

## FEATURE

## Nazareth Schools recall past, ready for future



From left, Jennifer Wurtz ('98), Bonnie Huether Wurtz ('69), and Mary Blind Huether ('40) read the general intercessions during the Mass.

By Lee Strong  
Associate editor

Mary T. Bush remembers the stress on academic excellence.

Father Thomas Statt recalls the sense of being a family.

R. Wayne LeChase recollects the training and discipline.

All three of these people are products of the Nazareth Schools, and winners of the schools' Lumina-Lux Awards given to alumni who serve the community as a whole and remain committed to their respective schools.

Bush, now the chair of Nazareth College's history and political science department, graduated from Nazareth Academy in 1947 and received a Lumina Award in 1996.

Father Statt, currently the pastor of Our Mother of Sorrows Parish in Greece, graduated from Nazareth Hall in 1946, and was honored with a Lux Award in 1995.

LeChase, president and chief executive officer of the Raymond LeChase Company, graduated from Nazareth Hall Cadet School in 1957, and received this year's Lux Award.

Father Statt echoed the comments of the other two about their respective schools when he declared, "I can say nothing but good about it."

The trio are among the thousands of students who have graduated from Nazareth Academy, Nazareth Hall (and Cadet School) and the Nazareth Middle School, which opened in the late 1980s.

They were among the many graduates and supporters of the schools who took part in a Mass and dinner April 30 to mark the 125th anniversary of Nazareth Academy in 1871, to present the Lumina-Lux Awards, and to present a special award to the late Marie Curran Wilson, a 1929 graduate of the Academy.

The guest speaker was Bishop James M. Moynihan of Syracuse, a member of the Nazareth Hall class of 1946.

The Academy opened on Jay Street in September, 1871, to provide education for young women. The 12 members of the original staff of Sisters of St. Joseph greeted 30 students in grades two through 10. The school relocated to 1001 Lake Avenue in 1916.

Nazareth Hall opened in 1886 to provide education for male students. It went through transformation over the years, becoming a cadet school in 1952, and becoming coeducational in 1970.

And in 1992, the two schools were consolidated into a unified system, coeducational up through eighth grade, and with the Academy remaining an all-female high school. The Hall now has 286 students in grades pre-kindergarten through five; the middle school has 120 students in grades six through eight; and the Academy has 275 students.

Bush noted that the intellectual spirit of the schools was set early on.

"It's interesting that when they founded (Nazareth Academy), the congregation stressed academic excellence," Bush said. "They sent teachers over to study in Europe. I think that was something that was very new."

Indeed, Father Robert F. McNamara



Senior Julie Halliburton, center, leads the Nazareth Academy Dance Company in "Colors of the Wind." The performance preceded the Nazareth Schools' Lumina-Lux Awards dinner, April 30 at the Bausch and Lomb Wintergarden.

S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer



Members of the Nazareth Hall Children's Choir sing "Love Changes Everything" by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The group is directed by Ralph Zecchino.

noted in his diocesan history, *The Diocese of Rochester: 1868-1968*, that in 1895, when New York state imposed strict standards for training teachers, Nazareth Academy only had to add two courses to be accredited.

"The rest of the Nazareth syllabus was already stronger than the new law required, so it met with immediate acceptance," Father McNamara wrote.

That stress on challenging young women academically continues, noted Sister Ann Collins, SSJ, executive director of the Nazareth Schools.

The Nazareth Schools, for example, recently completed the Middle States organization's evaluation for kindergarten through grade 12 — a process that considers a school's overall program and resources, and which in the diocese has previously not been done at Catholic grade schools.

"Nazareth Hall will be the only Catholic (grade) school in the area to have Middle States accreditation," Sister Collins said.

In addition, Nazareth Academy went to an all-Regents program two years ago — a requirement only now being discussed by state education officials for all high schools in the state. And the Academy offers a pre-engineering program.

"We really emphasize math and science for girls," Sister Collins explained, noting that that emphasis counters assumptions that girls will not excel in these subjects.

But the schools stressed more than academics, Father Statt noted.

"There was so much a sense of belonging," Father Statt recalled. "A community feeling permeated the school. We were really one big family."

At Nazareth Hall, he also met students from across the city of Rochester — something that would not have happened at that time had he attended his parish school, Father Statt acknowledged.

"It certainly did broaden our horizons, because at an early age we knew kids from across the city," the priest said.

The schools also encouraged a concern for others, Bush noted. Thus students have a long history of being involved in the missions, social projects and with addressing society's needs in general — a charism imparted by the Sisters of St. Joseph.

"I think they have tried to keep in tune with the needs of the times," Bush said. "I think that we talked about Christian values long before politicians were talking about Christian values."

As a result of the emphasis at Nazareth Academy, Bush continued, "I think I was better able to understand people in general. You were trained to treat people as individuals."

LeChase sensed this same spirit at Nazareth Hall Cadet School.

"They cared for me," he noted. "I was a person and I was special. That was important."

The school instilled in him a sense of



Bishop James M. Moynihan of Syracuse and Bishop Matthew H. Clark receive the gifts during the April 30 Mass at St. Mary's Church in Rochester.

discipline and training that emphasized values, principles and morals, he said.

"I think the Nazareth training laid the seeds for the that kind of lifestyle and management style," LeChase said. He added that he took with him from the school a belief in "doing what you feel is the right thing to do."

Even as the schools celebrate 125 years of history, they are also looking forward to the future, Sister Collins observed.

After a period of problems in the 1980s due to low enrollment, the schools have seen a reversal of fortune both in terms of enrollment and financial stability, she acknowledged.

In the last two years, for example, the Academy's enrollment has jumped 30 percent.

And in March, the school announced it had received a \$3.5 million bequest from Mabel Costich Miller, a 1924 graduate of the Academy. That gift will be used to create an endowment fund. A number of other gifts have also come in to help with everything from creating a computer program to improving the library.

Sister Collins attributes some of the positive directions the schools are taking to the single-school approach adopted in 1992.

"The single school (concept) has really strengthened our image," Sister Collins noted. "We are enrolling a lot of families, which is something that we are pleased with."

Apparently, she added, so are the alumni.

Increasingly successful annual fund drives, Sister Collins explained, "tells us they like what we are doing. People give to what they think is successful."