



# THE LAUNCH PAD

Volume XVIII Issue 1

Fall 2021

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Dear Parents,

For the first time ever, we had to add an extra page to this little publication. There were just too many things happening this fall to shortchange any of the major and minor events that make this school so special and so much fun.

Teachers agree that the seniors are doing a good job as role models for the younger students who — for the most part — are settling in to an almost-normal school year.

The upperclassmen and teachers seem to appreciate each tradition that shows up again: the Opening Day ceremonies, the tables being back in the lunchroom, All-School Mass, pep rallies, Ring Mass, fall sports, Homecoming, and even the appearance of a regular-looking PSAT day.

At this writing, things are looking a little better each day. In a way, the pandemic has made everyone hit the reset button. It's given all of us a chance to selectively bring back the most important elements of our lives.

Some things we can give up or leave behind, but love for our traditions and our joy in each other's presence are things we've all come to respect and to treasure.

—the editor



*Seniors applaud wildly as Brother Richard extinguishes the altar candles at their September 16 Ring Mass ceremony. Random traditions delighted the student body as the school year began as normally as possible. Principal Mr. Steve Straessle said, "We have been able to move forward and undertake the holy business of education."*

## BOYS BACK IN BUSINESS ON TRIBOU STREET

**G**leeful sounds like an old-fashioned word, but it's the best description of the class of 2022 as they took their rightful places for the August 16 opening assembly. They'd had a taste of pre-pandemic life back in May when those who had taken advantage of vaccine availability had been able to shed their masks in class for a few days. Now, armed with masks and a better than 70% vaccination rate, they were back in full force as the leaders of the school. And all their brothers were with them rather than viewing a virtual world from their own homerooms or actual homes.

No more virtual classes, no more students at home staring at a screen. The teachers were just as pleased as the seniors. No one seemed happier than principal Mr. Steve Straessle. He said, "The start to this school year has been among the best ever. Our boys easily demonstrate enthusiasm, and this year has taken it to the next level.

"The only noticeable differences in regimen this year include [everyone] wearing masks indoors and eating lunch in our big tent outside. Otherwise, things have been very normal. It's obvious the boys want to be in class together and will do what it takes to remain there. It's also obvious that parents want their boys in school and experiencing the milestones that high school brings, so they've been overwhelmingly supportive."

Mr. Straessle spent the summer in constant contact with the Arkansas Department of Health and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). The school takes safety cues from these two entities. Mr. Straessle said, "We've employed their suggested mitigation tactics including a high rate of vaccination and wearing masks. It's obvious that these efforts have helped us keep our doors open since August."

Safety and filtration upgrades have been in place since last year's efforts. There is upgraded filtration in every heating and air conditioning unit in the school. This system is rated as removing 99% of virus particles from the air. Teachers are mindful of keeping air circulating in the classroom; they are happy that the renovation several years ago prioritized having plenty of windows to let in fresh air.

Mr. Straessle credits the efforts of others as well. He said, "Our primary tool to fight Covid spread is the cooperation among parents and students. If boys feel sick, [both parents and the boys] are addressing the cause in a much more robust way, and that's helped us a lot."

The school has three goals:

- Avoid returning to a virtual platform
- Enjoy all our important milestones from Mass to pep rallies
- Eventually relax mitigation efforts due to virus control

*529 days later...*



*The 2021-22 school year began with an all-school Mass on August 16, the first one since Ash Wednesday of 2020, 529 days before.*



*Brother Richard blesses a student during the opening all-school Mass on August 16.*



*After Mass, the gym became a gym again and seniors greeted the new freshman class with some competition and random silliness. The seniors then officially welcomed the class of 2025 to their ranks.*



*Mr. Steve Straessle addresses the student body as a whole for the first time since the pandemic closed the school on March 12, 2020. With a fully masked and 70% vaccinated student body and a fully vaccinated faculty, the school year began as close to normal as possible.*

**2021: BOYS AND THEIR TEACHERS ARE BACK** (continued from page one)

The teachers here were unanimous in their approval of the first goal, eliminating virtual classes. Last year teachers used every trick they could muster to make online teaching work.

Math and science teachers were at the greatest disadvantage since so much of their work is visual and hands-on. Chemistry teacher Mrs. Rebecca Priester went to extreme measures to keep her classes going. “I had a wall of glass in front of the room, so I had to do the labs [as demonstrations rather than allow students to participate]. Since the desks had to be socially distanced, the students couldn’t see what I was doing. So I used a document camera to project the experiment. For the people at home, I had to set the computer in front of the screen.”

Teachers from every discipline applauded the full return of students on August 16. World history and economics teacher Mr. David Massery simply said, “It made me appreciate the time in class much more.” Health and P. E. teacher Mr. Keegan Doan echoed that sentiment. He said, “It was a breath of fresh air having the boys back and being able to interact with everybody.”

Students who spent last year as “full virtual” attendees shared a common satisfaction in being back on campus. Senior Mark Lara spent last year as a “full virtual” student. He said, “When I was home, I really didn’t want to pay attention. I’m excited to be at school again. Being behind a screen wasn’t the same experience as being on campus.”

Junior Cole Cameron became a full virtual student last year because of concerns about his family’s health. “My grandma moved in with us during the summer [of 2020]. I didn’t want to



*Mr. Straessle reacts to the boys’ traditional five-minute Ring Mass standing ovation when Brother Richard extinguishes the main altar candles.*

take the chance [with her health].” Cameron now feels comfortable because of vaccines and the steps the school has taken to provide safety. He’s also happy to be part of the school again. He said, “With everyone being here, the school definitely feels more like a community.”

Mr. Straessle credited parents and students for the successful 2021-22 school year opening. “In a world of confrontation, our parents and students have been incredibly supportive,” he said. “There is no price one can put on that fact. Without support, we would falter. With parent and student support, our footsteps are firm and we have been able to move forward and undertake the holy business of education without distraction.”

*Rocket Times staff members Ethan Deeter and Charles Timmis contributed to this article.*

**DUNCAN DIAZ RETURNS TO TEACH AND COACH**

More than a few teachers did a double take on the first day of school when Mr. Duncan Diaz showed up in a tie and headed to the front of a classroom. It didn’t seem as if four years had passed since he was sitting on the other side of the room.

Mr. Diaz is officially the youngest teacher in the building and has lived through having to sing a solo at the first faculty get-together as well as wearing a suit and tie to a state teachers’ meeting when everyone else was in casual clothes. That was a mild initiation compared to standing in front of his first class of sophomores on August 16.

The 2017 CHS graduate interviewed for his job teaching freshman world history and sophomore English just a few days before he graduated from Rhodes College in Memphis.



*Mr. Duncan Diaz enjoys the view from the teacher’s desk.*

So far, Mr. Diaz is working hard to prepare for each class and each game. He said, “My favorite part about coaching and teaching has to be the students. One moment I’m pulling my hair out because they’re driving me crazy and the next I see a kid I coached up make a play or a kid I helped out in the classroom take that next step.”

*Rocket Times staff member Grayson Mueller contributed to this article.*

# THE MOTHER SHIP

(A COLUMN FOR MOMS BY MOMS OF CHS GRADUATES)

**D**EAR MOTHERS [AND DADS] OF CHS STUDENTS, While you are going through the struggles of being pandemic parents to teenage sons, we at the *Mother Ship* are 20 years ahead of you and are now becoming grandparents. Let us tell you, the future is sweet, no matter what world-wide worry may beset you. When you watch your son hold his brand new daughter or son, it will all come full circle. And then, of course, the worries will multiply for this new life, but you must find the courage to live up to the gifts you see before you.

Mr. Steve Straessle has been talking about courage lately, as have all good leaders. As we were wondering about how to put our own [grand]Mother-centric spin on the idea of courage in a time of great stress, we found a quotation from a writer named Dean Koontz. We had heard of him before — he's a best selling author — but we hadn't read anything of his since he often writes suspense novels and tends toward the horror genre which might keep us up at night. We have trouble enough sleeping these days. However, we became interested in his work after we came upon this quotation of his:

“Each smallest act of kindness reverberates across great distances and spans of time — affecting lives unknown to the one whose generous spirit was the source of this good echo. Because kindness is passed on and grows each time it's passed — until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage, years later, and far away. Likewise, each small meanness, each expression of hatred, each act of evil.”

At first, we thought this was a lovely take on the “pay it forward” idea: A simple kindness rushes forward in time to become an act of selfless courage in some distant time. We could all imagine hundreds of such scenarios. One that easily comes to mind is recently retired teacher Mr. Steve Wells, who is probably responsible for hundreds of courageous acts born of his simple daily kindness to the thousands he taught since the 1980s. He remembered his students' birthdays, asked about their families, checked on those with faltering grades. We say he gave words of *encouragement*. He gave away little glittering chunks of courage in small, everyday ways. His was and is indeed a generous spirit.

However, Mr. Koontz is talking not only about the kind people among us. He is also warning about those who would destroy courage both now and in the future. “Each small meanness, each expression of hatred, each act of evil” will also have its result in the near and distant future. That part is what makes being a parent (or a grandparent) now frightening. There is so

much meanness, hatred, and downright evil that it would be easy to allow fear to overcome us. We see that in the spiteful anonymous letter, the snide remark, the judgmental look. We hear it in rants of righteous indignation about almost every big and small irritation.

How can we encourage those in our care? How can we pay kindness forward so that our children will be able to make their world better than it is today? How can we insulate them against the rudeness and unkindness that seems to be growing exponentially? An obvious answer is that we teach by our example.

What bar do we set for our sons when we fall into the gossip trap of Facebook, GroupMe, and other social media? We all know that these tools — which could be very useful for community building — can turn ugly with a quick click. What do our sons learn if we give in and pile on petty character attacks? How much better will the lesson be if we have a discussion of why we won't be part of the unnecessary and downright cowardly destruction of a human soul's reputation.

Let us offer one other simple and very positive thing we can use as a way to model kindness to our sons and to search within ourselves for truth: the concession.

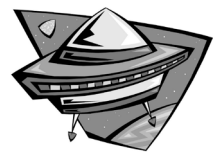
Writers of formal essays know the power of the concession. It is not surrender. It is a way for the writer to consider at least one of his opponent's ideas and concede that it has merit. A concession is an extended hand, a gentle compliment, an admission that the other has a point. By conceding that one's opponent has at least one idea of value, both people change and the two can begin a conversation that may lead to (at worst) an agreement to disagree. At best, the concession can lead to true understanding and compromise.

Atticus Finch from Harper Lee's classic book *To Kill A Mockingbird* counseled his wayward daughter on the kind art of the concession. He told her, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view — until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

This kind of understanding and concession to another's point of view could send waves of courage rushing to the future. It's our duty as parents and grandparents to set this simple idea in motion. We will probably never see exactly where we've sowed courage. As Mr. Koontz said, “each expression of hatred, each act of evil” will have far reaching results. We must arm our children with a generous spirit “because kindness is passed on and grows until a simple courtesy becomes an act of selfless courage, years later, and far away.”

*For some strange reason, Mr. Steve Straessle continues to ask the moms of the CHS classes of 2002 and 2003 to write this column.*

*Stay safe. Stay strong. And always remember:  
You are a Rocket Mom.*



## A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

In the photo at right, seniors light candles and share the flames with their brothers. The symbolism was not lost on their mothers who sat silently watching as the first candle flickered and multiplied until the room glowed with soft light. Then the boys stood and sang the hymn that thousands had sung before them. Their voices were full and rich. They were the voices not of boys, but of young men beginning a joyful journey.

Here I am, Lord.

Is it I, Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go, Lord,

If you lead me.

I will hold you people in my heart.



# RING MASS 2021: CHERISHED TRADITIONS CONTINUE



Fr. Lawrence Frederick blesses the 2022 senior rings as the boys' moms watch. The boys then approached the table to pick up their rings, the symbol of years of perseverance, hard work, and brotherhood.

The class of 2022 considered themselves blessed on September 16 as they straightened their class ties and entered the gym as a complete class. The seniors' mothers filled the bleachers and watched their sons receive a lasting symbol of the CHS brotherhood.

Underclassmen were also happy to be included in the event after not being able to attend last year. Seven hundred boys' voices joined in song during Mass. After Brother Richard extinguished the candles which turned the room once more into a gym, 700 boys roared approval of tradition and brotherhood.



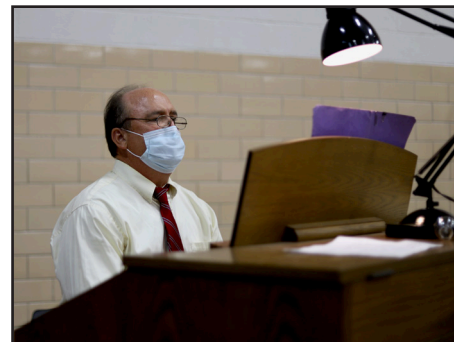
Leaving nothing to chance, Brother Richard Sanker had Ben Biernat and Preston Scott check boxes of matches for the candle ceremony. The packages had last been used in 2019 since the 2020 ceremony had to move outdoors.



Seniors sing the traditional hymn "Here I Am, Lord" during the most solemn moment of Ring Mass. Their masks could not muffle their strong voices as they sang and prayed together for the first time in over a year.



Mr. Steve Aday '02 reads from Pat Conroy's *The Lords of Discipline* twenty years after his Ring Mass.



Ring Mass couldn't happen at all without celebrants Fr. Lawrence Frederick and Fr. Patrick Friend; altar servers Phillip Zawislak and Larry Desiderio; behind-the-scenes organizer Brother Richard Sanker; organist Mr. Dave Massery; and Mr. Paul Spencer with his small but mighty group of volunteer student choir members. Fr. Frederick, Fr. Friend, and Mr. Massery wore their own CHS rings to the ceremony.



# HOMECOMING 2021 HAS SPECIAL MEANING



1) Student body president Jed Straessle is in his element as master of ceremonies for presentation of the Homecoming Court and the pep rally. 2) Junior Aidan Branton, freshman Casey Annar, and sophomore Connor Wrape shake the gym with the rest of the band's drum line. 3) Senior Preston Scott escorts MSM senior Mimi Baldwin, who wore the Homecoming queen's crown later that night just as her aunt — who was also named Mimi Baldwin — did fifty years ago at the 1971 Rocket Homecoming. 4) Rocket Football players Will Davis, Luke Driver, and Fortner Tiffie encourage the crowd to show up for the game. 5) MSM cheerleaders provide color and enthusiasm. 6) Senior candidates for Homecoming "King" Evan Eifling and Christian Dawson try to convince their classmates of their qualifications as royalty. 7) Sophomore Ajay Salgaonkar makes it look easy.

# HOMECOMING: MUCH MORE THAN A DANCE



Wide open spaces, plenty of boots and cowboy hats, a hayride, root beer floats, and a mechanical bull. There was a dance hall some place in the mix, but it had strong competition from all the other activities happening at the Homecoming celebration at CHS on Saturday, October 10.

The weekend was a full one for the entire school family. Friday afternoon's presentation of the Homecoming court featured the CHS band's signature sounds including the crowd-pleasing "Sweet Caroline." The MSM cheerleaders and Rockettes were on hand to support the Rockets. The Friday night game did not turn out as hoped, but the players and students shook off the loss by Saturday night.

Students and teacher chaperones were well aware of the significance of the first official student get-together since the 2020 Winter Formal, which occurred just a few weeks before the March 2020 quarantine began.



1) Freshman Zach Ellis is one of the first to try the mechanical bull, one of the hottest attractions of the Western-themed Homecoming. 2) Cowboys and lovely congirls pose at the end of a unique Homecoming event. 3) Student body officers Ben Biernat, Jed Straessle, and Ben Bauer celebrate a successful event with sponsor Ms. Bethany Meadows. 4) Loyal truck fanatics gather around their favorite ride. 5) The football field provided lots of outdoor space for groups to gather. The weather was absolutely perfect for the 2021 Homecoming activities. 6) Junior Elias Found and his date pose at the end of the evening.

# CHS CALENDAR:

## OCTOBER 15, 2021 TO JANUARY 5, 2022

- ◇ Friday, October 15: Rocket varsity football at NLR
- ◇ Monday, October 18: First quarter exams (periods 1, 3, & 7 — other classes are short)
- ◇ Tuesday, October 19: First quarter exams (periods 2, 6, & 8 — other classes are short); Junior Class Mass
- ◇ HALF-DAY Wednesday, October 20: First quarter exams period 4/5 (other classes meet for 24 minutes each) **Dismissal is at 12:30**
- ◇ Saturday, October 23: ACT (go to [act.org](http://act.org) for more information)
- ◇ Tuesday, October 26: Senior Class Mass
- ◇ Friday, October 29: Rocket varsity football vs. Conway at War Memorial Stadium
- ◇ Saturday, October 30: Ties That Bind Dinner and Auction
- ◇ Monday, November 1: All-Saints Day Mass; Father-Son Mass
- ◇ Friday, November 5: Senior yearbook ad deadline
- ◇ Friday, November 5: Rocket varsity football at Central
- ◇ Saturday, November 6: SAT (go to [collegeboard.com](http://collegeboard.com) for more information)
- ◇ Tuesday, November 9: Freshman Class Mass
- ◇ Wednesday, November 10: Make-up photos for all grades
- ◇ Thursday, November 11: Varsity basketball at Nettleton
- ◇ Tuesday, November 16: Sophomore Class Mass
- ◇ Thursday, November 18: Varsity basketball vs. Robinson at CHS
- ◇ **Monday, November 22 - Friday, November 26: Thanksgiving Break**
- ◇ Tuesday, November 30: Junior Class Mass; Varsity basketball at Searcy
- ◇ Thursday, December 2: Rocket Christmas Shoppe; Varsity Basketball vs. Truman at Searcy
- ◇ Saturday, December 4: SAT; Varsity basketball vs. Valley View at Searcy
- ◇ Wednesday, December 8: Feast of the Immaculate Conception — All School Mass
- ◇ Thursday, December 9 - Saturday, December 11: Basketball Tournament at Benton
- ◇ Saturday, December 11: ACT ([act.org](http://act.org))
- ◇ Wednesday, December 15 - Friday, December 17: Semester Exams — specific schedule TBA
- ◇ **Monday, December 20 - Tuesday, January 4: Christmas Break**
- ◇ **Wednesday, January 5: School reopens**

## SENIOR YEARBOOK AD DEADLINE: NOVEMBER 5

**M**rs. Deanna McGill wishes to thank all the parents and grandparents who have already submitted senior ads for the 2022 *Rocket* yearbook. The deadline is Friday, November 5. All ads that Mrs. McGill's staff receive by the deadline have a guaranteed spot.

After the deadline, bad things happen:

1. There is a penalty fee.
2. There is no guarantee you'll have a spot in the yearbook.

While ads are certainly not required, we really appreciate the support. The senior ads make the yearbook possible. Parents, grandparents, and godparents may purchase an ad honoring a senior. Contact Mrs. McGill at [dmcgill@lrchs.org](mailto:dmcgill@lrchs.org)



Here's Mrs. Deanna McGill, sponsor of the 2021-22 *Rocket* yearbook, reminding parents that the final deadline for yearbook ads is Friday, November 5. Dads could hand-deliver the ads a few days early when they attend the November 1 Father-Son Mass.

## FIRST EVER CATHOLIC BOWL



Head football coach Mr. John Fogleman gives instruction to his team as they prepare to take the field for the September 5 Catholic Bowl in Frisco, Texas. Mr. Fogleman said, "I think a lot of people didn't expect it to be as good of a game as it was. Never listen to people who say you can't do something."

Liftoffnews editor Jackson Smith contributed to these captions.



Senior Fortner Tiffie scores against Nolan Catholic High School in a hard-fought contest at the September 5 Catholic Bowl in Frisco, Texas. The Rockets played the highly-ranked Nolan team and endured a tough loss after three overtime periods. They still sang the Alma Mater with their fans.



The school JROTC color guard completes their mission at the Catholic Bowl in Frisco, Texas, under the leadership of Sgt. Major Scott Jernigan. Photos of Catholic Bowl: Mrs. Deanna McGill



## DETERMINATION PAYS OFF FOR GREENWAY AND SMITH



*Seniors Chad Greenway and Jackson Smith are ready for almost anything after earning National Merit status. The title opens many opportunities and repays much hard work.*

Seniors Chad Greenway and Jackson Smith never expected that the National Merit Scholarship would come to them easily. Both are strong proponents of putting in the work necessary to be successful students. They are among the elite scholars who now have the opportunity to acquire National Merit Finalist status.

Last fall, both did much more than show up on PSAT day with number two pencils and hope in their hearts. Both had spent countless hours taking practice tests in preparation. Greenway said, “The best way to improve is to take practice test after practice test. I benefited from scheduling my SAT just a few weeks after the PSAT, as the two are very similar. I took two full-length practice PSATs and nine full-length SATs; consequently, I needed to take the SAT only once. One trap I often see people falling into is taking real test after real test with no preparation in between and just expecting a better score.”

Smith’s strategy was similar. After his sophomore year PSAT (which is considered practice experience for students), he made it his goal to improve his junior-year score. “I spent the summer preparing for the test. I used only one source to increase my score: Khan Acad-

emy, [a free online educational site] which has an SAT prep program that provides practice problems for each type of question on the test as well as ten full-length practice tests. I did over 3000 practice problems on the site, spending a few hours every day over the summer as well as practice tests each Saturday morning. Once I took and reviewed enough practice tests, I could spot most of the trends in the test, which made it easier to perform well on the real test.”

Both Smith and Greenway will complete the steps to become National Merit Finalists. This process is mainly just a matter of filling out paperwork and writing an essay, which both are quite capable of doing. Both are on the editorial staff of the *Rocket Times*, the school’s news magazine, among the many activities in which they are award-winning members. Smith has earned All-Region First Band honors six times (three times for concert band and three for jazz band) and won sixth place in the state chess championship last spring. Greenway is a top cross country runner and commanding officer of the school’s JROTC program.

Smith’s dream school is Vanderbilt University. He said, “I don’t know how much being a National Merit Scholar will help me in the admissions process, but Vanderbilt gives out \$8000 per year to National Merit Scholars who don’t receive one of their other merit-based scholarships.”

Smith, the son of Jessica and David Smith, has a particular goal in mind. He said, “Ever since my dad was diagnosed with brain cancer, neuroscience has been a huge interest for me. I want to help others who have had to go through similar experiences. My current plan is to go to a school with a strong neuroscience program and become a neuroscientist.”

Greenway, the son of Kari and Chad Greenway, Sr. ’94, does not have such a specific plan in mind; however, he said, “I have a deep interest in the intersection of ‘big data’ and informed decision making. As such, I am seeking to gain at least one degree in a quantitative field such as applied and computational mathematics or operations research.”

## ROCKETS WIN TENNIS CONFERENCE AND GOLF STATE TITLES



*Golf team members Nash Johnson, Tripp Maris, Harrison Franks, and Andrew Payne acknowledge the student body’s standing ovation as they celebrate their state championship. They played at Hurricane Golf Club in Bryant.*

October was a good month for being on a golf course or a tennis court. The schools golf and tennis teams enjoyed more than good weather. Both teams brought home trophies and one will be memorialized on a gym banner.

The tennis team made the short trip to the Rebsamen tennis facility to win their conference championship by overcoming Central High School. Championship team members include Charlie Henry, Tommy Nolan, Rhodes Roberts, Isaiah Bordador, Aiden Bordador, Spartagus Wolfe, and Noah Anderson. Their coach is Mr. Tim Glancy.

Golf team coaches are Mr. Brian Loeb, Mr. Bubba Klugh, and Mr. Mike Majowski. Their state championship team includes seniors Nash Johnson, Tripp Maris, and Harrison Franks; junior Andrew Payne; sophomore Austin Eanes; and freshmen Sam Glover and Adam Squires. Payne was the overall champion and all-state golfer. Johnson and Eanes also won all-state honors.