

Redemptorist High, Elementary schools merge

The start of the 2011-12 school year will mark the beginning of the Redemptorist Schools of Baton Rouge.

"This new school will bring together the best of three long standing traditions in Baton Rouge's Catholic schools and merge them into one PK-12 institution," said Brian Menard, the newly hired administrative head of the merging schools.

"When schools come together, it is important that everyone feels a part of the new community formed," said Menard. "We recognize that St. Isidore and St. Gerard, which came together as Redemptorist Elementary School last year, and Redemptorist High School, which has stood contiguous to the lower school campus for six-and-a-half decades and educated countless students from the feeder schools, will each contribute distinct elements to the shared culture that will develop," he said.

"I have already begun working with people from all three traditions as we forge ahead together as one community," Menard said. "Retired Baton Rouge Police Chief and RHS Class of '70 alum Pat Englade captured this well when he said of our new direction, 'We are a Catholic neighborhood school teaching Catholic family values and producing graduates prepared for life,'" said Menard.

An important step in merging the two schools has been leadership team

meetings with Menard, upper school principal John Sanders, and lower school principal Erica Walker. "Successful mergers happen when the various entities all have voices in the process," said Menard, who previously led a school in Cleveland, Ohio, that is also the product of a merger. "Each of us plays an important role at the Redemptorist Schools of Baton Rouge. Working together as a team, our task is not merely to manage the school, but to lead it in ways that translate what has been essential through changing decades in the past into what brings success for our students today and tomorrow. That perpetuates the legacy of our alumni through future generations," Menard said.

Turning Redemptorist High School and Redemptorist Elementary School into the Redemptorist Schools of Baton Rouge began with the two school communities working with consultants last year to explore the best options for school governance. One key recommendation from that working group was creating a PK-12 collaborative environment that aligns the curriculum from early elementary through 12th grade and shares resources and planning for the benefit of both upper and lower schools. Each school maintains its own principal, while Menard's position of administrative head was created to focus on institutional vision, coordination, de-

velopment, marketing and other advancement efforts.

RHS teacher Chris Porche, looks forward to formalizing the relationship between the schools. "It's a great opportunity for us to bridge the gap with the people of St. Gerard Church, since they are the ones that founded both Redemptorist High School and St. Gerard Elementary School (now Redemptorist Elementary School after last year's merger with St. Isidore), as well as to share resources in ways that will make both the upper and lower schools stronger," said Porche.

The new administrative structure will be based on the president-principal model, which Menard used at Villa Angela-St. Joseph High School in Cleveland.

"With a bigger PK-12 school, we can allow our principals to oversee the academic work of the schools while Mr. Menard focuses on efforts to advance the institution," Porche said. "Rather than taking away from the St. Gerard ID, bringing everyone together in one family reinforces the charism of the Redemptorist priests and brothers."

One way that charism will continue to be manifested is through a continued affiliation with the Redemptorist Special Education Program, run by the Diocese of Baton Rouge on the Redemptorist Schools of Baton Rouge campus.