

'New' St. Brigid home to Scrabble, robots and hip hop

BY HANNELORE VOLPE
Staff Writer

Even though St. Brigid Catholic School spent its first two months last year as "two schools in one", it was ready to roll with its clubs, sports activities and programs right from the word go.

Now Stouffville's second Catholic elementary school is looking ahead to its official opening and blessing on Wednesday, Oct. 16, at 7 p.m. by the Most Rev. Bishop Richard Grecco, Auxiliary Bishop of Toronto.

Construction of the school was prompted by severe overcrowding at St. Mark Catholic School on Glad Park Avenue. But when that first day of school rolled around last year, the work wasn't complete at St. Brigid. Students destined for the new school had to remain at St. Mark for another couple of months. The two student populations were led by two principals and taught by two sets of teachers, all under one roof. Nonetheless, the transition "went really smoothly," said St. Brigid principal Jane Dillon-Leitch, of the school's Nov. 9 move-in. St. Brigid currently has 15

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teachers for the school's 340 students. Special needs students are "mainstreamed", Mrs. Dillon-Leitch said. "The kids are in their classrooms as much as they can be."

A chess club is being started this year by retired teacher Wolf von Kalben. There's a cross-country running club, primary and intermediate choirs, volleyball and basketball teams, as well as teacher Jennifer Orsetto's popular Scrabble Club, all of which started last year. "Scrabble becomes especially popular in the winter," observed Mrs. Dillon-Leitch. A number of the older students will be

building robots and developing computer programs in teacher Eric Longbotham's Robotics Club.

Students from Grade 1 to 3 can learn to play the clarinet or flute or learn hip hop and other styles of dance from teachers who come to instruct the students during lunch times.

With its emphasis on early literacy, the school has a reading recovery program run by Jackie von Kalben.

Fr. Leslie Tamas holds monthly masses for students. He also drops in to the school to informally meet with teachers and students.

The student council will hold its elections soon to see who will take over from last year's president, Nick Jago. Under his leadership, students became involved in school spirit-boosting events, such as sports jersey and crazy hat and hair days. The council also encouraged students to participate in food drives and support charities such as ShareLife.

The school, with its impressive entrance, is situated on large grounds in the residential area on Millard



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

St. Brigid Catholic School in Stouffville will be officially opened at a ceremony next month.

Street, east of Ninth Line. Since the two-storey school was built with an eye to the future, many of its classrooms are still empty.

The school was designed as a "walking school" right from the start, said Janet Montesano, chair of the school council. The majority of the junior kindergarten to Grade 8 students live close enough to walk to school, so only two buses are needed.

This year, when the school council gave parents the option of what they wanted to do for the year's major fundraiser, most opted for a one-time donation. The school council will again sell pointsettias, near the end of fall, and operates the school's milk program and pizza lunches. Profits from these programs buy books for the library and maps and globes for classrooms.

The Mayor's Youth Fund donated \$1,000 towards library books for the school.

"We have gotten a lot done," noted Mrs. Montesano of the school council. "All the parents are there for all the children of St. Brigid's."

The school's meet-the-teacher barbecue and curriculum night will be on Wednesday with the curriculum presentations running from 7 to 8 p.m.

Cheap, fun activities include cooking at home

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for those who do choose to drink."

Erin says while she isn't interested in drinking, she feels underage drinking could be reduced if there was more for teens to do.

While some students say it doesn't matter what they do on the weekend, it is usually a very different story for couples who are romantically involved.

If you are not with people you can hang out with and have a good time, you won't have fun regardless of what you do.

"It's sometimes impossible to find things to do on a date," says Erin, adding some of her favourite dates have been short trips to downtown Toronto to see the sights.

Justin prefers to keep dates closer to home.

"You have to be pretty inventive sometimes," he admits. "Coffee shops are a good place to date. It's not expensive so you won't have to spend too

much and you actually get the chance to talk to the person you're with."

Justin suggests staying at home and renting a movie rather than feeling obligated to go out to impress the person you are with.

Finding inexpensive activities for couples in York Region is becoming increasingly difficult, especially for couples not old enough to get in to dance clubs or other such facilities.

The activities available to younger twosomes have become pricier as demand grows.

So what can teenagers in the region do for fun without breaking the bank?

"Just do whatever, but do it with a large group of people that you can talk with," Erin says.

"Be with good people. That is all you need," Justin concurs. "If you are not with people you can hang out with and have a good time, you won't have fun regardless of what you do."

For activities that will not require too much hard-earned money, try cooking a meal at home for friends or going for a long drive out of town. Just be sure to do it with the right group of people and you are bound to have a good time.

Patrick McAlpine is a student at Brother Andre Catholic High School in Markham.

Parents deserve credit for devotion to children

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student with a language and speech disorder, said Mrs. Hubbard opened her grandson's eyes to the world of academics.

"She found out his interests and pushed him forward," Mrs. Warke said.

"To see him singing in front of a gymnasium full of people... that is what makes it worthwhile. That's what it is all about."

Connor now studies science, social science and math in regular classes rather than in his special needs class.

"She made that possible by giving him the groundwork and getting him going," Mrs. Warke said.

Seeing Connor perform in last year's play, despite his language and speech difficulties, was one of Mrs. Hubbard's most rewarding moments.

He had cried during some of the practices but, on the night of the play, stood in front of an auditorium full of people and sang.

"He couldn't have done that when he first came to us," Mrs. Hubbard said.

"To see him singing in front of a gymnasium full of people... that is what makes it worthwhile. That's what it is all about."

Mrs. Hubbard's calm nature makes her a successful teacher, Mrs. Warke said.

"She looks at them and smiles instead of scowling. She uses humour to diffuse situations."

Mrs. Hubbard said one of the secrets to her success is she gets to know her students' parents.

"I've always made it a point to get to know their parents because the parents know the kids the best and they can tell

me how to best meet the needs of their child."

Parents deserve credit for their devotion to their children, she added.

"She made that possible by giving him the groundwork and getting him going."

"I have the greatest regard and respect for them. The tremendous support they provide is inspiring to me... their job never ends."

As September's teacher of the month, Mrs. Hubbard will receive a free car wash and vacuum from Aurora's Warlock Auto Detailing; a six-foot party Subway sandwich for the class, compliments of Subway owner Brian Johns at Aurora Centre in Aurora; a gift basket from Apple Creek Gift Baskets in Newmarket and a \$150 workshop to improve communication skills by Inside Out with Karen Armstrong.

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