

St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School

2024
NEWSLETTER

A New Drama Club Takes to the Stage

Did you hear what Horton heard? Catch a glimpse of the Cat in the Hat? These days, if you enter our school after hours, be prepared to enter the mystical Jungle of Nool or the joyful town of Whoville.

It has been over seventeen years since the school last committed to a full-scale production like **Seussical JR!** Yet that did not hinder an enthusiastic group of parents, with the support of **Principal Amy Bauer**, from undertaking a new after-school drama program for K through 8th-grade students. Dr. Seuss's books come to life with the characters from Horton the Elephant, the Grinch, and, of course, the Cat in the Hat. This May, Horton will discover a speck of dust floating through the air, containing the Whos—and fun will surely ensue! Since January, practices have been underway for a hundred Whos, along with the Cat in the Hat, played by sixth-grader **Carson Victoria**, Horton, played by eighth-grader **Cody Schrock**, and his friend Jo-Jo, played by fourth-grader **Maria Malatesta**. Additionally, *Seussical, Jr.* offers an array of thirteen supporting characters played by other talented students.

Last spring, after some parents inquired about a theater program during the H&S meeting, the program director and musical director, **Mrs. Meggie Gribbin**, began asking other parents, "If we bring a musical to SMM, do you think we would get a good turnout?" The answer was a resounding "yes!" Mrs. Gribbin expressed, "Many of our children have been involved with other local programs, and while I am so thankful for those, I knew we could do something right on our stage. Word of mouth spread, and a team started to form."



Mrs. Katie Knee, co-director, **Mrs. Jessica Malatesta**, choreographer, and alum **Mrs. Kate Smith**, producer extraordinaire, eagerly jumped in to bring the musical to the students. Mrs. Gribbin added, "In addition, we have a team of parents who help out at rehearsals, take attendance, guide the **JR** choir of grades K-3 students to their spots, (continued on back page)



AROUND THE CAMPUS

As you walk around our parish campus, you can't help but feel a sense of belonging. This transformation is a testament to the community we've built, a community that our beloved pastor, Msgr. Chieffo has fostered through his motto of JOY—Jesus, Others, and then Yourself.

Whether you're praying in the church or chapel, attending an event in St. Francis Hall, reflecting in our outdoor gardens while listening to children enjoying the playground, or walking through the hallways bustling with students during school or in PREP, you know you are part of a vibrant community that is centered around faith, compassion, and generosity.

(continued on pg. 4)

With A Heart Full Of JOY



Dear Parish Family and Friends of St. Mary Magdalen School,

What a joy and blessing it has been to serve as a priest for forty-nine years and as your pastor since June of 2000. I am grateful and humbled by your many sacrifices, kindness, and love, which flow from your compassionate and merciful hearts.

I was deeply overwhelmed by the outpouring of love and support during the gala on April 6. I express my heartfelt appreciation to everyone who attended, donated, and contributed in helping us to build upon our school's legacy, as seen in each of our students and embodied by our community.

Your love for God and others has deepened my faith as your pastor and fellow pilgrim. We come from God, and we are each on a journey back to Him. As we make our way, we aspire to become saints who strive to imitate Jesus, the Way and the Truth, who guarantees us eternal life and love.

My Catholic faith and education changed my whole vision of how to live and love. A Catholic school education forms students into reverent, respectful, and responsible stewards of our faith. A vibrant faith that enables us to live a life of virtue as God's Powerful Spirit blesses us with divine love and hope to build a culture of life.

I praise God and thank the dedicated parents for entrusting their children to our school program. Since Saint Mary Magdalen School's founding in 1965, the school continually strives to form the mind and heart of each student to be Passionately Catholic and Academically Excellent. Your unwavering support has been instrumental.

God continues to bless us with many disciples of Jesus through the devoted clergy, our principal, faculty, and staff. The principal, Mrs. Amy Bauer, and teachers respect parents as the primary formers of faith and also care for the students as their own.

I am most grateful for our parents, parishioners, and friends who share their time, talents, and treasure with our students. By witnessing and practicing your charity and compassion, our students, in turn, challenge each other to become a loving presence of our Risen Lord at church, school, home, and in the world.

Through the powerful intercession of Saint Mary Magdalen, I pray that God continues to bless our parish family and friends with Jesus's presence, power, and peace in their hearts and homes.

Jesus loves you, and so do I,
Rev. Msgr. Ralph J. Chieffo, Pastor



Legacy of Love & Builder of Faith

This year, our biennial **Legacy of Love Gala** was a testament to our strong community spirit. It was a record-breaking event, with over 600 friends and family from our community filling the ballroom at Drexelbrook on April 6. Together, we came to honor our cherished pastor of twenty-four years, **Rev. Monsignor Ralph Chieffo**, who will be officially retiring this June. The event also marked a significant milestone in our fundraising efforts, netting over half a million dollars for the school, breaking all previous records.

Deacon Joseph Boyle told the *Delco Times*, "Msgr. Chieffo has been a beacon of light, showing the St. Mary Magdalen Parish Community the path of missionary discipleship through his example. He has met each of his flock where they are and guided us all towards our shared calling, the road to sainthood. When our hearts are restless, he leads us through the intercession of the Blessed Mother to find solace in her Son, providing us with a constant source of guidance and reassurance."

Long-time parishioners and alumni parents **Mary Ann and Don Saleski** and **Patty and Gary Holloway** oversaw and planned this delightful evening with the support of current school parents **Alyson and Brian Grandieri** and **Carolyn and Mike Longo**, as co-chairs, along with dedicated volunteers and parish staff.

The night was made even more meaningful by the presence of Msgr. Ralph's family members, including his siblings **Angelo Chieffo** and **Theresa Kilcur**, many friends including fellow priests and deacons, a wide array of devoted parishioners, along with **Archbishop Nelson Pérez**.

Principal **Amy Bauer** beautifully captured the essence of our pastor's leadership, saying, "Monsignor Chieffo's greatest passion is spreading the good news about the love of God and the joy of our Catholic faith to our young people. St. Mary Magdalen School is academically excellent and passionately Catholic because of his leadership and his unwavering support for me and our wonderful faculty and staff."

Since Monsignor's ordination on May 17, 1975, he has tirelessly served the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. Archbishop Pérez praised Msgr. Ralph and expressed how his pastoral care has created a vibrant community infused with the spirit of missionary discipleship that has flourished for almost 25 years. He noted that Msgr. Ralph was instrumental in constructing the new church, completed in 2008, and turned the building into a spiritual home filled with light and hope, emulating the Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ.

"We are deeply grateful for Msgr. Chieffo's leadership, guidance, and unwavering dedication to our school and all the students who have benefited from his work," added Patty Holloway, "This gala is a testament to the profound impact he has had on our lives and his lasting legacy."

The Archbishop, spoke to guests and thanked Msgr. saying, "for helping to build up the Kingdom of God with great faith, fidelity, and charity. As you enter this next phase of life, may God bless you with health, joy, happiness, and peace." And, we couldn't agree more!

For links to the evening's full photo gallery, tribute video, the full *Delco Times** article, and event sponsors visit: stmarymagdalen.net/gala2024.

Gala photos by Patrick Liam. Article quotes from Delco Times.



Every day at 8 AM, our principal, **Mrs. Amy Crawford Bauer**, focuses on the 369 students by initiating a positive morning routine. This ritual includes morning prayer, the Pledge of Allegiance, the school's Code of Conduct pledge, and the daily announcements, including birthdays, all delivered with a steady hand and a radiating smile. Afterward, the children and their teachers return to their homerooms to prepare for the first class of the day.

For Mrs. Bauer, transitioning from an assistant principal at Cardinal O'Hara to principal of SMM appeared seamless; however, that is due to her unwavering dedication and care, in full view each school day, and the many hours in between to ensure that the best practices are utilized for the advancement of students and staff alike. The best part of the day for Mrs. Bauer is seeing the students as they enter the campus. As part of her vision and mission for the school, Mrs. Bauer expressed, "The presence of faith-based learning, sense of community, daily expressions of faith, religious beliefs and spirituality, as well as actions and activities motivated by Catholic principles are what set parochial schools apart. I focus on developing our community among teachers, staff, students, and families."

Miss Mia Anthony, a new aide in Pre-K3, shared, "My days at SMM are filled with joy and laughter. The students in our class are not just curious and spirited, they are a part of a vibrant community. They light up when I greet them in the morning, and I witness their infectious enthusiasm as **Mrs. Mary Beth Boyle** guides and teaches them." Mrs. Bauer added, "If we feel invested as a community with a common purpose, we will likely stay, become engaged, and encourage others. These components are not just necessary for Catholic schools to survive, they are what make our students thrive."

This year, our students have been the driving force behind a myriad of new and traditional activities. Inspired by our dedicated faculty and staff, they organized our annual Cereal Box Dominoes Day on April 19, gathering over 350 boxes of cereal for area food banks. On April 8, they celebrated the solar eclipse with a burst of creativity, singing and dancing to 'Total Eclipse of the Heart' and 'Here Comes the Sun.' They also engaged in science-focused activities to learn more about solar eclipses and even managed to catch a glimpse through the clouds with special eclipse glasses provided by the school.

During Catholic Schools Week, our school was abuzz with many activities and events. Students assembled over two hundred "Hope Bags" for cancer treatment patients in January, a testament to their compassion and empathy. Thanks to the generosity of our school families, we collected a \$500 donation for Bringing Hope Home, a non-profit founded by parishioner Paul Isenberg. Students celebrated their teachers, staff, volunteers, service people, and more. Throughout CSW, students engaged in activities including dressing like teachers or staff members during "Teacher Swap," enjoying a Chipotle lunch and assemblies, and participating in the annual Religion and Spelling Bees.

Miss Anthony sums it all up, saying, "Our students are unique, kind, talented, funny, and genuinely love to learn. The invaluable moments are countless. St. Mary Magdalen embodies faith, compassion, and generosity, and I am truly blessed to be a part of it."



Famous Americans on Display

At the end of February, the 4th graders presented a significant class project, an interactive living **Wax Museum of Famous Americans**, to the school. Upon returning after the new year, they diligently worked on their project. Each student chose a famous American they were interested in learning more about from a curated list and began researching their selections.

The students didn't just pick their favorites; they each had to use their persuasive skills to convince their teacher, **Miss Erica Braunlinger**, why they should get their first choice. Once they had their individual, they set to work using reliable digital sources, such as the *Smithsonian's History Explorer*. They then delved into the resources to extract information about the famous American's personal life, from childhood and adulthood, including their professional lives, accomplishments, and impacts, and added a quote. They crafted all of their knowledge into well-structured paragraphs. The students concluded their research papers by stating their opinions on why their individual should receive the designation as a 'Famous American.' Finally, they used parts of the information to write a speech using the first-person point of view, which they read out loud at the Wax Museum.

One of the most remarkable aspects of this project was its interdisciplinary nature. Miss Braunlinger remarked, "The students applied what they had learned from their various special classes, showcasing their ability to integrate knowledge." In technology class, they skillfully compiled the information into a newsletter on Canva®, demonstrating their digital literacy. They learned about citing sources in library class, showing their understanding of academic integrity. They creatively sketched their backdrop in art class, displaying their artistic skills. They had to choose an image or scene that was meaningful to their individual, showcasing their understanding of the subject matter. They then brought their final pieces to completion, including an entire outfitted look of the American, with the guidance of Miss Braunlinger. Their coordinated efforts then went on display as a visual Wax Museum, as seen in some of the above photos from the event held in the gymnasium.

St. Mary Magdalen School has two Neumann Scholars in the Class of 2024!

We congratulate **Ella Eusebio** and **Alex Foster** on these distinguished scholarships presented by the Connely Foundation for all four years to an Archdiocesan High School of their choice. Ella and Alex will attend Cardinal O'Hara High School. SMM has had 39 recipients who have accepted this honor since the scholarship program was created in 1995.



St. Mary Magdalen Catholic School

Annual School Fund

Through your generous donations to the Annual School Fund, we will secure the legacy and sustainability of an invaluable Catholic education for our children today and into the future.

We raised **\$305,531** for this fiscal year. Thank you for your generous hearts! We are grateful to all this year's **Annual School Fund*** donors, including:



2023

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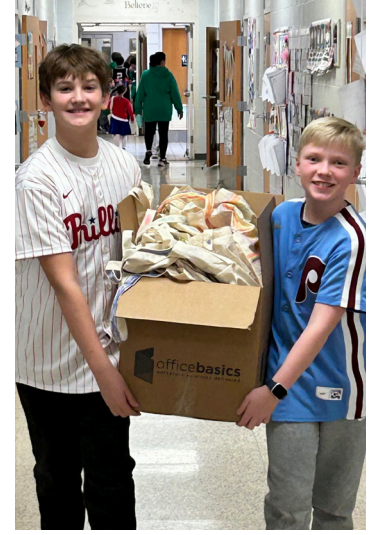


**List as of June 30, 2023 of gifts totalling \$250 and above.*

More Good News!

In CYO sports news this spring, our Minor Girls Track team won gold at Regionals. The team members were **Isabella Daily, Alexis Duffy, Ellie Hartman, Maggie McCarthy, and Keira Stonelake**. Our Junior Girls also qualified for the 2024 Penn Relays. Their team consisted of **Carla DiPaulo, Alexis Duffy, Ellie Hartman, Heidi Zola, and alternate Rosemary Stratton**. Congratulations to these stellar athletes!

Recently, Cardinal O'Hara held its tenth annual **Danny Hammond Dance Marathon**, which many of our alumni participated in (see photo below). In addition, our SMM School community helped by collecting \$757 to benefit this great event that brings smiles to many causes throughout our area. Well done!



Ways to Give

Through your generous donations to the Annual School Fund, we will secure the legacy and sustainability of an invaluable Catholic education for our children today and into the future. Other ways to directly impact the school include gifts to our *Endowment Fund, Sponsor-A-Student, Academic Program and Merit Scholarships, Legacy and Planned Giving, EITC Program in PA, Named Gifts, In Memory and Honor Donations*, as well as *Employee Match Program* options offered by some companies.

To give a gift of faith and education at SMM, visit smmarymagdalenschool.com, go to the 'giving' page, or contact our parish office. We are so appreciative of the many parents, parishioners, alumni, faculty, staff, volunteers, and friends for their spiritual and financial gifts, which enable us to fulfill our vital mission in Catholic education.



(continued from cover)

oversee dismissal, and work with students on the stage crew, along with anything else it takes to put on a show of this size.”

Mrs. Gribbin knew they had many student dancers, singers, gymnasts, and actors and wanted a show featuring as many of them as possible. **Seussical JR** is the perfect choice due to its many featured roles and generous production numbers. Plus, ten students are participating in the ‘Who Crew’ making props and designing the event program—and they will also help run the show’s technology. The team was astounded by the enthusiasm and turnout, with 110 students, a third of the student body, participating in the show. “Admittedly, I never expected to get such a huge turnout for a first show,” adding, “It shows that this theater program has a bright future!”

At the beginning of March, Mrs. Knee said the students practiced for about four to six hours a week.” To say we are so proud of these students would be an understatement.” Singing and dancing on stage is no small feat in a show almost entirely told through song! To help ensure the show’s vision, other Catholic schools were happy to lend SMM some lead costumes and even a stage extension for the show, or as Mrs. Gribbin put it, “Go big or go home.”

The parents love witnessing how the younger students have the older students to look up to as examples of confidence and leadership. They know firsthand that, as parents, their children are capable of so much if you challenge them, set increased expectations, and hold them to it. “These students are rising to the challenge, and I think our audiences will be thrilled on opening night!”

Mrs. Knee added, “The engagement and enthusiasm from all the students indicate their passion for the arts in our school. It is so fulfilling for us to be a part of bringing that to our school community.” The performance is sure to amaze parents, friends, fellow students, their teachers, and school staff. **Seussical JR** makes its debut on Friday, May 17, and will close on Sunday, May 19. Visit the school website for more photos, the cast list and more information.



Support the School Fund

Contributions to the School Fund help ensure Catholic education in our community now and in the future. To give, scan the QR code with your smartphone, go to our giving page on our website, or return the **School Fund** envelope.

Articles and design by Kerry Boyle.

