

# 1959: St. Joseph Academy enjoys new campus

In March 1959, St. Joseph Academy occupied its new campus near Palm Boulevard for the first time. The students and faculty were pleased with the convenient location, the fresh new facilities and the amount of space for classrooms, administration, athletics and other student activities. This was a big change from the campus on Elizabeth Street.

The faculty and students took advantage of the new facilities, leading to a full range of activities. Athletic competition included football, basketball and track, and both junior high and high school students fielded teams. Among the student activities were the "Red and White" annual yearbook, the "Tower" student newspaper, the Fall Carnival, and the band. Additional activities included a Mothers Club and a Men's Club.

During the early years after the move, it became necessary for the school administration to deal with some financial issues. Arrangements were made to repay the interest-free loan that had been provided earlier by Bishop Garriga, and funds were borrowed from a commercial lender. Tony Carnesi, president of Pan American Bank, was approached and agreed to assist. With his help, a loan in the amount of \$210,000 was obtained from a company in North Carolina, to be repaid over 20 years.

It also became necessary to make some alterations to the original construction and to acquire additional items of equipment. This put an additional burden on the finances of the school.

In 1964, the faculty included 11 brothers, with 34 seniors in the graduating class. The senior class raised funds to make a gift to the school — a replacement school bus.

The principal of St. Joseph from 1967 to 1971 was Brother Peter Martin. He and the Advisory Board felt the new facilities could be utilized more effectively by an increase in enrollment, which would provide additional revenues. One idea under discussion was for St. Joseph to go co-educational.

Some informal surveys were made, asking parents with boys attending St. Joseph, as well as girls attending the Villa Maria girls school, if they would consider sending their daughters to St. Joseph. Many said they would, and some commented they felt there were advantages for boys and girls to attend school together.

A decision was made in 1971 to go co-educational. Admission exams were administered for new students entering grades 6, 7 and 8. Ninety-one girls were accepted, six of which admitted to the 9th grade. There was also an increase in the number of boys in school.

The "experiment" in going co-educational was considered successful, and the following years some 200 girls applied for admission in grades 7 through 10.

One girl who came with the first class in 1971 was Mary Lou Lukefahr. Brother Peter Martin visited her mother, discussing the idea of her enrolling at St Joseph. Some Lukefahr sons were already attending, and Brother Peter Martin felt Mary Lou was a prospective student. One advantage of attending St. Joseph was that Mary Lou could walk to school from her nearby home on Hibiscus Street.

Over the years, five brothers and sisters in the Lukefahr family attended St. Joseph.

In earlier years, Mary Lou had attended Incarnate World and Sacred Heart schools. She initially felt a bit uneasy at St. Joseph, attending classes with so many boys. She also had to get used to the idea

of wearing regular clothing, instead of a uniform, which had been required at the girls' schools.

But she soon learned the classes were well organized, that the brothers were good teachers, and that enrolling in St. Joseph was a positive step.

She became involved in student activities, serving on the Student Council and on the pep squad. After her graduation in 1976, she attended the University of Texas at Austin, then was employed in Houston for many years. She retired and returned to Brownsville in 2003.

She has good memories of her years at St. Joseph, where she made lifelong friends, whom she continues to see frequently.

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