

Looking for A FEW GOOD STUDENTS

"Welcome to Northeastern!"

That was the spirited cry from a group of cheerleaders to families entering Irondequoit's Northeastern Catholic Junior High School for a Feb. 1 open house.

One of the cheerleaders, eighth-grader Solmarie Vega, took on multiple roles that evening. In addition to serving as a greeter, she guided visitors to classrooms and demonstrated experiments in the science lab — all the while talking up the virtues of attending Northeastern Catholic.

Solmarie, 13, a parishioner at Rochester's Corpus Christi Church, said that the Feb. 1 event marked her debut as a school guide. Asked if she enjoyed her role, she replied with a big smile, "Of course! I feel big."

Solmarie is among many students who take part in the recruitment process at diocesan schools and high schools. They can serve as guides at open houses; as part of a "shadowing" program for prospective students who visit during the school day; or even as visitors to other schools.

Current students play a vital role in attracting new students, said Joseph Knapp, director of recruitment and public relations at Aquinas Institute. He noted that approximately 20 percent of the Aquinas student body helps with recruiting.

Knapp said he enlists students in good academic standing who take part in several programs at

Aquinas. A good example is senior Kristin McAllian, who has been involved in cheerleading, peer ministry, student council, tutoring, student newspaper and yearbook. She has volunteered at open houses and also with "shadowing," in which a potential newcomer follows a student during the school day.

Kristin noted that visiting youths ask a wide range of questions about school life.

"We have a rotating schedule. They want to

know about that, our dress code, the activities, the sports," said Kristin, 17, a parishioner at John the Evangelist Church in Greece.

Ryan Steenberge, an eighth-grader at Siena Catholic

Academy in Brighton, helped at his junior high school's Feb. 1 open house. He also visited sixth-graders at his former elementary school, St. Louis in Pittsford, this past fall. Common questions about Siena, Ryan said, concern "what kind of sports we have and what the teachers are like."

Ryan noted that the younger students seem more interested than their parents in nonacademic aspects of student life.

"The kids really want to go to a school they feel comfortable with, and the parents want them to go to a school where they can excel," Ryan observed.

John Gaetano, a senior at McQuaid Jesuit High School, said that when he serves as an in-school guide, visitors are curious about "what it's like to attend an all-boys school." He said he tells them that "you get used to it," pointing out that McQuaid schedules a number of events with Our Lady of Mercy, an all-girls high school.

John said he takes his role seriously because he realizes the high level of responsibility it carries.

"I just like it — the fact I represent McQuaid, and this could make or break a decision from someone about going to McQuaid," said John, 17, from Our Mother of Sorrows Church in Greece.

Bryan Semski — who served on a hosting team Feb. 2-3 when sixth-graders visited Elmira's Holy Family Junior High — stressed that student recruiters must believe in the product they're selling.

"If I didn't like Holy Family, (my hosting) probably wouldn't have gone as smoothly as it did," said Bryan, 14, a Holy Family eighth-grader who attends Our Lady of Lourdes Church.

Teens interviewed were strongly in favor of a youth-to-youth approach to recruiting.

"You have something in common," Kristin said. "They can get a feel for what it's really like here."



At top, Northeastern Catholic Junior High School eighth-grader Maria Oberst, right, gives school tours during an open house Feb. 1. Below, Solmarie Vega shows a classroom to a visitor.



Maria shows visitors the kinds of homework she gets from a Spanish textbook.

Story by Mike Latona • Photos by Greg Francis

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