

St. Jerome C.E.S. remains 10 years strong?



By Brock Weir

In the fall of 2005, Aurora's St. Jerome Catholic School opened its doors as the first eco-certified school in the York Catholic District School Board.

It blazed a trail for the over 50 eco-friendly schools that have followed in the subsequent decade but St. Jerome is not content to rest on its laurels. As teachers, students, and community members past and present gathered at the school last Thursday to formally mark its 10th anniversary, they carried on their environmental stewardship with the dedication of a new outdoor classroom.

Designed with input from the students, the outdoor classroom incorporates trees, vegetation, and rows of seating on a series of flat-top boulders.

"[Your] enduring commitment to the environment is now reflected in the school's outdoor classroom, and this unique classroom will provide students with opportunities to learn, surrounded by the beauty of the nature God created," said Opiyo Oloya, Superintendent of Schools for the YCDSB following the classroom's blessing by Fr. Frank McDevitt of Our Lady of Grace.

The theme of nature was the common thread throughout last week's anniversary celebration.

St. Jerome's motto is "knowledge, faith and courage" and Principal Michele Reaume said when the intermediate students sat down to come up with a theme around which to build the party, they came up with "10 years strong" and what better way to symbolize this strength than with a tree or trees?

Each class contributed to the design of their own tree, which was framed and hung around the gymnasium and will remain in the school as a permanent reminder of the school's first 10 years.

"10 years, a decade of time - how do we measure 10 years of time together? In pencils? In ice cubes? In Band-Aids? In sheets of paper?" asked Ms. Reaume. "Perhaps we measure it in paint strokes, in Play-Doh, snow forts or blocks of Lego.

"We have shared 10 years of laughter, tears, heartache, triumph, challenges and successes. Pope Francis recently tweeted: "to form a family is to be part of God's dream, to join him in building a world where no one will feel alone. We at St. Jerome have contributed to this dream.

"We have been there for each other through it all. We are a family and each of us has played a part. For 10 years, we have been a part of something together. We have built and nurtured our school family and, in doing so, we have ensured that each of us feels a sense of belonging to something greater than ourselves, to the whole that is St. Jerome."

Added Fr. Frank: "Today, we gather with one heart and one voice as we ask for special blessing on St. Jerome School in recognition of our tenth anniversary. We are thankful for the stories we have shared, from memories of those important moments that have shaped us together. Here, we have learned to celebrate the unique and special gifts each of us brings to our school community. Help us to shape our world in the days ahead so the story of our lives may always give witness to your saving glory."

When St. Jerome was opened, it was designed to serve the growing communities in northeast Aurora. Upon opening it welcomed 355 students and within six years had to add a new wing not only to incorporate a growing number of students, but also full-day kindergarten programs. They are now 620 students strong.

"A lot has happened in those intervening years," said Brad Coates, Catholic School Council Chair. "We have seen St. Jerome become the focal point not only for our children's education, but become a centrepiece for our families and our communities."