

LaSalle High celebrates new beginnings

After suffering extensive hurricane damage, bayside school dedicates new science building and renovated facilities.

Marlene Quaroni

MIAMI

A year ago, students and teachers at La Salle High School were eating lunch under a tent — the cafeteria and other school buildings had suffered massive hurricane damage.

"It was hot and humid and we fought off mosquitoes," said Salesian Sister Patricia Roche, principal of the coed school in Coconut Grove. "The storms threatened to put us out of business."

Recently, students and alumni came together to bless renovations and dedicate a new science building named after Armando Alejandro Jr., a 1968 La Salle graduate and one of the four Brothers to the Rescue pilots shot down by Cuban Air Force MIGs in 1996 off the coast of northern Cuba.

The La Salle event, called "Remember, Rebuild, Renew," kicked off two years of celebrations until the school's 50th anniversary in 2008.

"Today, La Salle High School survives and thrives," Sister Roche said.

During the ceremony, Archbishop John C. Favalora also blessed a new bronze statue of Brother Victorino Arnaud, a member of the Christian Brothers de la Salle, an order that ran several schools in Cuba until its members were exiled in 1961. Brother Arnaud, a native of France, founded Cuba's *Juventud Católica Cubana*, a national Catholic youth movement that endures to this day.

His process of canonization is under way, said Brother Andre Reino, 56, an alumnus of the Christian Brothers de la Salle schools in Cuba.

"Soon, we will have a saint from our community," Brother Reino said.

The Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco operate La Salle High School, which has about 700 students in grades nine through 12.

Archbishop Favalora also blessed Immaculata Hall, the renamed administrative building, a statue of the Virgin Mary and Jesus and a newly created alumni Hall of Fame. One of the hall-of-famers is Miami-



TFC PHOTOS BY MARLENE QUARONI

Archbishop Favalora pauses while blessing Immaculata Hall, the refurbished La Salle administration building, the new name of which incorporates the early history of the school that began as Immaculata High School for girls. At right is senior Stephanie Avetrani.

Dade County Mayor Carlos Alvarez.

"I'm a proud graduate of the class of 1970," he said during the event. "Teenage years are problematic years. The brothers and sisters of La Salle High School helped me make the right decisions. This school will always be a big part of my life."

The bayside school opened as Immaculata High School for girls in 1958. In 1961, six teenage boys exiled from Cuba, who were former students of the de la Salle schools, approached Bishop Coleman Carroll with an

idea for a boys' high school on the campus of Immaculata.

"The bishop saw the need for another high school and within three months, La Salle High School for boys opened with its own building on the campus. It was a miracle," said Jose Arellano, one of the six.

Arellano's youngest son graduated from La Salle and his daughter is a current student. Besides Arellano, the event brought back Nestor Machado and Oscar Bustillo, three of the six boys who were the first to



La Salle Principal Sister Patricia Roche, FMS, and Archbishop John C. Favalora walk away from the bronze bust of Brother Victorino Arnaud, a Christian Brother exiled from Cuba, whose legacy gave the high school its name.

attend the school.

The paired school, for boys and girls, was renamed Immaculata-La Salle High School in 1963.

"Word got around and soon after it opened, 400 boys attended the school," Arellano said.

In 1983, Immaculata was dropped from the school's name, leaving some alumni feeling forsaken.

"That's the reason we renamed the administration building Immaculata Hall," Sister Roche said. "This facility started as an all-girls school. Then, the boys invaded. We're honored to have alumni here from both schools. This is their home."

The hurricanes of the past three years did a lot of damage. Renovations have cost about \$3 million, said Maria Haugland, La Salle's financial administrator.

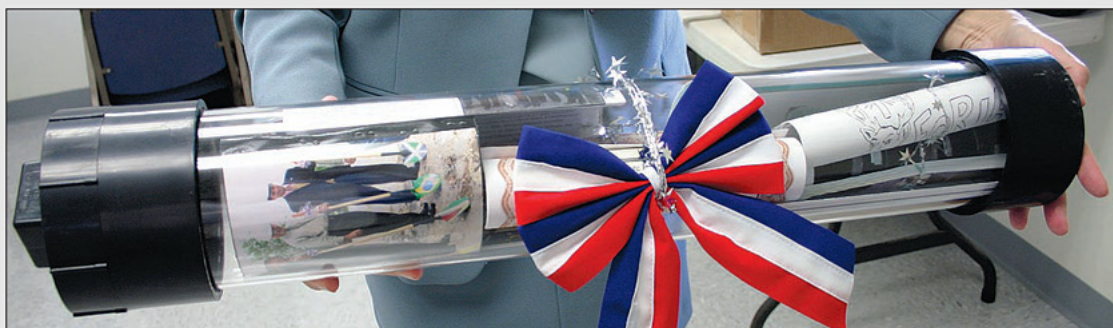
"In order to keep the school going, we're renovating in stages," she said. "The next stage will be the fine arts building."

During the event, Jorge and Marie Trellis, from Trellis Architects, unveiled a master plan for the campus. The couple's daughters are both graduates of La Salle High School.

Archbishop Favalora congratulated Sister Roche for the renovations taking place.

"I'm delighted to see that you're on the fast-track," he said.

A 'village' for world's children



TFC PHOTOS BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO

This time capsule, featuring memorabilia from the old Camp Matecumbe and Boystown, will be buried in the memorial courtyard of the new Boystown Children's Village.

Unaccompanied refugees will now be housed in new Boystown facility named after Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh.

Ana Rodriguez-Soto

PERRINE

Along with the memories came the tears.

Elly Vilano Chovel could contain neither as she read the prayer of the faithful at the dedication of the new Boystown Children's Village.

In front of her sat the children, living reminders of her own refugee journey four decades ago. Like Chovel, they had come to this

See BOYSTOWN, Page A7

BOYSTOWN

From Page A2

country alone and found shelter in the Catholic Church.

Now, thanks to her efforts and those of others who share a similar history, the unaccompanied minors of this and future generations have a brand-new facility to call home — the Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh Boystown Children's Village.

While dedicating it Sept. 20, Archbishop John C. Favalora renamed it after the man who made Chovel's journey possible, along with the journeys of at least 14,000 others who were spirited out of Cuba between 1960 and 1962. It was the largest recorded exodus of unaccompanied minors in the Western Hemisphere, which became known as Pedro Pan.

"It's not very often in your life that you have the chance to acknowledge and thank an institution that literally saved your life," said Ralph de la Cruz, senior columnist for the *Sun-Sentinel* newspaper in Fort Lauderdale. "It's a long overdue honor to say thank you and also to see that glorious tradition of hope and help continue in this place."

Unlike Chovel, de la Cruz did not come to the United States through Pedro Pan. But he, too, is grateful to the Catholic Church.

"Quite honestly, I feel as if they saved our lives," said de la Cruz, who left Cuba at the age of 4.

He and his parents fled the island on a 20-foot fishing boat. His two sisters had left a year

Facts about Boystown Children's Village

- On the site of the former Catholic Home for Children, 9615 Sterling Drive in Perrine, which housed youths in need of foster care from 1963 to 2004.

- Can accommodate 24 boys and 24 girls in two separate buildings; a third building houses a cafeteria and administrative offices. More staff facilities will be housed in a fourth building, which is being refurbished.

- The original Boystown, at Southwest 120th Street and 137th Avenue in Kendall, served as a shelter for Pedro Pan children from 1960 to 1965. It was known at the time as Camp Matecumbe.

- In 2003, the archdiocese sold the Matecumbe site to Miami-Dade County, which turned it into a park and memorial to Pedro Pan.

earlier and found refuge in Corpus Christi, Texas, with a group of nuns who had been expelled from Cuba.

De la Cruz and his family arrived in Texas with nothing but the clothes on their backs, and the local parish community gave them everything they needed to start over.

"They literally delivered us from evil," said de la Cruz, who acted as master of ceremonies at the Boystown Children's Village dedication.

Today's unaccompanied minors often bear deeper scars.



TFC PHOTO BY ANA RODRIGUEZ-SOTO

Archbishop John C. Favalora receives a commemorative cross from one of the unaccompanied minors being cared for by Catholic Charities at the Boystown Children's Village.

"We have experienced many unfortunate events that have marked our lives," such as physical abuse and domestic violence, said a spokesperson for those currently living in the facility, whose identity cannot be divulged. "We felt the only way to break the cycle was to come to a land of freedom."

The Boystown Children's Village is operated by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Miami with the help of an \$11-million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement. The children's village is one of 15 such programs in the country and the only one in the state of Florida.

"This is going to be the model program for the whole nation," said Julian Serrano, chief operating officer for Catholic Charities.

While they are being cared for, the children receive pro bono legal help from the Florida Immigrant

Advocacy Center. They also take classes and engage in sports and social activities aimed at helping them adapt to life in the United States.

Many of the children eventually become legal residents. The average length of stay at the home is 55 days. Last year, Boystown sheltered 336 minors between the ages of 1 and 17. The children hailed from 15 countries, including Albania, Lithuania, Cuba, Haiti, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala, El Salvador and even China.

The new facility was designed by architect Ben Lopez and the contractor for the project was Landmark Builders Inc., which is run by William Perez, a former Pedro Pan child.

"This is a longtime dream, not only of the agency, but also of Msgr. Walsh," said Juan O'Naghten, a member of the board of Catholic Charities.

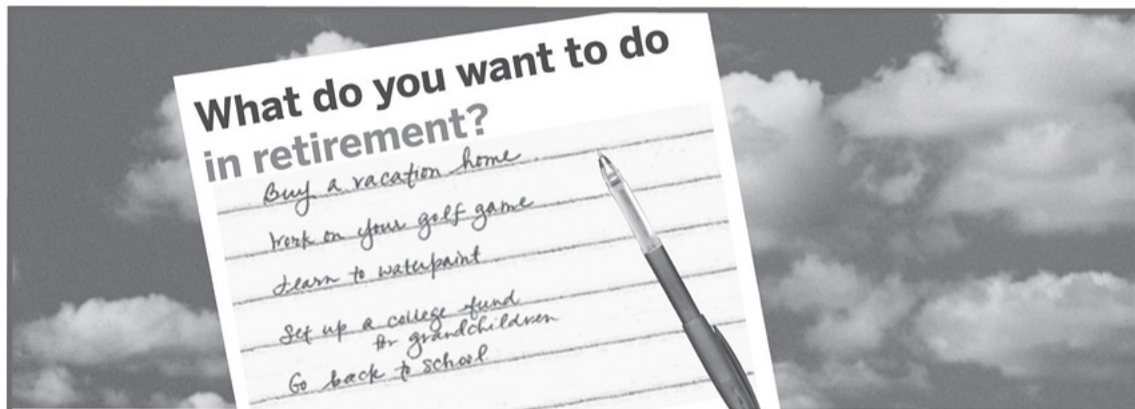
He noted that plans for the

project had originally been drawn up about 15 years ago. Msgr. Walsh died in December 2001.

Many of those who donated funds for construction of the children's village are members of Operation Pedro Pan Group Inc., the official national charitable organization of the children of Pedro Pan. One of the group's missions is to support the child welfare programs of Catholic Charities in the archdiocese. Chovel chairs the group's board of trustees.

"The village was Msgr. Walsh's dream," said Chovel. "It was the focal point of the pledge of thanksgiving we (former Pedro Pan children) made to him in November 1990. He must be smiling from heaven."

"This is just a splendid way for us to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Catholic Charities as well as the memory of Msgr. Walsh," agreed Archbishop Favalora.



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“You are the Salt of the Earth...”
you are the light of the world. Your light must shine before all...” Matthew 5:13-16

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