

Ten years is just the beginning for St. Maximilian Kolbe C.H.S.



By Brock Weir

You can measure ten years in time, but St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School is preparing to mark their first decade in Aurora by measuring their first decade in people and relationships.

St. Max, Aurora's newest high school, is set to celebrate its tenth anniversary on May 10 with a celebration for the entire community.

Tickets are on sale now for the anniversary celebration, which begins with a special mass, a Walk for Water benefiting the WE Foundation, two rugby matches, an evening open house and gallery walk, mural unveiling, and a closing ceremony with a surprise guest performer.

It is important to mark a 10-year anniversary because this school has been an important learning hub in this community since 2009, says Principal Peter Parente. Having taught here from 2010 to 2012, and coming back as Principal, I can say [St. Max] is really ahead of the curve in how we work with kids inside the classroom and out, our attitudes towards inclusion and student participation, and putting students and our faith at the forefront of all that we do.

This focus on inclusivity is what teacher Fausta Martini, a member of the anniversary organizing committee, says she feels is a hallmark of St. Max's first decade in Aurora.

We have all sorts of different pathways that come through this school, she says. We have a phenomenal technology department, students who go into Community Living, and I think there has been huge inclusiveness. The positive feedback that you hear

[out in the community]

keeps us going and keeps us doing the work that we do.?

Another hallmark, the committee agrees, is the St. Max community's effort to keep the spirit of St. Maximilian Kolbe himself alive within the school community by maintaining close contact with the few people in whom he's held in living memory.

Members of the Anniversary Committee recently returned from Massachusetts where they met with Father Lucjan Krolkowski, who studied in a seminary run by St. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest who volunteered to die in place of a stranger at Auschwitz.

Father Lucjan helped dedicate the school in 2009, and now, 99-years-old, he has offered a message to the community that will be played during the May 10 celebrations.

?He was intuitive enough and connected with us to the point where he knew what we needed to hear as a community moving forward,? said Mr. Parente. ?He offered a message of encouragement, for us to continue the great work that we're doing, a message from the faith perspective of how we continue to live out the legacy of St. Maximilian Kolbe, and he offered us a kind of direction. We lead each other ? as a Principal, drawing on the vast talents of everybody in the building, all the adults in the building ? but we're directionless without a course of action that is based in our faith. That is where Father Lucjan and the connection to St. Maximilian Kolbe comes in.

?A lot of schools who maybe aren't able to say that our saint was alive in the last century and there are still people alive who are connected with him. If you know St. Maximilian Kolbe's story, it truly is an inspiring story ? catholic, non-Catholic, it is a wonderful story of the events that led up to his martyrdom and his sainthood and the legacy he has left through Father Lucjan.?

Given the history of St. Maximilian Kolbe himself, perhaps it is unsurprising that the school bearing his name will place a specific emphasis on their charitable efforts at the time of this milestone. In addition to WE's Walk for Water, which raises funds for places around the world with limited access to fresh water, there will be a reflection on their efforts to raise \$10,000 for the Terry Fox Foundation, with a special appearance (most likely via video link) by Fred Fox, who will speak about the Foundation.

The evening Gallery

Walk will be a self-guided tour of various classrooms throughout the building that will showcase the work and achievements of St. Max's many milestones

?The idea is to get

as many students back here as possible, regardless of what they went on to do when they left here, so we can share with our current students the successes that these former students have experienced once they left SMK,? says teacher Martina Fasano, head of the newly-formed SMK Alumni Association, which hopes this anniversary will lay the foundation of a strong, interconnected group of alumni that will stand the test of time.

Adds teacher Dave

Almeida: ?Our school is great, but I think it is only going to get better with this event. This is one of the ways to get the community motivated; to promote the school being here for 10 years and having a good time at the event is one thing, but making people aware that we've been here is just the beginning. We have a few more years here!?

For

more information on St. Maximilian Kolbe's 10th Anniversary Celebrations on May 10, including how to purchase tickets, visit www.smk10.ca.