

Cardinal Carter plans reunion party to mark 25th anniversary



By Brock Weir

When Cardinal Carter Catholic Secondary School first opened its doors 25 years ago this year, they started with just 189 students, mostly in Grade 9, and a skeleton staff of just 14.

Largely serving the students and families of Aurora, King, and Oak Ridges, these students in close quarters were primed for leadership positions within the school, and watching this all unfold was Helen Lacroix, head of the English department.

Over a quarter century later, Ms. Lacroix is still the department head and has been able to watch the school grow, scale back and find new life again ? and now she's sitting on the committee spearheading a spring party to celebrate how far the school and its alums have come.

?We starting talking about this last May and we just thought this was the time to celebrate,? says Ms. Lacroix. ?We decided the best day would be in June when all the more recent alums are home from university.?

Celebrations will start on Saturday, June 14 at 10 a.m. with registration, followed by a mass in the school led by Father Joe Gorman of Aurora's Our Lady of Grace Catholic Parish. After that, 25 years of the school's principals will gather to reminisce with students.

Reunion attendees will have the chance to sign a large banner which will subsequently be displayed in a prominent location in the school for years to come, and a chance to break out into groups in classrooms celebrating the years of each graduating class ? and it is here that organizers hope graduates and former students really hop on the bandwagon.

?We have about 300 likes on Facebook, but we would like more alumni to come forward and grab memories,? says Ms. Lacroix. ?Each graduating class will have a classroom and we are hoping they will take the reins, gather memorabilia and photos to really put on a display to meet fellow grads.?

Following the in-school celebrations which will last through mid-afternoon, the party will kick into high gear around 6 p.m. at the Aurora Community Centre for a pub night in ACC2. Attendees will be able to get a taste of the area through a barbeque by Aurora's Big Grill Catering, a hospitality company focused on catering events large and small with locally sourced food.

Classic rock will be provided by Delayne Drive, a local group founded by Dan Kaniuk and Bob Gross, and other musicians who currently live, or once lived, as the name suggests, on Delayne Drive near Aurora Heights. They will be joined by a band made up of Cardinal Carter alumni that is currently being assembled by the school's music department.

“One slight fly in the ointment is we found out it was the same day as Italy v. England in the World Cup,” says Ms. Lecroix. “That is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m., but we have decided to turn our liability into a plus and we're going to make that a part of our celebrations with a live screening of the game.”

Cardinal Carter Catholic Elementary School has its earliest roots in Oak Ridges' Our Lady of the Annunciation Elementary School. From those early days, the 189 students to 14 staff created an environment where close bonds were hard to avoid. Many of these first students and staff still keep in close touch with their school.

“It was a great bonding time for all of us,” says Ms. Lacroix, noting, however, it was still a school in flux.

After they moved into their current home on Bloomington Road, just west of Yonge Street, they soon surpassed their 1,650 capacity building with over 2,000 students. After bursting at the seams, however, these numbers took a significant hit first when Ecole Secondaire Catholique Renaissance opened at the corner of Bloomington and Bathurst Street, taking on many of Cardinal Carter's French Immersion students.

Numbers decreased once again with the opening of St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic Secondary School six years ago, taking over many of Cardinal Carter's feeder schools leaving them with a student body of about 800. From there, Cardinal Carter became, for a time, a school largely serving King and Oak Ridges with some students from south Aurora but, according to Ms. Lacroix, numbers are now on the upswing again.

Next year, Cardinal Carter expects regrowth to reach 1,250, a growth she attributes largely to their fledgling International Baccalaureate program, which attracts students not only from across York Region, but also as far away as Saudi Arabia.

“It has been a real shot in the arm for us and we have been able to offer a full array of programs again,” she says, noting philanthropic efforts of students to build schools in India, wells in Ecuador and Nicaragua, and fundraising to purchase laptops for Aboriginal students.

“Students want to be the change they want to see in the world. One of the ways to follow Christ is to be aware of our fellow humans and do as much as we can to alleviate the suffering in nations less advanced than our own, and within our own as well.”

To register for Cardinal Carter's Reunion 25, find more information on programs and local hotels with special rates for the Reunion, visit cch.ycdsb.ca/Reunion25.