

Cardinal Carter set to ?hit new heights? after milestone reunion



By Brock Weir

?We're good,? said Richard Maurice, to a room of familiar faces on Saturday afternoon.

It was a simple statement, but the two words from the principal of Cardinal Carter Catholic High School summed up the feelings in the school's chapel as current students and staff, recent grads, and some blasts from the past came together to celebrate the school's 25th anniversary on Saturday.

The day featured a Eucharistic mass in the morning led by Father Joe Gorman of Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church, art and music supplied by today's students, a gathering of dignitaries who have helped steer Cardinal Carter's future from its early foundations in Oak Ridges, culminating in a pub night near the scene where it all began that evening.

?It is all stories of frustration, stories of pain, stories of pride, stories of humour, and it is certainly stories of celebration that enable us to appreciate the richness of our school culture so we can relish in this magical moment,? said Maurice.

He was speaking in the school's chapel before not just students past and present, but also his predecessors who served the school over the past year and a half.

For many, it was old home week as they hadn't been through the Bloomington Road doors they left with their mortarboards.

For Wendy McCabe, she hadn't looked back since her graduation in 1995. When the reunion came up, however, the chance to show her own children her own stomping grounds was too good to pass up.

?I haven't been back since I graduated and it looks 25 years old!? she joked. ?It was brand new when I started.?

For former staffer Angela Maira, it was an anniversary long-overdue, as was the school itself, when she was part of the fight in 1989 to bring a new Catholic high school to York Region. At the time, Newmarket's Sacred Heart Catholic High School was bursting at the seams, she said. Kids in Sharon had nowhere to go.

?I wanted to see a new school in our community so our children could have a Catholic education,? said Ms. Maira, who worked at the school from 1997 ? 2009. ?I know the staff here have been real community builders.?

One of the school/community builders in attendance at Saturday's celebrations was Cardinal Carter's first principal Dave Brennan.

He steered Cardinal Carter in its first decade and in those formative years, he said it was their main priority to "provide each person with the best possible conditions to achieve his or her potential."

"But, it was more than that," he said. "It was also to lay the academic, co-curricular, and spiritual foundation upon those who followed us so they could build. Judging from the many successes, some of which you are hearing about today, I think we were somewhat successful."

Reminiscences throughout the morning and afternoon highlighted the growth of the school communities, pressures that came when growth almost got the best of them, and tributes students like Colten and Luke Rybuck, who became heroes in the community after rescuing a neighbour from a fire, and students who left the Cardinal Carter community well before their time.

"Despite all the challenges, we made it work," said former principal Frank Fazzari of the school reaching its peak of students with 2,200 students and staff jammed in the building and 30 portables. "Everyone adapted and cooperated. Our school thrived, we were active, and we remained a very vibrant school community. It seemed like there was always something to celebrate."

Out of all this, however, one of his most memorable days was "as it was for many of the people in the room" when the elderly Cardinal Carter himself made the trek to visit his namesake school in June 2002. It was a historic event for the school community, bringing out thousands of students, staff, parents, and alumni to take in a mass, followed by carrying a cross up Yonge Street from Bloomington to Our Lady of Grace.

"He was frail and yet he attended the milestone event with a great determination I will never forget," said York Catholic District School Board trustee Elizabeth Crowe. "It was hot for the healthiest of us and he just?I can't even find the words to say it because it was such an awe-inspiring moment to be there."

For Ms. Crowe, another milestone for the school was Cardinal Carter developing an International Baccalaureate program, honing in on a niche in the educational system which revitalized what had been a waning school community. Many people, she said, were gravitating towards private schools and what was then the incoming St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School had been due to take a hit on their existing school population. It was a move which was embraced far and wide, she said.

"It is the reputation of excellence, combined with the welcoming, safe environment that is drawing students to the school," she said, noting another imminent upswing when 400 Grade 9 students from Aurora, King and Richmond Hill come through their doors this September. "Your support helps to lift the school up to new heights."