

Story by Mike Latona

Photo illustration by Kim Parks and Matthew Scott

Friends Advice

Biondolillo to Biondolillo because she had grown to trust him.

"He's checked on me from grade nine through now. So what 'Mr. B' says, I really take it to heart," remarked Rajeene, 17, a Nazareth senior.

Dave Charbonneau credits his guidance department with helping him become aware of a learning

disorder. During his freshman year at Elmira Notre Dame High School, he met with his guidance counselor, Suzanne Holahan, because he was having trouble in his Spanish class.

According to Dave, Holahan suspected that he might have a learning disability. She arranged for him to undergo testing, which revealed that Dave had attention deficit disorder.

Because of this syndrome, Holahan explained, Dave had an especially difficult time focusing on language translations.

"The frustration might have carried over into other classes," Holahan said.

Through Holahan's efforts, Dave was permitted to have Spanish waived as a Regents requirement. He is now due to graduate this June with a Regents diploma.

"If she hadn't seen the problem, it might have messed up all my other grades and hurt my GPA," said Dave, 18.

Dave added that Holahan continued to support him during his sophomore year by arranging to get him a math tutor.

"We're as close, I guess, as a student and guidance counselor can get," he remarked.

However, Dave noted, not all students take

advantage of all the services offered through guidance departments.

"I think some people are unaware of what a guidance counselor is capable of," Dave said. "The guidance counselor is there to help. Some students might think the guidance counselor is just there to tell them what they're doing wrong and what they should be doing, but that's not the case."

This hesitancy, Biondolillo noted, often pops up as students begin the college searching process.

"You see procrastination more at the close of the junior year and first few months of the senior year," Biondolillo said. "If you were here in April, (the seniors would) be beating the doors down. Unless it's very important, it's something they're reluctant to do."

On the other hand, Mark Kubiak began seeking his guidance counselor's advice about colleges during his junior year. Mark, a senior at Aquinas Institute, said that Father Dennis Kauffman, CSB, has offered invaluable help.

"Last year Father Kauffman showed me different colleges on the computer. This year he's helped me out a lot, telling me where I should visit and if I should visit," said Mark, 17, a parishioner at St. Mark's Church in Greece.

Rajeene said she has already attended two college fairs, but she weighs Biondolillo's advice more heavily than anybody else's.

"I feel more confident with 'Mr. B' because his door is always open," she said. "You know he'd give you honest, straightforward answers."

At the college fairs, she explained, "They're more worried about getting you into their school than they are about your well-being."

Concern for students' academic and personal lives can lead to

friendships between guidance counselors and the youths they serve. For example, Lisa Brown said she often stops by the office of her Aquinas Institute guidance counselor, Joë Gigliotti, just to shoot the breeze about anything that's happening in her life — whether it be college, or her progress with the Aquinas varsity soccer team.

"I probably spend more time with him than any teacher in the school," said Lisa, 17, an Aquinas senior. She is a parishioner at St. John the Evangelist Church in Greece.

Lisa added that she's impressed by Gigliotti's willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty.

"He's had a lot of talks with me and my family, especially my mom," she said. "He even called a few times over the summer."

Lisa noted that her closeness to Gigliotti was based on a sense of caring that he displayed from the time she was a freshman.

"I guess we clicked," Lisa remarked.

Mark recalls a similar first impression of his guidance counselor.

"Father Kauffman was like a friend, rather than a teacher or counselor," he said.

Mark added that Father Kauffman's level of concern is similar to that of a parent.

"It's like having a third family member," he said. "I drop by, usually in study hall, to update him on how I'm doing — just because he cares."

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