

Old Meets New for a Bright Tomorrow At Christian Bros High School

By Kathi Rubin

Imagine a high school where centuries of educational tradition are carried out in a state-of-the-art Science, Math and Technology building. Just across campus are the peaceful living quarters of five De La Salle Christian Brothers.

Consider a school where students have the opportunity to participate in more than two dozen sports activities including track, golf, soccer and wrestling. A school where alumni came together to build a football "field of dreams," giving the team a home field advantage for the first time in over a century.

Think about a high school that offers more than a dozen Advanced Placement (AP) college level courses and a comprehensive Visual and Performing Arts program that includes Fine Arts, Choir, Drama and Instrumental groups. Students can pursue their interests in one of 40 student activity clubs.

This is Christian Brothers High School, where students from three different counties and widely diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds gather in



Oak Park with a common goal –preparing for the best colleges and brightest futures possible.

Christian Brothers High School (CBHS) serves both its students and community in the tradition of Saint John Baptist de La Salle. A 17th century French priest, de La Salle made it his life's work to provide free education for the children of the poor, and establishing a community of Brothers to accomplish this work.

Fast-forward to the 21st century. The teaching order of the Christian Brothers spans over 900 schools and universities in 80 countries. CBHS is the oldest continually operating high school in Sacramento, with more than 125 years of rich tradition.

While five Brothers remain in residence on the Sacramento campus now

the traditions they have built here will live on – the school has an active alumni base of more than 10,000 graduates. More than half a century has passed for some of these graduates, but their ties to the school remain strong. The reason why is no mystery.

Student Body President Tara Larson sums it up. "It's the atmosphere here," she explains. "From my visiting 'shadow day' in 8th grade, I already felt welcome." The second in her family to attend Christian Brothers, she embodies the spirit of staff and students.

Larson is an honor roll student and has played varsity soccer here since her freshman year. While the school's focus is college prep, CBHS is a positive, overall experience for students. "It's important to learn and achieve, but it's equally

important for students to slow down, be teenagers and to enjoy these years," explains Paul Rieschick, the school's Director of Advancement.

"The pressure of college is present, but kids are getting up to speed on other things as well," explains Larson, who is a senior. "We all play sports, we all do community service together. There's lots of support from teachers and friends, it's a very comforting environment."

Freshman year is pivotal for ninth grade students on any campus. Here, it's a time for nurturing as well as learning. "Freshman teachers are like life guiders," says Larson. Each fall, 9th grade students attend the first of several "retreats" that will bond them with their peers and their staff. By senior year, the students will be toting duffel bags and basketballs to 4-day retreats led by Campus Ministry Director Susannah Nelson.

While CBHS is indeed a Catholic school, diversity is most welcome here. Students come from a variety of faiths, ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

"We have a dress code, so nobody can really tell where students live," says Larson. "We all wear Christian Brothers shirts. It's not a 'forbidden class war,' it's all about how we present ourselves to peers and to adults," says Larson. Fellowship is encouraged here. "We have 'mix it up' days, where you talk to someone you haven't met," she explains. "Thursdays the entire school has the same lunch period, so that students in all grades get to know each other."

Students here are also socially conscious. The school's World of Difference Club recently sponsored an Interfaith Conference for representatives from

four local high schools, to offer students insight into the beliefs and evolutions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

Diversity is one of the reasons that the school is maintaining and expanding its Oak Park campus. "The purpose of the LaSallian order is to serve children in need," explains CBHS Director of Communications Ryan Rose. "By being located here, the school is more accessible for students in the community. It also offers the Brothers and our students direct opportunity for community service."

Students participate in "service learning" projects including the annual "Oak Park Street Sweep" and sponsoring and tutoring students at nearby Oakridge Elementary School. "Our motto is 'Enter to Learn, Leave to Serve,'" says Larson.

The learning is a given – how can you argue with a college enrollment rate of 99% for the Class of 2005?

As part of the emphasis on academic achievement, school administration has recently "remade" the school's honor roll system. Instead of the 4.0 grade point average required for Highest Honors, students must achieve a GPA of 3.75 or above. Honors students must achieve an average of 3.50 to 3.74. Students agree that the new system better recognizes and motivates students.

"Remaking the honor roll involves more students," says Larson. Ryan Rose agrees. "This sets the bar for a broader range of honors/percentages." He adds that the school has also broadened its range for class rankings. "We'll tell a college that a student was, say, in the top 10% of their class rather than top one or two percent," he says. "This



SCHOOL PROGRESS
continued from page 6

helps to provide a more level playing field."

The change in the honor roll system is only a small example of how old meets new on this dynamic campus. Some administrative offices are housed in what was once the living quarters for the Brothers. The brand new Science, Math and Technology Building accommodates everything from chemistry labs to a fully operative TV studio which students use for live broadcasts. The school is growing, too and has purchased property across the street from the campus as well.

More important than the growth of the school is the growth of each CBHS student. The school's activities and accomplishments are impressive – but describing the camaraderie and professionalism of both staff and students must be seen to be understood. Prospective students and parents are encouraged and welcome to arrange campus visits. The deadline to apply for the 2006-2007 school year is Jan. 20.



The placement exam is Jan. 28.

For more information about Christian Brothers High School, call 733-3600 or visit www.cbhs-sacramento.org.