



THE LAUNCH PAD

Volume XIX Issue 1

Fall 2022

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Dear Parents,

A little more than two months have elapsed in the 2022-23 school year, but it has been an action-packed, very interesting ride.

Entering the school building on August 15, students found all the things they love about the school — or all the iconic traditions they'd heard about — were back in full force from day one.

Opening ceremonies, the first all-school Mass, pep rallies, speakers from around the state and around the world, Ring Mass, Homecoming, a record breaking football season, and laughter in the classrooms and hallways were all reminders that everything important about the school is still very much alive and well.

The band stages early morning flash-mob performances, students enjoy videos produced by the broadcast crew, the Rocket fight song rings through the halls between classes on game days, and students visit the chapel for class Masses and silent prayer.

No one at this school doubted the return of each and every tradition. We are happy that your sons are here to experience each moment. Stay tuned. The year has just begun. *—the editor*



For the first time since the fall of 2019, Ring Mass proceeded in its traditional way. In 2020, virus protocol dictated an outdoor service attended by only seniors and their mothers. Last year's Mass returned to the gym, but everyone wore a mask. This year, the candles reflected the seniors' reverence and joy at receiving the symbol of their dedication to duty and love for their CHS brothers.

UNIQUE CHS MISSION: CHARACTER AND SOUL

Mr. Steve Straessle met with teachers on August 11 and 12 to prepare for the 2022-23 school year. Unlike the two years before, there was no emphasis on protocol for distancing students, there was no discussion of convoluted hybrid schedules, and there were no assignments for students to eat lunch at designated outdoor settings. This year began with a more uplifting discussion of aspects that make our school different from any other.

Mr. Straessle summarized the discussion in two words: character and soul. He said, "Our focus this year is on the qualities that separate us from other schools. No one is born with good character. It's hewn. It's built. It's put together through the trials and errors of life experienced in an environment that demands better, that models better.

"Soul, on the other hand, is inherent to our birth. It's that bit of 'magic' that connects humans to the divine. Soul does not have to be built. Instead, it needs to be honored, it needs to be advanced, it needs to be born again and again.

"Our teachers come to school with character in one hand: a hammer, a mallet, ready to help build. In the other hand, it's soul. It's a palm empty of implements and open to the boys as they hear, 'Come, follow me.'"

The meeting progressed with some usual business. Mr. Straessle introduced two new teachers, Mr. Jake Nestlebutt

and Master Sgt. Fernando Faria. Mr. Nestlebutt is teaching American history, American government, and a computer coding class as well as serving as assistant basketball coach. Master Sgt. Faria joins Col. Charles Johnson and serves as a new Marine instructor. The faculty welcomed back Mr. Chip Reeves as he returned to resume his duties as physical education teacher and assistant football coach.

Also on the agenda was discussion of school safety and some of the regular procedures such as taking accurate attendance and providing support for students with learning differences. The meetings were business-like, but there was plenty of laughter as the school family reunited and got down to the business of their chosen profession.

Mr. Straessle had more to say about his major themes for the year. He said, "We have a great athletic program, but some other schools will win more championships than we will. We have a great academic program, but some other schools will host more National Merit Semi-Finalists. We have a beautiful campus, but other schools will have more.

"However, I can say with confidence, no school — no institution in this entire state — will better us in how we build character and honor soul.

"That's our message, that's our mission."

Shakespeare Morning



Members of TheatreSquared from Northwest Arkansas arrived early on October 3.



Actors from TheatreSquared's in-school tour performed free of charge thanks to funds from the Arkansas Arts Council, the National Endowment for the Arts, and donations from private companies.



The student body enjoyed the performances enormously as the actors combined humor and instruction.



Members of TheatreSquared asked for a photo with Titus. Seated are Shyendra Chandrasena with Titus, Char Kendall Dupins, and Ivy McGrew. Standing is technician for the group and also audience favorite Ryan Pangrac. All four are classically trained Shakespearean actors.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT CATHOLIC HIGH

The eight pages of this newsletter only scratch the surface of life at this school for the past two months. Every day seems to bring a new opportunity, sometimes from unusual sources.

Several interesting speakers visited the school during the first weeks of school. One of those speakers was Omar Alshogre, once a Syrian prisoner and now an emissary of the Syrian Emergency Task Force. He gave an inspiring presentation to seniors. His message was simple yet profound: "Use your passion and identify your tools to change the world."

Members of TheatreSquared from Northwest Arkansas delighted the entire student body with a modern take on William Shakespeare's work.

Journalism students heard from two very different sources in two days. First was Mrs. Katrina Muros from Okeechobee, Florida, who happens to be journalism teacher Mrs. Gretchen Gowen's sister. Mrs. Muros talked to the students about the group of small town newspapers she manages and edits. The next day, CNN executive Ramon Escobar visited the class to discuss his job as senior vice president of talent recruitment and development. Mr. Escobar was visiting Little Rock to attend the alumni dinner and his class reunion. The next day, the students discussed how both the small and large worlds of journalism had relevance to school publications.



Mr. Omar Alshogre speaks to seniors about his life-changing experiences as a prisoner in Syria. He encouraged the students to become informed about what is happening in the world.

Former mayor Mark Stodola also visited recently to speak to senior American Government students about the workings of local government.

Mr. Straessle has finalized plans for a presentation by Arkansas author Eli Cranor in January. Mr. Cranor is an Arkansas native whose debut novel *Don't Know Tough* is garnering good reviews from book critics all across the country. Junior and senior students have shown interest in reading the book to prepare for Mr. Cranor's visit.

SCHOOL DOGS HAVE THEIR [SCHOOL] DAY

Picture below is Mr. Steve Straessle with his friend Mac who has been a welcome new face and set of paws on campus. "His future at school remains to be seen at this point," said Mr. Straessle. "We'll see how it goes and if he keeps getting along with everyone, I'll keep bringing him."



Titus is still head dog at school and is mellowing with age. He is Brother Richard's constant companion and listens to Brother's every word. Senior Chris Suffern said, "It's definitely a morale booster having dogs around. It's a cool little thing that's unique to Catholic."

THE MOTHER SHIP

(A COLUMN FOR MOMS BY MOMS OF CHS GRADUATES)

DEAR MOTHERS [AND DADS] OF CHS STUDENTS, We mothers of CHS graduates who are about a generation ahead of you have been watching you. Not in a creepy, stalking kind of way, we assure you. We've just been keeping up with the school, talking to several on the faculty, and visiting with some of you whom we happen to know.

As you have worked your way through the disasters the pandemic brought, we thought about you often. Now that you are learning to live with an endemic disease, you still have to deal with the residual effects of all that isolation and stress. Add that to the already difficult task of finding ways to motivate your teenage boys to stay focused. How can you make them believe that their future depends on what they are doing right now?

Motivation. How do we motivate teenage boys? If we knew the answer to that question, we would be trillionaires or whatever comes after trillionaires. We've really been thinking about this and looking for something concrete to tell you in this column. We haven't found the secret recipe for motivation, but we have been reading some interesting things about survival of the human spirit that seems related to motivation of all people.

Stay with us for a little while, because we're going to reference a time much darker than we're living in now — or even that we have lived for the last two and a half years. We'll take you to a man named Dr. Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor. Dr. Frankl had established his career as chief of neurology at a hospital in Vienna before World War II. His world collapsed and he lost his parents, his wife, and his unborn child in the concentration camps.

Before the war, Dr. Frankl had developed a theory that those who found meaning in their lives had a better chance at success in all aspects of life than those who did not. He saw extreme evidence of this in the camps. He said, "He who has a *why* can bear any *how*."

Other researchers studied Frankl's work and came up with the reasons why people overcome adversity in four levels. The first three include individual goals, family, and community. The fourth and highest level consists of religion, spirituality, and values. Basically, what Dr. Frankl found was that

a person who belongs to something greater than himself has the greatest resilience and the greatest sense of satisfaction with his life. We really didn't need a scientific study to know this to be true. Most of us are seeking a connection with something bigger than ourselves. We find ourselves happiest as a part of a family, a community, a mission, and a church family.

Back to our question of motivating teenage boys. More than ever, these young men need to find a place to belong before they can set and reach goals. You have accomplished part of that by sending them to a school that emphasizes continuity and a community of faithful brothers they can count on throughout their lives. This becomes obvious when hundreds of alumni return for their October dinner or when large CHS alumni groups pop up all over the country.

Your sons' place as part of the school's brotherhood is a good start, but not every boy realizes the value of working every day for his future. So it's up to you as parents to help your son find his *why*.

This won't be easy. It will take finding some neutral ground and a time away from routine problems. It will take many heartfelt conversations about what your son really wants to do with his life. No one can expect him to declare a college major when he's 15, but as parents, you can start asking the questions about what he hopes his future will hold.

You can encourage participation in service projects — not just as items to list on his college applications but as ways to connect with those who need his help. The school has a group called REACH that participates in several service projects each year. JROTC here also takes on service projects. Most area churches have youth groups that emphasize belonging to a community as well as serving others.

For spiritual awareness, you've come to the right place. There are many people at this school who are willing and able to listen and to guide your son. We'd also like to recommend a program that began way back when we were in high school. The Catholic diocese still runs a program called Search. Any senior can attend a weekend retreat that offers fun and fellowship and also helps teens find themselves.

We still don't have the magic to assure you that your son will make perfect grades or be perfectly happy. We do know that this place offers hope and a place to belong. It's a beginning to finding the *why* that will make any *how* possible.



Moms from the CHS classes of 2002 and 2003 write this column.

SCHOOL BOASTS THREE NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS FOR 2022-23

Pictured at left are three seniors who earned the title of National Merit Semifinalist for their junior year PSAT scores. Left to right they are Owen Fraley, Andrew Dillman, and Mason Walsh. Fraley is the son of Krissy Morris and Patrick Fraley; Dillman is the son Jill and Scott Dillman; and Walsh is the son Lori and David Walsh.

Along with most members of the senior class, the three National Merit scholars are working on college applications. The Merit scholar designation gives these three students an edge in scholarship opportunities from many colleges and universities. The three have acceptance letters and the opening volley of scholarship offers from several schools including the University of Arkansas, the University of Georgia, and the University of Tulsa.

National Merit Scholar designation takes some of the stress away from these seniors' college search. They are also closer to a common goal. Fraley echoed the wish of every college hopeful, "I don't want to leave college with any debt."



2022 RING MASS MARKS ANOTHER “NORMAL” EVENT



The class of 2023 read a prayer of dedication during the Ring Mass on Thursday, September 15.

Before our pandemic experience, we cherished our traditions, but often took them for granted. We did not imagine that anything could interrupt the customs and events that had developed over the 90 years of school history.

Now, every event has many layers of meaning. Everyone silently counted the blessings of the 2022 Ring Mass. Even though there were Ring Masses in 2020 and 2021, their differences stood out. Now, back in the gym without (as many) concerns about health protocols, the class of 2023 and their mothers enjoyed every moment.

It was appropriate that the alumnus who read Pat’s Conroy’s take on class rings was a son of an alum, a current teacher, and a father of a senior. Mr. Todd Ezzi, son of the school’s athletic director Mr. Tim Ezzi, and father of senior Beau Ezzi, read from Conroy’s *The Lords of Discipline*: “The ring would be our connection to the bright circuit of immemorial fraternity.”



Members of the junior class sing the Alma Mater as they observe their brothers the seniors wearing their class rings.



Fr. Lawrence Frederick presides over Ring Mass.



Left: Mr. Todd Ezzi, son of Mr. Tim Ezzi and father of senior Beau Ezzi and freshman Brody Ezzi, reads from Pat Conroy’s *The Lords of Discipline*. Center: Seniors contemplate the weight of their senior rings. Right: Mr. Steve Straessle watches over the seniors in the first year since 2009 that one of his sons has not been part of the student body.

MASTER SGT. FERNANDO FARIA FULFILLS DREAM



Master Sgt. Fernando Faria settles in to his new office next to the JROTC classroom. Surrounding him are mementos of all his past assignments including items from his last posting at Fort Sill in Oklahoma.

Master Sgt. Fernando Faria is settling into his first year as Marine JROTC Instructor after a career that took him all over the United States and to a one-year deployment in Iraq.

He eventually landed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where he taught at the artillery school. "I was in Oklahoma, so we were close to here," he said. "I have family in Hot Springs, so we would come to hang out in Arkansas a little bit." While on a visit

to Hot Springs, he heard about Sgt. Major Scott Jernigan's planned retirement.

Master Sgt. Faria had wanted to be a JROTC instructor for a while. "I was a JROTC cadet when I went through high school," he said. "I loved what the program did for me as a student and it was one of my highlights. Even though I played sports, I thoroughly enjoyed JROTC. I had always wanted to do military life, so it gave me an understanding of what it's going to be like.

"I got some information [about CHS], and the accolades that the school has with the program and how involved it is not only with the program, but with the school and the community, and it was a done deal for me. Specifically, after I spoke with Sgt. Major Jernigan, Colonel Johnson, and Mr. Straessle on the phone, I told my wife to pack up our stuff because we're moving to Arkansas."

The term "brotherhood" gets tossed around here throughout the halls, but Master Sgt. Faria has already experienced it. "I saw it when I was here for two weeks at the end of school last year," he said. "Everybody works together, everybody looks out for each other which directly translates to the boys. Seeing the freshmen coming in who haven't embodied the school's values and how the seniors come in behind the freshmen and tell them, 'This is how we do it.' That's mind-blowing to me."

JROTC cadet senior Connor Stahl has a lot of respect for Master Sgt. Faria. "I think he has a lot to offer and has the potential to do great things for the program," he said. "In the short time I've known him, I can say I have zero doubt in him. He's hardworking and ready to support this school. I think that's exactly what the program needs. Not only do I think he'll continue the legacy of Sgt. Major [Jernigan], I firmly believe he'll have his own legacy by the time he retires."

Rocket Times associate editor Essa Kassissieh wrote this article.

MR. JAKE NESTLEHUTT FULFILLS HIS DREAM TO TEACH AND COACH

The classroom was quiet as students worked on their Chromebooks on a September afternoon. With the help of new teacher Mr. Jake Nestlehutt, they were learning computer coding using the Python and Java languages.

Even at this early stage of their class, students gave a visitor a clear description of what their goal was and how their knowledge might be applied in future jobs. Mr. Nestlehutt checked on each student's progress and offered suggestions here and there.

This job is Mr. Nestlehutt's first teaching assignment after his graduation from Rhodes College with a business degree. He said, "I knew in my junior year there that I wanted to teach, and so enrolled in a Masters of Art in Teaching at the University of Arkansas at Monticello." This program requires him to teach in an Arkansas school. When he finishes the program, he will have not only an Arkansas teaching license, he will also hold a Masters degree in teaching.

Mr. Nestlehutt's skills and background meshed well with the opening he filled at this school.

He played basketball for Rhodes, a D-3 school, and has taken the Rockets' assistant basketball coaching position. His work in advertising and marketing gave him expertise in computer software as well as coding. He is also teaching American History and U.S. Government.

Mr. Nestlehutt seems to be settling in to the culture of the school. He attended a private co-ed high school in Atlanta. He said, "It was different from here in that people knew everyone in their friend groups, but they might not know everyone in their class as they do here."

He was impressed with the student body on August 15. He said, "The first-day assembly I thought was really cool how they had [senior] Will Davis shoot [basketball goals] against [freshman] Brody Ezzi, and I enjoyed how into it everyone got. They didn't do things like that where I went to school, so it was interesting to see.

"I got to see [my first CHS] football game and how supportive everybody was," he said. "Watching the students and football players sing the *Alma Mater* at the end was really cool to watch." *Rocket Times associate editor Essa Kassissieh contributed to this article.*



Mr. Jake Nestlehutt confers with a senior during a computer coding class. The students appreciate the ability to learn two computer languages they may use in future careers.

HOMECOMING TAKES CHS BACK TO 1970s & 1984



Seniors Andrew Nguyen, CJ Onyekwelu, and Nate Rousseau celebrate another Rocket win. A week later, the record hit 8-0.



Alex Neece helps William Timmis tackle a Sylvan Hills ball carrier on October 14.

Homecoming 2022 linked the school to its past, to traditions that include gathering as many people as possible in one big room to dance the night away.

A crowd of almost 800 embraced the 70s disco theme and appeared in every brightly-glowing sequined outfit imaginable. They were celebrating the Rockets' 7-0 record after the win on Friday night, October 14, along with the freedom from masks and distancing protocol they'd dealt with in 2021.

The 7-0 record recalls memories of 1984, when the football team had seven consecutive wins before winning a state championship. Coach Mr. John Fogleman is looking ahead only to the next Friday night game. He said, "We'll enjoy the win and get ready for next week."



Junior Jaxon Hatchett concentrates on his next assignment.



The Rockets face their fans as they sing the Alma Mater. This tradition occurs after every game, but was especially sweet after the Homecoming win over Sylvan Hills, which brought their record to 7-0 for the first time since the 1980s.



Left: Senior Ethan Smith leads the sequin-bedecked chorus to a 70s anthem. Center: Sophomore Chris Pace and his date show off their 70s smiles. Right: Senior CJ Onyekwelu (again), and sophomores Jackson England and Paul Plafcan dominate the dance floor. All photos on this page by Rocket Times photographer Phillip Zawislak.



CHS CALENDAR: OCTOBER 28, 2022 - JANUARY 31, 2023

- ◇ Friday, October 28: Varsity football at El Dorado
- ◇ Tuesday, November 1: Senior Class Father-Son Mass
- ◇ Friday, November 4: Varsity football vs. Marion at War Memorial Stadium
- ◇ Saturday, November 5: SAT (for more information, go to collegeboard.com)
- ◇ Tuesday, November 8: Freshman Class Mass
- ◇ Thursday, November 10: Varsity basketball vs. Southwest at CHS
- ◇ Tuesday, November 15: Sophomore Class Mass; JV basketball at PA
- ◇ Thursday, November 17: Varsity basketball at Robinson High School
- ◇ **Monday, November 21 to Friday, November 25: Thanksgiving Break**
- ◇ Tuesday, November 22: Varsity basketball vs. Mills at CHS
- ◇ Tuesday, November 29: Giving Tuesday (see lrchs.org)
- ◇ Wednesday, November 30 to Saturday, December 3: Varsity basketball — Searcy Bank Classic
- ◇ Thursday, December 1: Rocket Christmas Shoppe
- ◇ Saturday, December 2: SAT
- ◇ Thursday, December 8: All School Mas: Feast of the Immaculate Conception
- ◇ Friday, December 9 to Saturday, December 10: Varsity Basketball “Jammin’ for Jackets” at Southwest/Hall
- ◇ Saturday, December 10: ACT (for more information, go to act.org)
- ◇ Wednesday December 14: Semester Exams (Schedule TBA)
- ◇ Thursday, December 15: Semester Exams (Schedule TBA)
- ◇ Friday, December 16: Semester Exams (Schedule TBA)
- ◇ Friday, December 16: Varsity basketball at Beebe
- ◇ Saturday, December 17: Varsity basketball at Conway
- ◇ **Monday, December 19 to Tuesday, January 3: School closed for Christmas break**
- ◇ Wednesday, December 28 to Friday, December 30: Varsity Basketball at Lake Hamilton Classic
- ◇ **Wednesday, January 4: School reopens for second semester**
- ◇ Friday, January 6: Varsity basketball at eStem
- ◇ Tuesday, January 10: Senior Class Mass
- ◇ Tuesday, January 10: Varsity basketball vs. Sylvan Hills at CHS
- ◇ Wednesday, January 11: JV basketball vs. Central at CHS
- ◇ **Friday, January 13: Parent/Teacher conferences – 12:30 – 3:30**
- ◇ Friday, January 13: Varsity basketball at Parkview
- ◇ Monday, January 16: School Closed – Martin Luther King Day – information about MLK student service day projects TBA
- ◇ Tuesday, January 17: Varsity basketball vs. Jacksonville at CHS
- ◇ Friday, January 20: Varsity basketball vs. Maumelle at CHS
- ◇ **Saturday, January 21: Winter Formal**
- ◇ Tuesday, January 24: Freshman Class Mass
- ◇ Wednesday, January 25: Varsity basketball at Parkview
- ◇ Friday, January 27: Varsity basketball vs. Bebee at CHS
- ◇ **Sunday, January 29: Open House for Incoming Freshmen**
- ◇ Tuesday, January 31: Varsity basketball at Vilonia

*Junior Jason Hatchett fends off a host of West Memphis players on September 30. The Rockets won that game by a score of 37-16. As of October 21, the team was 8-0 with two conference games to go in regular season play.
photo: Phillip Zawislak*



SCENE AROUND SCHOOL



Rocket Times photographer Phillip Zawislak reviews his latest photos with associate Rocket Times editor Essa Kassissieh and Liftoffnews editor Drew Dillman.



Mr. Todd Egzi and students in his physical science class watch an attempt to launch a balloon-powered vehicle. Students used basic principles of physics and engineering skills in this experiment.



Mr. Matt Hartnedy, quarterback of the 1985 Rocket football championship team, visited school recently and spoke with current quarterback Sam Sanders. Mr. Hartnedy relived the 1985 game when five overtimes decided the winner.

LITTLE ROCK POLICE ADD A LAYER OF SECURITY AT CHS



Officer Will Hairston (CHS class of 2012) talks with Fr. Patrick Friend. Officer Hairston is one of several off-duty police officers who walk the halls daily. Their purpose is not to help teachers with discipline. They are here to provide extra security to the measures already in place at the school.

Students and teachers have been accustomed to seeing Little Rock off-duty officers serving as directors of after school traffic or as security at big school events. Having an officer inside the building every day is a new experience.

Beginning on October 3, students and teachers began meeting the officers who now provide security on our campus. Mr. Steve Straessle explained the addition in a letter to parents. He emphasized one thing: “Let me be clear at the outset: we have no specific threats against the school.”

Mr. Straessle cited security additions to the building over the past few years including auto-locking doors, a buzzer system in the front office, a security lobby “envelope” among others. Teachers recently attended active-shooter training, learned first-aid and triage measures, and reviewed lock-down protocols. Mr. Straessle said, “We have several other measures in place that we do not discuss publicly.”

Mr. Straessle indicated the turning point to add the in-school officers came in the form of Governor Hutchison’s Arkansas School Safety Commission reports. He said, “One item stood out clearly: response to a threat cannot be measured in minutes. It must be measured in seconds. Therefore, having a response on campus is vital for student safety. The Catholic High school board endorsed this measure. Today, we implemented it.”

Also clear in his communication to parents was that the officers walking the halls are here to deter and address outside threats. Mr. Straessle said, “Catholic High teachers will still gleefully handle all behavior issues among the students. This is not a standard SRO [school resource officer] program.”

Students have accepted the presence of the officers on campus. One of the security detail regularly watches the seniors daily lunch volleyball games. The officers have taken a low-key approach but are happy to answer questions or check on any small thing that seems out of the ordinary.

Before school began, teachers participated in two in-service days. Mr. Straessle said, “We discussed that we must understand the world in which we live so that we can work for the world that we want. It’s saddening that we must take these measures. But, we recommit ourselves to working for the world we want — the one our children will inherit someday.”

MR. CHIP REEVES RECEIVES ENTHUSIASTIC WELCOME HOME

Mr. Chip Reeves returned to the school at the beginning of the year and took up his old position as health and P.E. teacher and assistant football coach. Mr. Reeves left the school in 2020 as a result of a death in his family. He then helped to stabilize his family’s ranch business.

While there are some benefits of living on a ranch, it might not be one’s passion. “We were able to sustain the ranch,” said Mr. Reeves. “[And] I was missing being here. I was missing the interactions, missing the day-to-day routine, missing football. I missed the relationships that I had built with the faculty here, the traditions that are so great here, relationships with the boys. It’s just really special this place.”

Principal Mr. Steve Straessle said, “[Mr. Reeves’] experience here was a very positive one. His impact on the kids, his impact on the football players was very positive. He brings a lot of common sense and just deep knowledge to his classroom and to his football team. These are valued in all of our coaches, and of course, he exhibits those very clearly.”

Mr. Reeves’ fellow teachers are glad that he walks the halls again. Head football coach Mr. John Fogleman has known Mr. Reeves for a long time and coached with him at Malvern. Mr. Fogleman said, “What Coach Reeves brings is a lot of energy and a lot of passion. And you can never have enough of that. We’re happy to have him back.”



Mr. Chip Reeves demonstrates proper technique for an exercise in his freshman introduction to physical fitness class, an elective he has enthusiastically taken on. Rocket Times reporter Phillip Zawislak contributed to this article.