

Features

High schools recruiting by using creative tactics

By Rob Cullivan

Last March 17, Edward J. Tracey told Irish jokes all day long on radio station WGVA in Geneva. The DeSales High School principal was thinking green during his DJ stint — green as in new recruits for his school and green as in potential donations to help operate it.

By putting Tracey on the air all day, WGVA lost potential advertising revenue, which local businesses offset by donating more than \$300 to sponsor the principal. Not to be outdone in the realm of community action, the station turned around and gave DeSales the donated revenue.

Tracey's on-air performance exemplifies the creativity and initiative that mark diocesan high schools' attempt to broadcast their desire for students and their need for funds. While all the schools use similar methods to recruit students and develop revenue, differences in style and substance point to diversity among the diocese's eight secondary schools.

Some of the schools, such as Bishop Kearney and Nazareth Academy in Rochester, combine their recruiting and development offices, while others, such as McQuaid of Rochester and Notre Dame of Elmira, maintain separate offices for each function. Regardless of how they do it, each school recognizes that without a steady or increasing enrollment of freshmen each fall, funding appeals to the public will ultimately fail.

To ensure that their freshman classrooms stay filled, the six Catholic high schools in Monroe County coordinate their recruitment efforts. Recruitment directors from each school meet once a month to exchange ideas and insights regarding their profession. This year, as in the past two, recruiters are combining efforts to produce television, radio and newspaper advertisements that invite students to look at Catholic education in general as an alternative for their high school years.

According to diocesan recruiting directors, combining recruiting efforts offers many advantages, despite the fact the schools are often competing for many of the same students. Two years ago, for example, the recruiters' association received a \$10,000 matching grant from the Delaware-based Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activity, after contributing equally to the fund needed to qualify for the matching grant. The combined funds were used to pay for television ads.

Brother Lawrence Atkinson, director of development and alumni at Cardinal Mooney High School, welcomes the recruitment

cooperation. "We wouldn't be able to afford television advertising on our own," he explained. Edward Ranalli, director of recruitment and public relations at Aquinas Institute, shared Atkinson's sentiments. "Catholic high schools need to present a united front," he said, noting nonetheless that "there's a healthy competition in all areas."

That competition manifests itself through the individual recruitment efforts of each school. All six Monroe County high schools invite seventh-graders from area Catholic elementary and junior high schools to visit their campuses each spring. Visits normally consist of sitting in on classes, touring each school's facilities and eating lunch in the school cafeteria.

Recruiters also visit public and private schools each spring to talk with counselors about potential prospects for enrollment. Fifty-five percent of McQuaid Jesuit High School's freshmen come from public and private schools, according to Ralph Bunce, who oversees the school's recruitment. Ranalli said that he talks to public school students in religious-education programs, hoping to persuade them to choose Aquinas.

The schools hold individual open houses in the fall of each year, and sponsor a joint Catholic secondary schools' exhibit at one of the high schools each October. Accompanied by students from their high schools, recruiters visit elementary schools in the fall to make another pitch to eighth-graders. Usually, each school makes individual visits to elementary schools within its area, but last year, recruiters joined efforts to offer elementary schools a one-day presentation that enabled eighth-graders to hear from all six schools at once.

Brother Atkinson said the 10 elementary schools that accepted the recruiters' offer responded enthusiastically to the joint pitch, but he said that he was unable to assess the new approach's effect on his own recruiting efforts. "We all have certain schools as our main feeder," he explained, noting that the joint presentation "was less personal than we would like it to be." On the other hand, he acknowledged that the effort gave him access to schools Mooney might otherwise not have visited.

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Linda Dow Hayes/Courier-Journal

Among the many marketing tools area Catholic schools use to attract prospective freshmen are informational brochures and flyers.

graphic area, but that she has expanded the school's recruitment base throughout Monroe County, and even into such surrounding counties as Wayne and Ontario. The expansion paid off when the school increased its freshmen enrollment by 25 percent last year, she said.

Despite their cooperation, each school must stress its unique qualities if it wants to attract the student who hasn't decided what school to attend. All of the schools draw a large number of their freshmen from the siblings of currently enrolled students and from the children of alumni, but a significant number of poten-

tial freshmen have no reason to attend a particular institution other than the perceptions they gain from the recruiters' efforts.

Recruiters stress their schools' strong points, which may range from strong athletics to an outstanding music program. Nazareth Academy emphasizes its character as an all-girls institution. Jean Zannie Mumford, the school's director of recruitment, development and public relations, brings students along on her elementary school visits so that they can answer the inevitable questions. "(Students) have

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St. Mary's School spreads the word to new audience

St. Mary's Elementary School is finding Catechists know it well.

St. Mary's school hasn't always been there, but the school's presence in the area is growing. Sister Mary Kirtz, principal, said the school's enrollment is growing. Last month, the school received a grant from the Delaware-based Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activity, after contributing equally to the fund needed to qualify for the matching grant. The combined funds were used to pay for television ads.

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