



THE Beacon

NEWSPAPER OF THE DIOCESE OF PATERSON, N. J.

VOL. 44 † JULY 22, 2010 † NO. 26

Ready to Challenge Students Morris Plains schools to meet students this fall with building renovation, new technology, curriculum

By **MICHAEL WOJCIK**

News Editor

MORRIS PLAINS — On the first day of classes Sept. 7, the new, innovative St. Virgil Academy and Morris Catholic Junior School here will be ready to meet the challenges of educating students with an extensively renovated building outfitted with cutting-edge technology and a completely revamped curriculum that will inspire them to learn together in “collaborative classrooms.”

“Today, students are using technology,” said Debbie Duane, dean of students of the sixth- to eighth-grade Morris Catholic Junior School, who is helping lead curriculum and facilities renovations this summer. “Today in the workplace, it’s about collaboration. Now, in our collaborative classrooms, students will work together to solve problems, using 21st century tools. Students always love to talk, so we will give them something to talk about [academics].”

Sparking these innovations is an innovative model between St. Virgil School here and Morris Catholic High School, Denville, announced last year. St. Virgil’s sixth- to eighth-graders in the fall will walk into the familiar St. Virgil’s School, but instead will find themselves students of the new Morris Catholic Junior School. This new model will give St. Virgil’s middle school students access to most of what its parent institution, Morris Catholic High School, has to offer in the areas of technology, sports, curriculum and spiritual and extracurricular activities, said Jerry Fazio, principal of the pre-K to fifth-grade St. Virgil Academy.

“Our students will see the difference,” said Fazio, who comes to St. Virgil from DePaul Catholic High School, Wayne,



BUSY SUMMER — St. Virgil Academy and Morris Catholic Junior School, Morris Plains, have been revamping facilities, technology and curriculum. *Beacon photo / Michael Wojcik*

where he spent 27 years as an administrator, educator and athletic coach. “Students will come to school wanting to learn.”

“This new model is visionary and collaborative,” said diocesan School Superintendent John Eriksen, who, with other educators, announced the new model last year as St. Virgil’s celebrated its 100th anniversary as part of festivities that will continue until June 2011. “This innovative model will allow each school to share the best they have with each other and to allow both schools to continue to offer quality Catholic education and formation.”

The terms of the new model call for Morris Catholic to administer the new middle school? a “satellite campus” — to be located in the St. Virgil’s school building — from academics and extracurricular activities to facility and facilities. A leader in “Web 2.0” the next step in digital communications, Morris Catholic High School plans to update the middle school’s technology and share its faculty and much of its curriculum and programs, such as peer ministry, noted Michael St. Pierre, Morris Catholic High School’s president.

This summer, St. Virgil’s and Morris Catholic Junior School have been working to get outfitted with the latest technology. Each class will house an interactive white board and five computer workstations with “safe-use” filtering software, supported by the school’s new computer lab. Renovations will convert the library into a state-of-the-art media center, said Duane, who came from St. Vincent de Paul School, Stirling, where she served as assistant principal.

The schools, which will have a “grand opening” later in September, also are outfitting their staff, faculty and parents with technology. They will use an Internet-based computer program, Power School, which will post student grades and attendance records, and Edline, where teachers will post homework assignments and where staff, faculty and parents can communicate with each other, Duane said.

“The possibilities with technology are exciting,” said Duane, who noted that the schools have been revamping their curricula to meet the standards of N.J. State and of the N.J. 21st century Learning Initiative.

Also, Morris Catholic Junior School students will be able to immerse themselves in the high school experience with frequent visits to the Morris Catholic High School campus, five miles away. They will attend classes, partner up with Morris Catholic students, participate in school-wide spiritual events, such as Masses and join in extracurricular activities, such as the high school’s media club, St. Pierre said.

While on Morris Catholic's campus, St. Virgil's students also will have access to the high school's facilities, including its many athletic fields and its technology, which includes a state-of-the-art equipment to enable students to create high-end graphics, movies, Web pages and Internet audio programs, called podcasts. Morris Catholic also has fully embraced "Web 2.0," driven by Twitter and other social-networking and other technologies, like Internet logs, called "blogs," which are enabling members of the school community to communicate with Morris

Catholic and each other more quickly and to collaborate more effectively and helps them promote the school in ways never possible before, St. Pierre said.

"St. Virgil's students will be able to do amazing things with technology," St. Pierre said. "We want the St. Virgil's students to feel special at Morris Catholic. We want to enhance their middle-school grades and experience. They will have access to everything here," he said.

The already stellar religious instruction at St. Virgil's will add more Catholic service projects for Lent and Advent.

Occasionally, students from both the middle school and high school will gather together for assemblies and Masses at either campus, Duane said.

"It is our mission to endow our students with faith in God and faith in oneself," Duane said. "When children have faith and know that God is with them, it gives them confidence to explore and discover. They become leaders and achieve self worth and academic success."

To arrange a tour of St. Virgil's and Morris Catholic Junior School, call (973) 539-7267.