

# THE blarney stone

A PUBLICATION FOR THE COMMUNITY OF NOTRE DAME PREPARATORY SCHOOL AND MARIST ACADEMY



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## Student retreat follows different path

### Sophomores combine retreat time with service to the “least of (their) brothers and sisters”

As part of Notre Dame Prep’s retreat program this year, the school’s tenth graders came up with a unique slant on the annual event.

According to Grace Seroka, retreat-commission moderator and member of the school’s Campus Ministry department, the sophomores designed their retreat to include community service. She said the retreat, which had as its theme, “We are the World,” began with a talk by NDP 2006 alumnus Dennis Strach, who is studying to become a priest. (See profile on page 2) Seroka said Strach was wonderful and spoke of the importance of giving of one’s talent and time for the betterment of others.

The students then split up into groups of eight and traveled to 11 different locations in Pontiac and downtown Detroit to begin an intense series of community-service activities.

“Our kids ministered through conversations and action with the elderly, the homeless and the abandoned,” said Seroka, who shares campus-ministry responsibilities with Deacon Tony Morici.

“At soup kitchens, the kids prepared and served meals,” Seroka said. “At food and clothing centers, they boxed complete family meals, and sorted through heavy containers of clothes and hung them for distribution. At an animal shelter, they walked, petted, brushed and gave loving

care to abandoned dogs. At the Care House in Pontiac, they listened to talks about abused children and prepared care packages for them.”

The NDP sophomores are certainly not alone in dedicating time to help those in need. Following the lead of what Catholic schools have been doing for a long time, there has been a marked increase in recent years in community-service activities for all high school students across the entire country. With difficult economic times, rising unemployment and homelessness, opportunities for such service are now unfortunately abundant. High school student clubs and organizations have been teaming with local charity organizations like Goodwill or the Salvation Army to collect food, clothing and other necessities. Other charities, including the March of Dimes and UNICEF, also benefit from high school drives.

One major area of student attention in the U.S. over the past few years has been the “invisible children” of Darfur.

But the earliest organized U.S.-spon-

sored program of community service may have been during the 60s when President Kennedy established the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps spawned many similar programs in the ensuing years that gave young people the opportunity to help fellow citizens who were less fortunate.



ND Prep sophomores help out in the kitchen at Grace Centers of Hope in Pontiac. Shown left to right, Isabella Marra, Peter Fornari, Brendan Johnson, Ryan Pierce and Patrick Bartoli

President George H.W. Bush encouraged volunteerism through his “thousand points of light” idea in the 80s and two decades later his son, President George W. Bush, encouraged “faith-based” initiatives to help eliminate poverty and hunger.

At the high school level, community

*Please see Retreat, page 4*

**Notre Dame Preparatory School and Marist Academy provides its economically diverse student body a Catholic-Christian and internationally recognized college-preparatory experience of lasting value.**

**L.A. ACTOR/COMEDIAN (AND NDHS ALUM) VISITS PONTIAC CAMPUS**  
 (See page 6)

# Graduate “pulled” to the priesthood

Dennis Strach, who graduated from ND Prep in 2006, shares his story about how he decided to enter the Congregation of Holy Cross. He talks about the importance of listening to your heart—and then following it.

ND Prep 2006 grad Dennis Strach, who has decided to follow his heart and become a priest, says the decision did not come easily. He struggled with the “pull” to the vocation of priesthood for many years. The term “vocation,” Strach explains, is often misperceived as solely about the priesthood or religious life. “Someone also can just as well make a vocation to one’s family, for example,” he says.

But he does feel that everyone has a vocation and that everyone has been made for a purpose. “Through life and experiences, you’ll eventually figure out your vocation,” the 21-year-old seminarian said. “If you use the gifts that God gave you to the best of your ability, you will find your true vocation.”

Strach felt that no matter what other things he had considered for his life journey, there was always something pulling him to the religious life. “No matter what I planned, God had His own plan for me and He knew exactly where I would best serve the world.”

As Strach studied in college (and played music), he prayed that God would lead him to where he was meant to be. “He will lead you to your next place,” he says. “It’s a journey and you have to keep moving to the next stop. Eventually, you will be led where He wants you to be.”

There were many stops along Strach’s journey. At Notre Dame Prep, he had numerous conversations about his vocation to religious life. He turned to his former teacher, Ms. Ellen Tessada, often for support and she continues to be a very good mentor and friend. Participating in the school choir also provided a good



foundation that continued to solidify as he led its Praise and Worship group. Strach believes that music has been a way for him to share himself through the church while growing and learning through experience.

Looking back on his high-school experience, Strach fondly recalled a few memories from ND Prep. He remembers how he would imitate the Marist priests in school. In a voice that perfectly imitates Fr. Joe Hindelang, Strach recounts how he once made an announcement in Fr. Strasz’s voice. Now switching to Fr. Jim’s voice: “Classes are cancelled for the rest of the afternoon.” Strach then heard a familiar and somewhat scary voice yelling, “Strach! In my office!” Needless to say, Fr. Jim wasn’t impressed by Strach’s impersonations, even though they were spot-on—or perhaps because they were spot-on!

More seriously now, Strach thinks that the learning experience at NDP’s Catholic community was a tremendous asset for him. “I saw my academic life through the lens of faith. Though both extremely valuable and important, Catholicity came before academics, which is something many don’t appreci-

ate until much later. The Catholic faith teaching extended far beyond religion class and was shown in all that encompassed ND Prep.”

After graduating from NDP, Strach entered Oakland University and will be graduating this spring with a bachelor’s degree in music and a minor in Spanish. At OU, he continued to develop his love for music by participating in ensembles, choirs and other performances that were often hefty additions to

his rigorous class schedule. He feels that what you get out of the social environment at any college depends on whether or not you make an effort. Strach said he made the effort and it continues to pay dividends to his overall success.

Throughout college, though, Strach continued to struggle with the “pull” to religious life. He would play music during the weekends at his parish, St. Andrew in Rochester Hills, work with students preparing for confirmation, and help wherever and whenever he was needed. Although the “pull” kept “pulling ever harder,” he tried to avoid it as much as possible. He had a steady girlfriend, and the priesthood was the furthest thing from his mind.

Or so he thought.

Strach said that during his grandfather’s funeral, the celebrant gave him a rosary and said, “I blessed this especially for you—and for your vocation.” After the funeral, Strach e-mailed a general inquiry to the vocations director for the Archdiocese of Detroit, Fr. Jim Bilot. They kept in regular contact, and after a few weeks of discussions with Fr. Bilot, he decided to go on a discernment weekend at Sacred Heart Major Seminary. The die was beginning to be cast.

But his parents encouraged him to complete his bachelor's degree before entering the seminary. He would often visit the University of Notre Dame during college, where he noticed the men of Holy Cross and how happy they appeared in their vocations. He continued to research and to learn more about the priesthood.

Strach's journey continued as conversations with the Congregation at Holy Cross began to get more frequent. "I became committed to get to know these men, and learn about their spirituality, their charism in Holy Cross and especially, the heart of their community."

Often he would receive calls from a Holy Cross priest who served as a spiritual brother. "He would call just to check in or say hello and I began to feel the support of the Holy Cross community," said Strach. He said at this point, he began to really focus on where God wanted him to be. Finally, he took a leap of faith and scheduled a formal visit to Moreau Seminary (at the Congregation of Holy Cross) where he completed the application process. He felt content that he had finally made the difficult—but correct—decision.

Strach says that the Holy Cross order creates "educators of the mind and heart"

and that it has always been his personal goal to not only help people with the external, but with the internal and spiritual as well. He says he wants his work to point to God.

As Strach plans his journey to the seminary this fall, he offers this career advice to current students at Notre Dame Prep: "You can't do it on your own. Read books and talk to people about things you are interested in. Make the step toward the direction of your dream, even though it may be a difficult journey."

He says he himself took small steps initially and built relationships with people who were trustworthy. And he asked a lot of questions.

"There are a lot of misconceptions about the religious life, but if you feel the 'pull' and do proper research and ask the many questions, you never know where God will lead you. Be assured, though, that He does in fact have a plan for you."

Note: Dennis Strach gave back to the community of NDPMA in March when he spoke to the sophomores before their retreat, which was centered on community service. Strach spoke of the importance of the giving of talent and time for the betterment of others. 🇺🇸

## Children's book author visits lower division

Local author Bridget Llewellyn (Lake Orion) visited Notre Dame Marist Academy, Lower Division on March 25 and shared her new book, "One Child, One Planet: Inspiration for the Young Conservationist" with students. The theme of the book is environmental responsibility. The book's stunning photography is by Carl R. Sams and Jean Stoick, who also are co-creators of the New York Times best-selling book, "Stranger in the Woods."

Llewellyn's new book is a loving



tribute to Mother Earth and all her gifts, but also her greatest concerns.

"One Child, One Planet" teaches gentle lessons on greenhouse gases, climate change, going green and conservation, and provides practical ways for children to help protect the world's fragile environment.

Llewellyn was invited to the lower division as part of its Michigan Green Schools project. NDMA is seeking its second straight Emerald School honor. 🇺🇸

## BRIEFLY . . .

### HONORS ENSEMBLE SETS NEW SCHOOL RECORD

All Notre Dame Preparatory and Marist Academy choirs qualified for the State Festival Competition. The middle-school choir, freshmen singers, and the Concert Chorale/Honors Ensemble all received an excellent rating at the district festival. The Honors Ensemble received the best point total of any NDP choir ever. The state festival was held at Rochester High School in late April.

In addition, six NDP singers will compete at the State Solo Festival after receiving the top rating at the district festival. They are freshmen Gracie Calvaneso and Annie Calvaneso, sophomores Sara Barron and Michael Kurowski, junior Madeleine Frabotta and senior Maria Lograsso.



### JUNIOR RECEIVES GRAND AWARD AT SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING FAIR

Norman L. Jin, an 11th grader at ND Prep, participated in the 53rd Science & Engineering Fair of Metropolitan Detroit in

March and received the Grand Award. He was one of only two students in his category to win this award. He is now an Intel International Science & Engineering Fair (ISEF) Finalist and has qualified for competition at the Intel ISEF in San Jose, California. As a Grand Award winner, Jin is eligible to receive a four-year merit scholarship from one of the following universities: Lawrence Technological University, Oakland University, Wayne State University and University of Detroit Mercy. His project was titled, "High-Efficiency, High-Power Factor Electric Vehicle Battery Charger." In addition to the Grand Award, he also received awards from other organizations and corporations for his project.

### FORMER COACH IN HALL OF FAME

On March 27, Ed Maloney, a 1964 graduate of Notre Dame High School in Harper Woods, was inducted into the Michigan High School Football Coaches Association Hall of Fame. He

See BRIEFLY, page 5

## Retreat, from page 1

service is now the hallmark of volunteerism for students in the community. And colleges and universities are putting more and more emphasis on the amount and kind of service hours performed by applicants.

Nearly 11-million students nationwide volunteer through their schools annually,



NDP sophomores, from left, Kyle DeCarolis, Jacob Edgar, Joe Pizzimenti, Jonathan McCormick and Alex Smith help clean up the alley behind the St. Patrick Senior Center in Detroit.

according to the Corporation for National and Community Service, which is a federal agency that engages Americans in service through its Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn-and-Serve-America programs. It also leads President Obama's national call-to-service initiative, United We Serve.

Some of the projects nationwide that CNCS monitors range from traditional charity initiatives like Hats for the Homeless to environmental cleanups to human-rights endeavors such as gun violence in

this country, genocide abroad and help for senior citizens.

One such project recently engaged in by ND Prep students was the Weekend Meals Program at St. Patrick Senior Center in downtown Detroit. St. Pat's Senior Center offers many services to the elderly, especially those within the city of Detroit. Its comprehensive health and wellness program provides valuable services that include hot and nutritious meals, a healthcare clinic, and transportation assistance. In fact, SPSC is the only remaining community-based health clinic for seniors in the city.

SaTrice Coleman-Betts, executive director of the center, says the Weekend Meals Program is a vital bridge for needy seniors since most of the normal staff is not available on the weekends to distribute

food. "Many volunteers bring the food, but some also will have us order the food after which we'll get reimbursed," she said. "Groups of students like the one from Notre Dame Prep cook, serve, and clean up after the meal. Sometimes we need help for special events—like when we have our Irish Festival or during the holidays."

NDP campus minister Seroka adds that the sophomores not only worked in the kitchen at the senior center, they helped clean up the grounds outside.

She said that along with the obvious benefits to the needy, these kinds of activities during retreats offer students a necessary time to step back from their academic, social and athletic activities in order to reflect on the presence of God in their lives.

"In addition to the hard work of community service, a retreat offers a sacred time that is spent with other classmates in reflection, small group discussions and in worship," she said. "Every class retreat is designed by the Retreat Commission to specifically address the needs of each class. Retreats may include presentations on a theme given by peers who usually strongly encourage the kids to step forth enthusiastically in Christian leadership."

"This new style of retreat also enabled our students to be in smaller and more intimate group settings. They welcomed this opportunity since it allowed them to get to know each other better and fostered a quieter, more prayerful time with God."

But Seroka adds that laughter also was shared during some of the activities in "wonderful moments of discovering God through tearful eyes while peeling onions or doing the chicken dance with the elderly!"

She says that God was felt much more deeply as students expressed more gratitude for life as they shared their experiences.

She also said each day of service "concluded with a prayer service in the NDPMA chapel, with the kids listening to the Word spoken from Matthew 25:40: 'Whatever you did for the least of My brothers and sisters, you did for Me.'" 🇺🇸

## INNOVATIVE NEW ACADEMIC PROGRAM NOMINATED FOR BEST-IN-COUNTY HONORS

Notre Dame Prep's "Structured Study for Success" program, which was started this year to help underachieving students improve their academic performance, was nominated as one of Oakland County's best academic programs and will be considered for this year's top winner by a panel of members of the Oakland Intermediate School District and The Oakland Press newspaper.

NDP senior Molly Batchik also was nominated for achieving significant academic improvement. Students eligible for the individual award must have a minimum grade point average of 3.0 and have overcome personal challenges to achieve "excellence in their education."

Winners were announced in late April at the 18th annual Excellence in Education Awards banquet after this issue of The Blarney Stone went to press.

All schools in Oakland County, public and private, were invited to

participate by nominating one student and one academic program. A total of 35 students and nine academic programs were selected for consideration.

In a summary submitted by Notre Dame Prep to the nomination panel, school officials said the "Structured for Success" program identifies students who may not be achieving at acceptable academic levels to become participants. However, unlike traditional methods that penalizes students by taking away extracurricular activities until their grades improved, the SSFS program allows for the continuation of these activities, and provides for a structured series of study halls with peer tutors.

According to the NDP school counselors, the new program has been a success. In the first semester, they found most students did improve academically. And the fact that many want to continue in the study hall by choice now also was seen as a positive development. 🇺🇸

# What if?

*From the Michigan High School Athletic Associations publication "benchmarks" Spring 2010 Vol. 1, No. 3; by John Johnson, MHSAA Communications Director*

The easiest shot to take in high school sports—or all levels of sports for that matter—is one that attempts to show up the game officials. Whether it's coaches, or players or spectators, everyone has an opinion about every call, and they're all increasingly becoming less inhibited about showing it.

The people with the poorest view of the play physically—certainly the poorest view of the play from a perspective standpoint, and generally with the least knowledge of the rules and their application—are the quickest to loudly bellyache, gesture, and just flat out act out poorly when they don't like a call.

The non-verbal communication alone—the mimicking of the throwing of a flag or an official's signal, first by coaches, then by players (and not always in that order)—catches the wave and feeds the fans in the stands like fresh meat being given to a pack of piranhas.

And it doesn't stop there. The whining finds its way online after the game, sometimes even during the game, where know-it-alls brave enough to spew their venom, but so cowardly they hide behind a screen name (even those participants who claim to be game officials) turn a holding, or a yellow card, or a lift, or a pick off, or a block-charge call into a matter of life-or-death.

OK, it's a well-known fact that criticism of an official's call goes with the territory. When you put on the stripes, you know it's coming, and you need to have the backbone to deal with it.

But let's turn the tables for just a minute. A game of "what if." A game of man bites dog.


What if the official got in the face of a 14-to-17-year-old baseball player and mocked him for not doing what he thought he should have done on a play, gesturing wildly to show him what he thought was the error of his ways?

What if the official ran over to the dugout, or to the bench, stood next to the coach and looked out over the field and told the coach, "You know what, coach? Even though we're 30 to 40 yards away, you really can see better over here."

And what if an official went up to the top row of the bleachers to grab that loud, obnoxious fan, escort him down to the playing surface, put him in the spot the official was occupying and handed him the whistle?

Of course, there would be an even larger outcry of outrage. Officials can't do that!

But what if the officials treated others the way others treat them? What if the man bites the dog back? I think there would be a little less, maybe even a lot less, of the abuse these people have heaped upon them.

The real answer to this is rooted in the principles of sportsmanship. At least at the school level, administrators can describe and demand the behavior they want of their coaches, players and spectators. Coaches need to deliver and model good sporting behavior, and in turn, the players will follow. If these first two groups would stop showing up the officials, the fans would be less likely to be outwardly critical as well. And our games would be better off for it. 



## BRIEFLY, from page 3

is the former head football coach at Pontiac Catholic, Harper Woods Notre Dame, and Notre Dame Prep high schools.

### VOLUNTEER AWARD FOR EIGHTH GRADER


ND Marist eighth grader Ashley Palardy has been honored for her exemplary volunteer service with a President's Volunteer Service Award. The award recognizes Americans of all ages who have volunteered significant amounts of their time to serve their communities. It was presented by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards program on behalf of President Obama. Ashley earned her award by volunteering at local animal shelters.



### ATHLETIC BOOSTER CLUB'S GOLF OUTING

The NDPMA Booster Club will host its 14th Annual Golf Outing on Thursday, June 17, at The Wyndgate. For more information check the website or contact Pat D'Agostini at 248-650-8601.

### KILLER BEES FARE WELL IN REGIONAL AND STATE COMPETITION

In the FIRST in Michigan robotics regional competition on March 27, ND Prep's robotics team, the Killer Bees, came in second place out of 40 teams at the meet held in Troy. In the state competition held April 3 at Eastern Michigan University, the team finished in the third-ranked alliance, and fifth overall out of the 65 teams at the event. The team also won the State Chairman's Award, which qualified them to compete for the National Chairman's Award at the April 17th national meet in Atlanta, Georgia. 



# Joey Gladstone visits NDPMA's Pontiac campus

Actor/comedian Dave Coulier, "Joey Gladstone" from the hit ABC sitcom "Full House" and a 1977 Notre Dame High School (Harper Woods) alum, visited the Pontiac campus of Notre Dame Prep and Marist Academy on March 26 and spoke to an enthusiastic student assembly.

He was back in his home state from

California to headline Comedy Fest at Mark Ridley's Comedy Castle in Royal Oak March 25. This was a "Clean Guys" all-ages show. (Dave is known for keeping his humor very family-friendly.) While in town, Coulier also did a couple of shows in Romeo at Younger's Irish Tavern.



## 2006 GRADUATE WINS PHILOSOPHY PRIZE



Caitlin Wylie, a 2006 graduate of Notre Dame Prep, has won the Zerby Essay Prize for 2010 for her essay entitled "Pleasures of the Intellect in Mill's Utilitarian-

ism." The Zerby Prize is given annually by Michigan State University's Department of Philosophy for the best essay written by an undergraduate student.

The following is taken from the selection committee's report: "The committee agrees that Caitlin Wylie's 'Pleasures of the Intellect in Mill's Utilitarianism' is the clear winner. It lays out Mill's arguments clearly and concisely, assesses them critically, finds them unpersuasive, and then offers a plausible way to save Mill's position. She argues deftly and carefully, like the fine philosopher she has shown herself to be."

Congratulations to Caitlin! 🎉

*A higher grade of learning*

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