director of Development Mike Gordon was inducted into Roman Catholic High School’s Sports Hall of Fame for his outstanding baseball career. Gesu friend Jen Sall completed her first Ironman Triathlon in 13 hours and 30 minutes. To add extra meaning to her competition, Jen raised over $10,000 for Gesu in honor of her late mentor Suzanne Stark.

Gesu Earns Middle States Reaccreditation

Gesu received official notification that the school has been reaccredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. Thank you to everyone who worked so hard on this intensive self-study and independent review, especially co-chairs Amy Brignola and Colleen Comey.

Gesu receives a four-star rating from Charity Navigator. An independent organization that rates nonprofits on fiscal responsibility, only 15% of organizations reviewed by Charity Navigator achieve a four-star rating two years in a row.

Cheri Dierd! Over a dozen 7th and 8th graders seized the opportunity to study Latin under the guide of volunteer Greg Loman. Mr. Loman also taught Latin in the school’s expanded Young Scholars Program this summer.

Carrie Donovan, Ani and Cimar watch the “Latter Prime” doll Mr. O’Dara Kran. For a ceremony on Mr. Peter’s Kindergarten class, Creative Instances Gesu students reading was set up for any student of Mr. Atlas, Kindergartners could read by the end of the year.

Science and service come together for Miss E’s 8th grade students, who take a break from their Earth Day Bay State beach clean up to adopt a tree at the Rainforest. The class raised over $300 enough money to “adopt” a monkey they named Gesu and a tine they named the Parent Tree.

Kuadr ‘08 poses for a shot with Mayor Michael Nutter after completing the Broad Street Run. Three other Gesu students and their teachers crossed the finish line of the 10-mile course that day.

Patricia ‘88 proudly displays her diploma. With a solid educational foundation, odds dictate that this will be the first of many graduations for the members of the Class of 1988.

Thanks to over 85 Sponsor A Coach donors, 116 sponsored students received Gesu Scholarships this year. If you would like to sponsor a child by contributing the full annual cost of a Gesu education for one year ($4,700), contact Mike Gordon at (215) 763-9077 or mike.gordon@gesuschool.org.
THE NEW "YOUGNEST SCHOLARS" CHALLENGED TO EXCEL:
Twenty-one of the brightest 3rd–5th graders are poised to escape the "achievement trap."

Spearheaded by Trustee John DiIulio, Ph.D., the new pilot program Youngest Scholars was launched this June at Gesu. Over the summer break, the 21 Youngest Scholars, selected from the top rising 3rd–5th grade students at Gesu, participated in rigorous supplemental academic work. The goal is to provide talented students with an extra boost to keep them from falling into the so-called "achievement trap."

The Youngest Scholars Program responds to a disturbing trend revealed by a Jack Kent Cooke Foundation report, which DiIulio coauthored. The report looked at the nation’s highest-achieving students, broke the numbers down by income, and compared the students’ long-term outcomes. The authors found that children who were among the top 25% of the nation’s students, but who fell below the national median for family income, did not attain the same level of education as their higher-income peers. Lower-income high-achievers were twice as likely to drop out of high school as their higher-income high-achievers, were less likely to graduate from college, and were less likely to attend the most selective colleges.

According to the report, "Instead of being recognized for their excellence and encouraged to strengthen their achievement, high-achieving lower-income students enter what we call the ‘achievement trap’—educators, policymakers, and the public assume they can fend for themselves when the facts show otherwise."

"I never prayed so hard that the results would come out differently than they did," says DiIulio, "...We’re not doing a good enough job in lifting up and supporting even those kids who are naturally gifted...they’re getting lost in the shuffle. Not one to stay locked in the ivory tower, DiIulio jumped into action. Because the research showed the lower-income high-achievers lost ground throughout elementary school, DiIulio worked with Gesu’s President Chris Beck and Principal Sister Ellen Convey to develop a plan for reaching Gesu’s most talented younger children. The Youngest Scholars pilot program was born. The program complements Gesu’s existing Young Scholars Program, which has a successful track record preparing high-achieving 6th–8th graders for admission to highly selective high schools."


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Address correction requested

Save the Date: October 31st, 2008

Gesu’s 11th Annual Symposium on Inner-City Education: Lessons in Leadership

Panelists include: Steelman Graham, author and nationally recognized authority on leadership, Rev. Joseph M. McShane, S. J., President of Fordham University, Moderator Dr. John DiIulio, Jr., Gesu Trustee and Director of the Penn Fox Leadership Program, Winston J. Churchill, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Gesu School, Christine S. Beck, President & CEO of Gesu School, Marc Manneck, CEO of KIPP Philadelphia Charter School, and Lars Beck, CEO of Young Scholars Charter School.