

Christian Brothers plan college in Placer County

By Julie Sly
Herald editor

Plans to build a private four-year university in the Sacramento region were announced March 14 by the San Francisco District of the Christian Brothers, the religious order that runs Christian Brothers High School in Sacramento and St. Mary's College in Moraga.

In a morning press conference at Christian Brothers High School, officials of the order said they had reached an oral agreement with landowner Angelo Tsakopoulos to build the university on 600 acres of donated land in southwestern Placer County, adjacent to St. Clare Church in Antelope/West Roseville.

The tentative name given to the four-year institution is De La Salle University, named after St. John the Baptist de la Salle, founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools and patron saint of teachers.

"We are both pleased and excited about the opportunity to launch a new Lasallian university in the Sacramento area, particularly because the need for private higher education in the region is so great," said Brother Craig J. Franz, president of St. Mary's College, who will lead the effort to establish the new university.

"This is certainly a challenge, but it will be a joy to undertake," he said.

Brother Franz said he expects the new university to have 2,000 to 4,000 stu-

dents. In comparison, St. Mary's has 2,500 students and employs about 500 faculty members and 500 assistants and staff, he said.

"We anticipate that the (possible) jobs will be a wonderful boost to Placer County," Brother Franz said.

The estimated cost of construction was not released at the press conference, nor were details announced about the cost of attending the university. Tsakopoulos' son, Kyriakos, president of AKT Development, said that plans were underway to raise \$50 to \$100 million for the new university.

The Brothers and the Tsakopoulos fam-

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ily expect the university to be built in two to four years, depending on whether they can get county approval and meet planning requirements. "At the outside, maybe seven years to completion," said Kyriakos Tsakopoulos.

Angelo Tsakopoulos first offered in January 2001 to donate between 300 and 600 acres in western Placer County for a private university, and to sell an additional 700 acres surrounding the property to establish a college endowment money for grants and scholarships to help students attend the college.

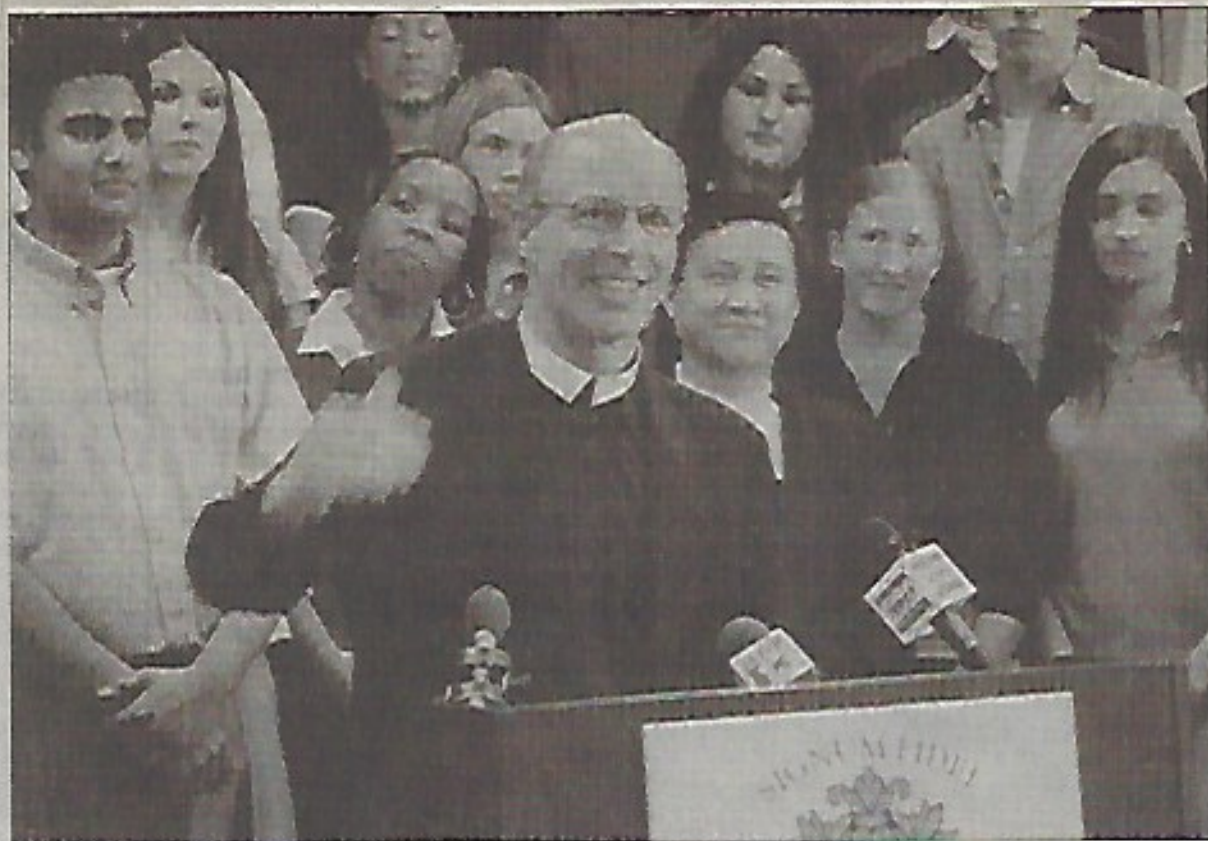
AKI Development, his company, owns 3,300 acres of agricultural land just north of Baseline Road and the end of Watt Avenue. The 600 acres to be donated are zoned for agriculture, so a conditional use permit will have to be granted before a campus can be built.

The Sacramento Bee reported March 15 that environmentalists, including the Sierra Club's Placer County group, have indicated they will sue the county if rezoning is allowed and development is permitted in the surrounding area.

Bringing a private university to the Placer County region has been discussed since early 2001, when Angelo Tsakopoulos offered to donate the land. That led to the formation of a Regional University Committee of county civic, business and education leaders to organize public support for the project. That committee worked with the developer to send solicitation letters to 850 private colleges and universities.

Kyriakos Tsakopoulos at the press conference said the group received 12 applications and Christian Brothers was one of three finalists. He declined to name the other schools.

He said the Christian Brothers order has a remarkable track record in education. "They prepare students with practical skills for the working world, while giving them the moral tools and character to succeed and serve their communi-



Christian Brother Craig J. Franz, president of St. Mary's College, announcing the new university joined by students at Christian Brothers High School, said "this is certainly a challenge, but it will be a joy to undertake." Cathy Joyce/Herald photo

ties," he said.

Bishop William K. Weigand, in a statement read at the press conference by Father Colin Macdonald, pastor of St. Clare Parish, noted that the Christian Brothers have a 126-year history of education in Sacramento.

"Their tradition of education has shaped the minds and hearts of generations of high school students," the bishop said. "I am very happy that now the Christian Brothers plan to bring to our area at the university level the same kind of high-quality, specialized liberal arts education they have long provided at St. Mary's College."

The bishop added that "the establishment of Catholic universities in the Sacramento area is long overdue and will greatly enhance the Diocese of Sacramento as well as the wider community."

In November, officials of the Legionaries of Christ religious order announced their intent to develop a private, Catholic university in the Sacramento region

called the University of Sacramento, the Legionaries' first university in the United States.

Legionaries' officials are still in serious discussions with Sacramento city and county officials about the location of a four-year core campus and are considering settling at the former Mather Air Force Base (Mather Field), according to Legionaries of Christ Father Robert Presutti, general coordinator for the University of Sacramento.

The Legionaries envision starting a graduate school of education in downtown Sacramento by the fall of 2005, which would include a credential program and perhaps a school of bioethics, Father Presutti said. Once they start operations there, the Legionaries plan to build the four-year residential campus by 2007.

Father Presutti told The Herald he welcomed the announcement by the Christian Brothers of another private Catholic university in the Sacramento region.

"What we have found all along is that the metropolitan region is the largest in the state without a private, four-year university, and that the area needs and deserves many good universities," he said. "The Christian Brothers have a historic presence in the region, but each of the universities will bring its own character. It will create some interesting synergies for education - we're happy about it."

In addition to St. Mary's College, the other Lasallian colleges and universities in the United States are LaSalle University in Philadelphia, Christian Brothers University in Memphis, Lewis University in Romeoville, Ill., St. Mary's University of Minnesota in Winona, Minn., Manhattan College in Riverdale, N.Y., and the College of Santa Fe in Santa Fe, N.M.

The Legionaries of Christ currently operate 11 universities in Mexico, Spain, Chile and Italy, and a graduate school of psychology in Virginia.