

Remembering the past, making way for the future at Villanova

‘Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.’

Henry Ford

While Ford may have been referring to the success of his Model T or the assembly line, today, his words perfectly encompass the journey that has been Villanova College.

Villanova College had a humble beginning, with 26 students coming together in the basement of Sacred Heart Parish for its inaugural school year in September, 1999. Although amenities and resources were few, faith in the school's future was strong, and so was the resolve of its founders to wade through the paperwork and building permits necessary to establish its own site.

Finally, on Friday, Jan. 24, 2000, the school community moved in to a home of its own – a 12,000-square-foot portable located on 33 acres at Marylake.

‘It was very exciting when we moved,’ recalled Mary and Celeste Iacobelli, members of one of the school's founding families. ‘The portable was a big step forward. Until that time, the school was just an idea. We didn't have anything that we could touch and feel. When we had the site, we had some appreciation that this was actually going to happen. For us, it was a fresh start. It was a new start. It was a great experience to have a home for the kids. We became a very close-knit group, and that building became more like a home for our families.’

Students and faculty at VC would call this structure home until 2002, when classes moved in to Phase 1 of what is, today, a 120,000-square-foot building.

Despite the move and the constant growth and development of school facilities over the next 12 years, the portable, which became fondly referred to as ‘The Annex,’ remained on the school property, where it served as a reminder of Villanova's history and a symbol of its incredible growth.

On Saturday, Jan. 24, 15 years to the day that the founding students and faculty moved in to the original building, Villanova alumni and families, faculty, and students came together to pay homage to their roots by participating in the demolition of The Annex to make way for future plans for the campus's continued growth.

Alumni and their families were treated to a walk down memory lane, as the school's Great Hall was adorned with photos and video footage of the original building. The day's keynote address came from School President Paul Paradiso, who thanked everyone for their contributions to the school.

‘We should all be proud of what we created and the legacy that began in that humble structure,’ he stated. After his remarks, everyone was invited outside to try their hand at demolition. With the swing of a sledgehammer, members of the Villanova Community – ‘past and present’ – were able to make a final mark on a place that has left such a mark on their lives.

After these momentous swings, ProGreen Demolition Ltd. took over the project while alumni spent the rest of the afternoon touring the halls of the current building and soaking in the reality of just how far the school has come in 15 short years.

Today, the site on which the original school stood is a mound of rubble in the shadow of a building that boasts state of the art amenities that earlier students could only dream of seeing. Although plans for what will replace ‘The Annex’ have yet to be finalized, there is no doubt that it will remain as important a site in the school's future as it has been in the past.

As Josie and Remo D'Angelo reflect: ‘When compared to the Villanova of today, it may have been ‘the worst of times’ because the portable wasn't the most attractive building we'd seen. But it also was, in a way, ‘the best of times.’ We were not just a school. We were a family, kids and parents alike.’

Although the original school building may no longer exist, as Saturday's event attests, it leaves behind lasting memories and a powerful legacy. It will forever be a testament to the power of coming together, keeping together in pursuit of a common goal, and working together to make these goals a reality.