

Catholic high school to come to Macomb

By Kristyne E. Demske
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MACOMB TOWNSHIP — It's been about seven years in the making, but now backers are hoping to finally get a Roman Catholic high school in northern Macomb County.

Public information meetings and fund-raising are just getting underway for a planned Macomb County Regional Catholic High School, which would house 800 to 1,000 students in a co-ed, college prep atmosphere.

The Rev. Jerry Machlik, pastor of St. John Vianney Catholic Church in Shelby Township, said the idea came about because most Catholic parents in the area had to drive at least 20 miles, if not more, to put their child in a Catholic high school.

"Not everyone has the ability to drive their kids," said Sal Simone, a founding trustee of the school. Simone lives in Romeo and drives his children about an hour one-way to Academy of the Sacred Heart High School in Bloomfield Hills. "Thirty-three percent of the enrollment at Lutheran High (North) is Catholic."

"This whole area has just grown so fast that people have a desire for Catholic education that's accessible," said the Rev. Mike Hrydziuszko, pastor of St. Isidore in Macomb. Driving an hour or more each day "might not be possible. It becomes an issue for the majority of people who don't have the flexibility," he said.

Because of that problem, several groups started about seven years ago individually looking into building a northern Macomb County Catholic high school; they then combined their efforts to bring the plan to fruition.

"Everybody was focusing in on a Catholic high school," said Hrydziuszko. "It became a consolidated group of clergy and laypeople."

The new school would be located on 23 Mile Road between North Avenue and Card Road on the site of the old Oliver Sod Farm. That property was purchased by the Archdiocese of Detroit and made available to the group for the high school.

"It's kind of in the heart of this big population growth," said Hrydziuszko.

The group wants to make sure the public is aware that they're not against the public schools, they just think some parents might be looking for more in an education for their children.

"Parents are looking at something beyond academics," said Machlik.

"This is not a response to a poor public school area. It's a better installation of our Catholic Christian values," Hrydziuszko said. "That whole way of living your life. Faith is not just something that you do for an hour on Sunday."

Those involved said there is plenty of demand, with St. Lawrence in Utica, St. Thecla in Clinton Township, St. Mary Schools in Mount Clemens and Holy Family Regional School in Rochester — all within close distance of the proposed school.

Plus, with the school building closer, the group is hopeful that parents will become more involved — something that's difficult when the school is an hour away.

"The parents are primary educators," Hrydziuszko said. "If they're putting up the financial ... hopefully, there's that involvement."

The school comes with a \$27 million price tag. Right now, the group is talking with some silent corporate donors, then they'll be looking for local churches and parishioners to help out however they can. They hope to open the school doors in September of 2007.

"This is a real opportunity for the entire church to come together," said Mark Morrow, a fundraising consultant for the group. "It's really an investment in the long-term future."

Even with another Christian high school in the area, Lutheran High North, there won't be any problem filling the school either, said Simone.

"Most of our demographics and statistics show that there should be more than enough room," he said. "Our concern is not to fill the school, it's to raise the money."

Although the details aren't worked out, Hrydziuszko said the tuition and the classes offered would be competitive with other private high schools in the area. The group is talking right now with an educational Catholic Order that would run the school, but they're still in negotiations and didn't want to say which Order it would be.

They hope to open the doors to everyone who wants to come. "One of the objectives ... is to make sure that this does not become an elitist type of school," Machlik said. He said they hope to make scholarships, endowments and other education funding available to students, possibly through local Catholic churches. "It's a project that is needed in the community, it's wanted," Simone said. "That's the question of all the young parents, 'where we going to send our kids to high school?'"

"We have some people that have made a financial commitment to the school because they're concerned about their grandkids," said Leonard Brillati, president of the school.

There will be a public information meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 24 at St. Lawrence, 44633 Utica Road in Utica. For more information or to get involved, call Leonard Brillati at (586) 306-9611.

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