

St. Anne's School begins new era of education in Aurora



‘Attraversiamo,’ is a favourite Italian saying of Sabrina D'Angelo.

To D'Angelo, Head of St. Anne's School (SAS), York Region's only all-girls independent school, it means, ‘Let's cross over together.’

That has been a long-held dream for SAS since they welcomed their first students last year to Aurora's St. Andrew's College campus and their very own Cygnet Centre, referencing the name of SAS students, derived from the school's emblem of a swan.

The dream to ‘cross over together’ became a reality on Tuesday morning when SAS moved across St. John's Sideroad to formally cut the ribbon of their brand-new campus, little over an hour before this year's group of 174 students crossed the threshold for the first time.

‘Zero more sleeps!’ said an excited D'Angelo this week, before an audience of 500 who gathered outside the Jacobean-style mansion that is now SAS' base of operations. ‘We are making history. Today is a testament to the power of dreams, dedication, hard work, and the unwavering belief in the potential of young women. As we prepare to open the doors to St. Anne's School, we embark on an educational experience that promises to provide countless opportunities that will change lives, shape futures, and leave an indelible mark on our community and beyond.’

‘The idea of a school for girls was born over a decade ago from three profound beliefs: one, the incredible potential of girls and young women and the understanding that empowering them through education is not just a choice, but a necessity; two, that girls and boys need an intentional platform in which to engage meaningfully and authentically; and three, to find that balance between these two that will serve our communities and the world in innovative, thoughtful and exciting ways. At St. Anne's, we are committed to empowering students in every realm of their lives. We aim to instill not only knowledge but also the values of integrity, empathy, resilience, kindness, hard work and leadership.’

These principles were emphasised by Board of Governors Chair Mark Etherington who highlighted the community partners who came together to bring SAS to fruition.

He hailed D'Angelo for her ‘vision, passion and iron will’ to make SAS a reality.

‘In 60 minutes or so, the footsteps of 174 girls echoing through the halls will be heard for the first time as they begin their journey here,’ he said. ‘There will be nervous anticipation of a new school year at a new school, meeting new people, exploring this magnificent campus, of sitting in bright classrooms, of being challenged to experiment with new ideas and concepts, of the sound of laughter ringing through the dining hall, of whistles in the gym, of lifelong friendships being formed.’

Noting St. Andrew's 124 years of educating boys and forging traditions, he said St. Anne's was just at the beginning of its journey, considering its traditions, and working towards its first group of alumni.

‘Today is about St. Anne's and the incredible future that lies ahead. In many ways St. Anne's is a blank canvas and all those fortunate to attend here will be the authors of St. Anne's future and success. They will write its history, carve out its tradition and in time will be its alumni. Each graduating class will inspire future generations of students. As they leave this campus, they will no doubt be ready to face the world, to make big and bold decisions that will shape their lives, our country, the globe, in a positive and inspired way. I am excited to watch St. Anne's School and its students flourish.’

Added SAC Head of School Kevin McHenry: ‘We had the good fortune of moving north to Aurora in 1926 and we will celebrate 100 years in Aurora in a couple of years – what a place to be on Yonge Street, in this amazing growing and affluent community, and we're fortunate to be here. 124 years and this is Year Two for SAS. The partnership is strong. We are single sex schools and we believe in single sex education, but we also recognize that part of that is co-curricular and integration is what we're all about. It's so exciting to build a program, we've had lots of laughs, and we're building for the future. It's been such a wonderful ride. I'm really, really looking forward to the future of building this together.’

This excitement was shared by Mayor Tom Mrakas, who described SAS as ‘a unique educational opportunity’ for students.

‘St. Anne's School is a place where girls are encouraged to find their voice, to challenge and explore, to cultivate their minds to reach their fullest potential,’ he said. ‘The girls who are starting their journey here today will build the foundation to be leaders, innovators, and initiate progressive change.’

The goal of SAS, said D'Angelo, is to ‘raise a generation of women who are not just academically accomplished, but socially-conscious and compassionate, a generation of women who are prepared to lead the future.’

Addressing the Cygnets, the anticipation was clear for the Head of School.

‘We made it! Every initiative and every project have a ‘why.’ That is what steered this journey. There are many times when it would have been easier to quit, easier to pivot in a different direction, but that was never an option. That is not the Cygnet way. You are the why; you are the reason behind this decade-long journey. You are St. Anne's School.

‘To the many donors contributing to capital expenses, those who have graciously donated to the school's endowment, allowing more than 20 per cent of our student population to be recipients of financial assistance, making the SAS dream possible for many students and those gifts, via the annual Parents Fund, every donation big and small allows us to maintain and create an exceptional educational experience for our students. Thank you. We look forward to celebrating your contributions in the coming months.

‘For all of us, attraverssiamo signifies the movement to crossing into a new space for learning and teaching, a space where our girls will become young women prepared to lead the future. Let's get ready to attraverssiamo. As we cut this ribbon and open our doors to a new era of education, let us remember that the impact of this school extends far beyond these physical boundaries. We are shaping future leaders, thinkers, innovators, and advocates who go out into the world and make a profound difference. Let us embrace the opportunities that lie ahead and continue to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of young women.’

By Brock Weir
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