

# ‘Meme’ Garza: 40 Years at St. Joseph Academy

Brownsville native Manuel “Meme” Garza came to St. Joseph Academy as a student in 1956 and studied there for nine years, graduating in 1968. After graduation, he continued his education at St. Edwards University in Austin.

In the fall of 1975, the St. Joseph principal, Brother Francis Garza, hired Meme to teach history, health and physical education — and to be one of the coaches. In 2014, now beginning his 40th year, Meme continues his work at the school.

When he reflects on his memories of those years at St. Joseph, he feels it is important for people to recognize and appreciate the consistent values the school has emphasized and taught through the years.

Those values are of the Marist tradition: to be humble, to do more with less, to work hard and to do one’s best.

Meme feels St. Joseph graduates are instilled with the idea of helping people and serving the local community and beyond. Students are taught to be thinkers and to develop their own opinions. They are exposed to a commitment to excellence that has worked to the credit of the school and the community. He says the students learn at three important levels: the physical level, reflecting the importance of physical activity and competition; the academic level, reflecting the acquisition of new knowledge and stretching of the mind; and the spiritual level, reflecting the religious side of life. He asserts that at St. Joseph students are taught and actively participate in each of these levels.

Meme feels these teachings have had a positive effect in the community of Brownsville, and the many St. Joseph graduates who have played leadership roles in community life reflect these values. He says that since so many community leaders are St. Joseph graduates, they have been referred to as the “St. Jo Mafia.” He considers that to be a compliment.

He also gives credit to the founder of the worldwide Marist Order, St. Marcellin Champagnat, a Frenchman who is respected at St. Joseph. He was a leader whose work has affected people throughout the world for nearly 200 years.

As a coach, his boys and girls teams have earned a combined 16 state championships, and he has coached 93 individual state champions.

He has been inducted into the Rio Grande Valley Sports Hall of Fame.

As Meme begins his 40th year at St. Joseph, he continues to coach the cross-country and track teams, and he has recently assumed a new responsibility, working as a guidance counselor for 7th and 8th grade students. This is a new field for him, where he is working to develop his skills.

He is one of the many people who have admired and respected Coach Gus Zavaletta, and he recalls that even the fans attending athletic events showed their admiration of the coach by chanting: Whose the peaches?

Whose the cream?

Whose the coach of our football team?

Zavaletta, Zavaletta, Zavaletta!

When asked how the name Bloodhounds came to be adopted for the St. Joseph athletic teams, he tells a story he heard years ago. The St. Joseph baseball team was playing the Brownsville High School Eagles. Near each dugout was a “batter up” circle, where the next player waited his turn to bat. The circle of the Brownsville Eagles had an eagle drawn in the dirt. It seems the St. Joseph team was without a name at that time, and in their circle a saint had been drawn in the dirt, indicating the team was affiliated with a religious school.

St. Joseph coach Brother William Menn felt that since the team had no name, he scratched out the saint drawing. This led to consideration of what name should be given the team. The school colors were red and white, and people began thinking about using the name “Red Hounds.” After further discussion it was decided to use the name “Bloodhounds,” which reflects the strong and tenacious character of that breed of dogs.



Special to the Herald

CARL CHILTON