

ASCENT helps students rise to excellence

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — A year ago, Linda Hilliard knew that Nazareth Academy had to warp speed into the computer age.

"While our academic programs were on the cutting edge, our technological programs were a little backward," remarked Hilliard, assistant principal for curriculum and instruction at Nazareth.

That situation has changed in a big way over the past 12 months. Nazareth has significantly upgraded its computer facilities by installing 30 new IBM and Macintosh computers for its student body.

Those computers will be put to use quickly this fall when the school, located at 1001 Lake Ave., launches its pre-engineering program in conjunction with Rochester Institute of Technology.

ASCENT — which stands for Academic Scholarship in Computing, Engineering, and New Technology — will give Nazareth students the opportunity to gain four college credits by successfully completing a four-year Regents program.

Nazareth announced in January, 1992, that the program would be available in the fall. According to Hilliard, the all-girls' Catholic school is the first in Monroe County — public or private — to implement an accredited pre-engineering curriculum.

No extra tuition cost is necessary to enroll in ASCENT. Subject areas covered over the program's duration include technical drawing, digital electronics, computer programming, automation and robotics.

The program will also feature occasional field trips to RIT so Nazareth students may familiarize themselves with workshops and labs related to engineering.

Upon completion of the four-year requirement, students will then be given the opportunity to gain credit — either at RIT or other universities offering engineering — by passing an examination.

Dick Hendrick, a Nazareth physics and biology instructor who will be teaching many of the program's courses, said Nazareth probably couldn't offer a program such as ASCENT if it hadn't updated its computers.

He believes that a high school program such as ASCENT is vital — especially for young women — in this day and age.

"Number one, we're increasingly becoming a technological society; two, there's a decreasing number of people who understand technology; and three, of these people, the women are a minority," Hendrick commented.

Hendrick noted that women who embark on engineering careers have traditionally been "super risk-takers in high school. As far as I'm concerned, it should be more of a mainstream thing."

School statistics

When school begins more than 3 million students will head back to more than 9,000 Catholic schools in the United States to be taught by nearly 170,000 teachers.

Hilliard added that she's hoping the program will contribute toward "a shift in perceptions of the kinds of field women can go into."

ASCENT is the brainchild of Ti Lin Liu, an RIT engineering professor. Liu will continue to be involved with the program by serving as a consultant to Hendrick.

Hilliard noted that the program comprises 18 students — mostly incoming freshmen — enrolled in ASCENT's inaugural group. "We'd like to eventually see it grow into two or three sections," she said.

Elisabeth Santos, 13, was initially attracted to the program because "I like to do work with computers, and I like science and math," she said.

Katie Best, 14, entered ASCENT on the advice of her sister, Elizabeth, a Nazareth junior. "I'm thinking about going into engineering, and I've already taken ninth-grade math," she said.

Aubrey Cudzilo, 14, thought that the opportunity to visit a college campus "made (ASCENT) more exciting."

Hendrick is also looking forward to the challenges of structuring this new program.

"I have a fairly large engineering background. I'm writing a manual as I go, I have to say; but I have a pretty good idea of what I want to do," he said.


Although Hendrick doesn't expect everyone enrolled in this program to become an engineer, ASCENT will still be a worthwhile experience.

"The dropout rate in engineering is among the highest of any college major," Hendrick acknowledged. "But by the end of (the ASCENT program), the kids will at least know what engineering is about — and the intense computer experience will help them no matter what field they go into."

"The primary tool in engineering is a computer, and obviously our primary goal is to more than introduce students to computers. They also have to be able to solve problems with them," added Hendrick. "At a lot of (high) schools, computers are introduced as typewriters and you never get beyond that point."



Babetta G. Augustin/Photo editor
Katie Best (left), Elisabeth Santos (center) and Aubrey Cudzilo are among the 18 students enrolled in Nazareth Academy's ASCENT pre-engineering program, which offers the opportunity for college credit upon completion of a four-year sequence. Best, Santos and Cudzilo will enter the ninth-grade at Nazareth this fall.



Bishop Kearney High School

A neighborhood school celebrating over 30 years of developing the whole person.

Come and experience Kearney ... an education for life!

Join us for our fall Open House, Sunday, October 25

**125 Kings Highway South
Rochester, NY 14617-5596
(716) 342-4000**



J.L. Hammett Co.

The Best In Educational Supplies & Equipment

• Paper	• Teaching Aids
• Office Products	• Day Care
• Art Materials	• Playground Equipment
• Early Childhood	• Furniture
• Physical Education	• Microcomputer Software

**J.L. Hammett Co, Inc.,
Your One Source
School Supply Company**

One Paliotti Parkway, Lyons, NY 14489, 800-333-4600