

D'Angelo will bring authentic opportunities to young women as Head of St. Anne's School



As a member of the St. Andrew's College community nearly two-decades, it became increasingly clear to Sabrina D'Angelo with each passing year that something was missing in York Region's education community: a place where young women can come to learn, become engaged and be inspired with other likeminded female leaders of tomorrow.

Now, as the newly appointed Head of St. Anne's School, a new independent school for girls slated to open within the next three years in Aurora's northwest quadrant, she has the opportunity to put her vision into action.

As a member of the St. Andrew's College community for almost two decades, it has been very clear over the years that there is something missing in York Region, and that is the same opportunity our boys receive at St. Andrew's in a unique setting and space for girls, she says.

That space will be created in an expansive Jacobean-style manor house on St. John's Sideroad, just west of Yonge Street, that was previous home to SAC parents Andrew and Anne Dunin, and is now part of the Shining Hill development.

With facilities that lend themselves perfectly to classrooms, offices, gym and dining facilities, and outbuildings that can be transformed for a variety of uses, including makerspaces for girls to work on engineering, design, robotics, coding and other STEAM-related areas, it will provide opportunities for young women close to home.

I think this is the most appealing piece to all this, she says of providing these opportunities for female learners. It really comes down to the opportunities that are made available for girls, specifically. It is very important for girls to see other girls do certain things, to see women in certain roles. It empowers them, it inspires them, and it allows them to believe that they could also fulfil those same roles, whether it is in the arts, whether it is in athletics, or whether it is in unique programming like engineering and architectural design.

St. Anne's School will be a unique space for young women to find their voice. They will feel empowered to make a difference, they will be challenged to participate in programs that would not necessarily be offered at coeducational schools. I think one of the advantages of establishing a school for girls is the natural release of competition that exists between males and females. Girls no longer need to feel as though they must compete against the boys; rather, they can work toward fulfilling the roles that are predominantly male driven. Young women now have an opportunity to see themselves in those roles.

St. Andrew's College formally announced the establishment of St. Anne's School on October 2, but significant work and collaboration with various stakeholders, including Shining Hill, the Region of York, the Town of Aurora, and various partners has been underway for well over a year.

They have also been working with architectural firms and project management companies to develop the long-term sustainability of the campus as well as the development of new facilities to ensure St. Anne's will always be able to meet the needs of students.

By next June, Mrs. D'Angelo says St. Anne's hopes to have a clearer picture on whether they will be able to welcome their first students from Grades 5 ? 9 in 2022 or 2023; but, once established, they hope to add a grade each year until they have reached Grade 12.

?We're hoping to have 20 girls in each class in our first year, which would bring us to an enrolment of 100 students,? she says. ?Our measure of success is attaining full enrolment, how quickly we can develop our Campus Master Plan, and the implementation of our academic and co-curricular programming to meet the needs of girls?

Supporting students also includes collaboration with both the community at large and St. Andrew's College just a stone's throw away. There are some misconceptions about what single-sex education entails, she says, adding that in the twenty-first century, it is time to tackle that issue head-on.

?We need to be very cognizant of the needs of these individuals growing up,? she says. ?They are living in a very social media-driven society and their perceptions of what healthy relationships are between the genders are skewed. Providing single gender educational experiences on separate campuses, yet having the opportunity to collaborate in a co-curricular context or an academic program where sharing gender based perspectives would broaden their understanding and heighten their appreciation of each other's viewpoints.

?The real driver is providing an environment that is free from gender distraction and competition, a learning and teaching space where girls are encouraged to think freely and act openly.?

For more on St. Anne's School, visit stannesschool.ca.

By Brock Weir Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter