



This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the St. Francis de Sales High School musical. The first show was *Guys and Dolls* in 1970. We are celebrating this milestone with a Gala Celebration at Lourdes University on April 18th, 2020, before the Saturday night performance of the 2020 production, *Catch Me If You Can*. Look for information on Gala tickets in the coming weeks. We look forward to celebrating the history of the St. Francis musical with you!

Before the lights dim and the curtain rises on *Catch Me If You Can* in April, it is a St. Francis tradition to recognize

the musical alumni at the shows by asking them to stand up. Take a moment, when that happens, to look around the room and take in one of the things that makes the St. Francis musical so great. You will see 50 years of tradition and community, a torch that has been passed on, year after year, to new generations. Every year, the number of people who stand grows, becoming a part of a tradition that stretches over the course of half a century of St. Francis musicals.

IN THE BEGINNING...

After 50 years of productions, it is taken for granted that the curtain will rise each spring. But in 1970, when the musical first began, there was no such guarantee of success. That year, the Beatles disbanded, Apollo 13 contacted Earth from orbit with "Houston, we have a problem," and the Vietnam War was only half over. It was a tough time. It was the time of the Vietnam War, people were being drafted, brothers and sisters, people we knew. You would sit by the radio and wait to hear which numbers were drawn. It was typical to listen to live TV and radio broadcasts of



St. Francis de Sales
High School presents

RODGERS & HAMMERSTEIN'S

OKLAHOMA!

April 21—22—23—24
Start High School Auditorium

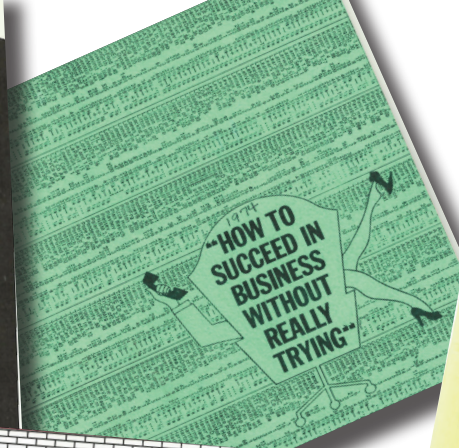
Music by
Richard Rodgers

Book and lyrics
Oscar Hammerstein II

Based on Lynn Riggs' play
"Green Grow The Lilacs"

Produced by special arrangement with
WILLIAMSON MUSIC, INC.
810 Seventh Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10019

All the typesetting in this program was done by the
students of St. Francis on a Comp/Set® phototype-
setting system bought by the school with state funds.



BACK: Greg Fretz, Tom Jannawin, Drew Fisher,
Mary McGowan, Dave Keven, Mary Wasmann,
Mary McGowan, Greg Patterson. FRONT: Frank Groll,
Pat Koenig, Greg Patterson, Steve Cain, Mary Ann Paballa,
Pete Gansel, Pat McVicker, Maria Kruon, Sarah McGowan,
Marie Chelish, Maria Kruon.

the U.S. Selective Service System drawing lottery numbers to determine who would and would not be drafted. Things were a bit brighter on Bancroft Street. The wrestling team was primed to win the state championship, the Irish Knight had been taken from Central

Mr. Gene Antoszewski was tapped by then-president Fr. Robert Healy, OSFS, to start a musical program. Today, many students will take dance lessons, singing lessons, or perform in community theater. In 1970, "we did not have one ounce of experience," notes Barb Murtagh Blanchard (SUA '70). "Nobody had any experience and nobody knew what to expect. We were novices at the whole thing. It was uncharted water." Sam Botek (SFS '71) recalls that first night of rehearsal. "We started rehearsals in the gym, and Fr. Healy came in the first night of rehearsal and made a little speech. He told us all that this was possibly going to become a tradition, that he hoped that we made it a success and that it would be something to become a St. Francis tradition in the years to come. And we were on the ground floor. We took it to heart."

Together, "Mr. A", his wife and professional dance instructor, Conni Antoszewski, and the music director Mr. Zapatal, or "Mr. Zap", endeavored to do something brand new at St.

Catholic, and a St. Francis student had three Catholic girls' schools to find a date to the dance. The Knights had done a number of musicals, but St. Francis did not have a musical. However, they did have an English and Speech teacher with a background in song and dance.

Francis. Their premiere production, *Guys and Dolls*, was perfect for an all-guys' high school. They took young men from the football team and sought out young women from the Catholic all-girls' schools. Until that point, Botek was a football player who had sung in his church choir. Barb Murtagh didn't even know he could sing. She believes she was recruited because "I was a cheerleader and I had personality. It wasn't until later that I found out that I could sing." The production staff did their best, bringing enthusiasm and passion for the performance, but the cast was untrained and untested. Reportedly, most of the leads had understudies because so few people knew how to sing and were at risk of hurting their voices.

Right up until the opening night of that first production back in 1970, there was still a big question hanging over the heads of the students. "We had no idea if it was going to be any good," shares Barb Blanchard Murtagh. "There was a fear of the unknown." But from the moment the curtain opened on the 1970 production of *Guys and Dolls*, the students and the audience knew that they had something special. When Botek and company sang "Sit Down, You're Rocking the Boat" in the second act, the audience leaped to their feet for a standing ovation. To the incredulity of

cast, crew, and staff, they proceeded to do three encores of that song. Botek recalls it vividly. "That was unbelievable, it just ripped through me like lightning. It was just amazing."

That first musical was more than just a show - it was a beginning.

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ST. FRANCIS DE SALES SCHOOL PRESENTS...

CATCH ME IF YOU CAN

THE MUSICAL
BASED ON THE DREAMWORKS MOTION PICTURE

APRIL 16 - 18 AT 7:30
APRIL 19 AT 2:00

AT THE FRANCISCAN CENTER OF LOURDES UNIVERSITY
MUSIC BY - MARC SHAIMAN
LYRICS BY - SCOTT WITTMAN AND MARC SHAIMAN

A large black silhouette of a person in a running pose, positioned diagonally across the right side of the poster.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PRODUCTION STAFF

Mr. A only stayed at St. Francis for four years, leaving after auditions in 1974 to answer a casting call for a little film called *The Blues Brothers*. He was cast as the comedic villain “Gruppenführer”, a member of the Illinois Nazi Party. Mr. A’s technical director, Robert Stucker, stepped in to take over the musical. Bob Stucker was joined by choreographer Craig Barrow, music director Sister Jeanne Marie Rowan, OSU, and an acting coach named Gloria Mouloupoulos. Years later, students who participated in the shows and professionals that worked with Bob Stucker recall his technical prowess. Judge Gene Zmuda (SFS ‘77) recalls how, in a production of *Oklahoma!*, Mr. Stucker literally had the cast build a barn, on stage, during a song. Each night, as the barn was completed, the audience would respond with a standing ovation. Mr. Stucker was known for his elaborate sets, but also his eye for detail. “Bob was such a technical stickler,” recalls Karen Niewiadomski, current choreographer of the musicals. “He was phenomenal that way, detail. His eye for detail was terrific.” In fact, when Lourdes College was building its Franciscan Center, they consulted with Mr. Stucker on the design of the theater, the same stage that the St. Francis musical has been performing on for decades.

Some members of the current team at St. Francis have been in place since the mid-80s. Mrs. Karen Niewiadomski was a dance teacher at D&D Dance Studios with Doug Beehler, and Carl Collier was a new teacher. While Doug has since retired, Karen and Mr. Collier have remained integral parts of the St. Francis musical over the past 30+ years. They have worked with multiple directors in that time - Gloria Mouloupoulos, Barbara Kondalski, Michael Kastner, and Kevin Hayes. Each director brought something different to the table, writing different chapters in the St. Francis musical story. Karen’s work ethic and high standards, with a perpetual motto of “One more time!” has always pushed the production to levels not often seen in a typical high school show. One student noted that they admire how Karen “gives everyone a chance, which is often a lengthier process but gives students more opportunities” while also

“taking into account those who work harder” as a litmus for success. While Mr. Collier has taken on various leadership roles in the school, he has consistently passed on a passion for music to young Knights and leads the live orchestra to provide the moving music each show requires. Greg Skibinski (SFS ‘92) has been Technical Director for the St. Francis musicals since he graduated, and his brother Geoff (SFS ‘94) often shares the load of creating technically impressive sets. Together, the Skibinskis lead the crew of students who learn and grow in their appreciation of building, painting, and ultimately creating a new world on stage.

EVOLUTION OVER THE YEARS

I spoke with Allison (SUA ‘20) and Duncan (SFS ‘22) Borland, siblings who performed together in *42nd Street*, to get a sense of what the musical was like today. Like so many before them, they were drawn to the musical by the environment created by the staff and students. “The environment is the draw,” they both confirmed. “The audience sees [the show] and they say ‘I want to be a part of that.’” One part of that environment is the importance of inclusion. “Such a big effort is made to include everybody,” notes Allison. Duncan has recognized a growing interest trying harder this year. While last year was mostly a social endeavor, he brings higher expectations for himself as a sophomore than he did as a freshman, with a desire to “take pride” in his performance. This is the result of hard work and sacrifice - Duncan had to give up track to do the musical - but believes it is worth it. While many things have changed, some have remained the same. Those high expectations - both for oneself and for the production as a whole - have been a consistent part of the musicals over the years.

LUNCH WITH GLORIA

As a part of writing this article, I sought out Mrs. Gloria Mouloupoulos, who started working with the musical in 1975 and shared the role of Co-Director with Mr. Bob Stucker in 1987 before taking over as Director. As I entered Scrambler Marie, I realized that I had never actually met “Mrs. M” before, despite hearing about her all through high school. Her last year was my 8th grade year, and so we never



worked together. But she recognized me from the table and waved me over. I asked her, "How did you know it was me?" And she said, "oh, you look like a Kenney." It was like I had discovered a long-lost member of my family, as she recalled visits to my grandparents' home and working with my uncles who had done the musicals in the '70s and '80s. Throughout my conversation with Gloria, I realized that there were many Toledo families that she would recognize and would recognize her, even claim her as a member. As if to drive home the point, as we sat there, we were approached by Jenn Huffstetler (NDA '94) and her mother, Mrs. Anna Huffstetler. Gloria recognized them, and began chatting like she had seen them last week, asking how Scott Huffstetler (SFS '97) was doing. She spoke in a loving manner of all her former musical students - "they became family."

FAMILY AND TRADITION

The theme of family and tradition is a common thread through the history of St. Francis de Sales High School - the bonds of brotherhood, the tradition of the gentleman Knight. One St. Francis Knight who is currently in the musicals and plays sports noted, "there's a bond in both. It's just a different kind of bond." Perhaps part of that difference comes from the presence of young women from

Notre Dame Academy, St. Ursula Academy, and, until it closed in 1988, McAuley High School. Brittanie Kuhr (NDA '09) knew something about that tradition, as St. Francis was the alma mater of her father; Jeff Kuhr ('70); her older brother; and now her nephews. "I knew what it meant to be a part of the St. Francis family, which is what made me want to be partake in this special tradition." Brittanie is excited to continue this legacy someday - her son, Emmett, is SFS class of 2038.

For some, the theme of Family hits much closer to home. Many siblings have done the musical because an older brother or sister spoke so highly of their experience, while others were dragged along to auditions with the promise of "trust me, you'll enjoy it." Throughout the course of 50 years of productions, former students have grown up, started families, and seen their children join the St. Francis Musical tradition. It is hard to mention the St. Francis musicals without acknowledging the Dillon Dynasty, as so many members of the Dillon family have participated in the shows over the years. Bill, Tom, Hohn, Ellen, Mary Maureen, Tom's daughter Rose, Bill's children John, Clare and Ginny are just a few who performed, while matriarch Dee Dillon organized countless musical dinners and Ellen Dillon Gill (NDA '94) did makeup for many Knights in the

years following. The Murtaghs, Korhumels, Kenneys, and Stengles are all cousins, and they have done St. Francis musicals since the first production in 1970. Tim Korhumel (SFS '75) performed in musicals such as No, No, Nanette, and later cheered for his daughter, Catherine (SUA '17), on the musical stage. Most recently, John Stengle (SFS '82) and Joyce Murtagh Stengle (SUA '82) saw their daughters Janet (SUA '14), Julia (SUA '16) and Jenna (SUA '17) follow in their footsteps.

Many musical alumni owe a bit of gratitude to the St. Francis musical for introducing them to their significant other. Ben Hoffmann (SFS '98) met Kelli Heer Hoffmann (NDA '97) in the musicals and dated in college before eventually getting married. Kristy Wisniewski Hayes (NDA '99) met her husband, James Hayes (SFS '99), when she performed on stage and he played in the orchestra. Matt Knaggs ('02) started dancing for Doug and Karen at D&D Dance Studios because of the musicals. There he met Doug's granddaughter, Amber, and today they are married, living in Toledo, with three beautiful children. Kevin Lada (SFS '03) did stage crew all four years, but it wasn't until his senior year that a budding artist, Emily Hoschak Lada (NDA '03), decided that helping with the musical would be fun her senior year. Another crew member let slip that they had both had a crush on the other, they had their first date shortly after musical ended that year, and this summer they'll be celebrating their 10 year wedding anniversary.

PROFESSIONAL MUSICAL THEATER

For the majority of graduates from the St. Francis Musical program, that is the first and last time that they ever perform on stage. For a select few, they turn that passion into profession and work to make that their career. Ian Knauer (SFS '86) has been working professionally in theater for 30 years. At St. Francis, he was cast as the lead as a sophomore and as a junior took on the role of Nicely-Nicely Johnson in Guys and Dolls, 15 years after that first St. Francis musical. He recalled "what a great team Gloria and Bob Stucker were, that she had such a great emphasis on the acting, and he had that background and the techni-



cal elements...they played to their strengths and it played brilliantly." After St. Francis, Knauer went to the University of Michigan for Musical Theater. Today, he is married, living in New York, and considers himself fortunate to have always made his living doing what he loves. Marc Kessler (SFS '90) also joined the U of M Musical Theater program after graduating, "following in Ian Knauer's path" he says. His experiences tapping as Billy Lawlor in the legendary 1989 SFS production of 42nd Street gave him an edge. He kept tapping all the way to the Manhattan Rhythm Kings, where he danced with one of musical theater's biggest names, Tommy Tune. He used his "Catholic training at SFS" to develop the musical Altar Boyz, and has performed on motion picture soundtracks such as The Aviator

and Joker. Michael Dauer (SFS '02) effectively grew up at D&D Dance Studio before joining the St. Francis musical. Eventually he took that training to New York, where he is a professional choreographer and dancer. Mark Blowers (SFS '08) grew up running around the St. Francis musicals, as his mother, Teresa Blowers, played the piano for several of the musicals, in addition as working as vocal director from many productions. Whether by nature or nurture, Mark's experiences with St. Francis growing up seem to have had a lasting impact. During *Bye, Bye Birdie*, Mr. Kastner gave Mark a Sinatra CD to help direct his performance. Today, he lives and performs in New York City, where he recently released his debut album, "Come Croon With Me," and has won multiple 2019 BroadwayWorld Awards including Best Debut Show and Best Independent Recording.

Others did not go quite as far as Broadway, but they are still actively involved in musical theater and the creative arts. Angie Katafiasz Perez de Tagle (NDA '98) has choreographed Whitmer's spring musical for the past 11 years. "I got the job, in part, by showing the director my musical VHS's," she recalls. "She was highly impressed by the caliber of our productions. I'll never be Karen Niewiadomski, but I sure am having fun trying!" David Hemmert (SFS '00) transitioned from performing on stage to working off-stage. "Ever since the ol' SFS Musical days," Dave says, "I've always wanted to have my finger on a button or to have some say about any show or entertainment piece I've ever attended." He has brought that interest to life, employed today as a professional light designer for major music concerts and corporate events. Sarah Horschak Tognozzi (NDA '04) went from 13 years working as a pharmacist to being a performing arts teacher and director at a Catholic elementary school. Michael Neary (SFS '98) is a speech therapist in Chicago schools who also works with the drama teacher and acts as the music director for their drama club. Susie Hillard (NDA '01) is a professional actor and comedian in Los Angeles, doing voice over work for cartoons and various other projects. Kirstin Kedzierski Hinshaw (SUA '04) moved back to Toledo and took over directing responsibilities at St. Ursula Academy.

One of the stories that Mrs. M told me about in our conversation was about a young freshman cut from the baseball team who hung around musical rehearsals, watching and listening to the upperclassmen perform. That freshman,

Zach Lahey (SFS '96), discovered a love of musical theater. So much so that he studied Musical Theater at Ohio Northern University and pursued a career in New York City. Today, he lives and works in Toledo where he owns Manhattan's Pub 'n Cheer. Years later, when Mrs. M was putting on *Guys and Dolls* at the Toledo Rep, she reunited with Zach when he starred as Sky Masterson. Incredibly, Sam Botek was also a part of that production, reprising the role of Nicely-Nicely Johnson he played in 1970, and even doing the original Mr. A choreography.

Some aren't paid for their gifts, but they are still actively involved in theater and music. Those who are in the greater Toledo area may have seen many SFS musical alumni in any one of The Crosswell's recent productions, including Joe Dennehy (SFS '91), myself ('01), Brittanie Kuhr (NDA '09), Derek Kastner (SFS '14), Will Dupuis (SFS '17) and even current director, D. Ward Ensign. When John Kern (SFS '95) joined stage crew his senior year, it was his first experience as a part of a production. But it gave him the confidence to audition for shows for the Toledo Rep the following summer. A decade later, in 2006, new to the Indianapolis area, lonely and looking to make friends, he joined a local theater production. He credits the 25+ productions since to his experiences on stage crew at SFS and the friendships forged in high school. Katie Hamilton Munger (NDA '98) directs the community theater summer musical in her town. Leigh Sorge Beining (NDA '99) performed with the Toledo Opera Chorus for 13 years, while in college and until pregnant with her second child, and called it "an awesome experience and opportunity to stay involved with theater as a hobby after high school."

For Kevin Tennant (SFS '00), working on a St. Francis show would be the first and last time that he would work on a musical. "I was never involved in any other musicals other than SFS, but for me, it was magical in every way possible. I looked forward to the musical every year, like it was Christmas." But Kevin keeps the lessons he learned from the musical alive in his heart on a daily basis. "The majority of the stuff I learned working the musicals have transferred over to what I am doing now in my career...I can literally look back and be so grateful for the experience I was so fortunate to have and realize how important that was in the big picture to now."

Whether alumni of the St. Francis musicals ever took to the

stage again, many of them look back fondly and acknowledge the profound impact that the St. Francis musical has had on their life. A familiar face around the St. Francis hallways, Fr. Joe Newman, OSFS (SFS '03) once performed as a part of the musical. "I cannot separate my experience in the musical from my experience at SFS. My musical experience taught me to empathize with the audience. I use that lesson as a priest." For anyone who has ever seen a homily by Fr. Newman, he uses a variety of tools, including the scientific and theatrical, to elevate his message and connect with his congregation.

Dr. Michael DeBacker (SFS '87) credits his involvement in musical theater and dance with helping him get into medical school. "A member of the selection committee [for medical school] was asking me numerous questions in a thick Russian accent about my involvement in the arts, and what value I thought it would have in the career path I was choosing," Dr. DeBacker recalls. "I answered something to the effect that, although I was never a very talented performer, when I see a piece of theater, dance, music, or any piece of art, I can appreciate the hard work and sacrifice it has taken to create this beauty." It turns out this professor was a former dancer with the Bolshoi. Dr. DeBacker did musicals with multiple siblings, Gretchen (NDA '88), Jen-

of Wade Kapszukiewicz (SFS '90). Later, when he decided to run for office, he reached out to his friend from the St. Francis musicals, Gretchen, to run his campaign.

Today, Mayor Kapszukiewicz is the first St. Francis graduate to serve as the Mayor of Toledo, and Ms. DeBacker transitioned from running a mayoral campaign to working with the mayor as legislative director. I met with Mayor Kapszukiewicz and Ms. DeBacker, and we enjoyed poring over old programs and sharing stories from their musical days together. Like how Mayor Kapszukiewicz's musical dance partner, Emily Weglian Zoeller, would someday introduce him to her sister, Sarah, and that they would be married someday in a very "It's A Wonderful Life" meeting. Ms. DeBacker pointed out that it was Mayor Kapszukiewicz's experiences in musicals that has helped shape who he is, personally and professionally. "That experience is a really profound thing that has contributed to his willingness to do things as mayor that I don't think a lot of other people are willing to do, to dress up and do goofy things and be an adamant supporter of the arts."

Fun fact: In 2018, Mayor Kapszukiewicz became the first Toledo Mayor to play the honorific role as Mother Ginger in Toledo Ballet's Nutcracker. (A role that was also performed



nifer (NDA '89) and Liz (NDA '91). It was while in musicals that his sister Gretchen met a young Knight by the name

in 2016 by Rev. Ronald Olszewski, '62, OSFS) When Mayor Kapszukiewicz graduated from St. Francis, he traveled with D&D Dance Studios to perform at Walt Disney World, even dressing up like one of the three little pigs in a performance. His experiences with big character costumes soon proved to come in handy. One of his first experiences with public speaking and confidence came from his work as Muddy, the mascot for the Mud Hens, shortly after graduating from St. Francis. In an interesting coincidence, another St. Francis musical alumni, Tyler Clark (SFS '10), also served as Muddy the Mud Hen as part of a summer internship. Perhaps in a

few years St. Francis will have another alumni follow the path from the musicals to Muddy to the Mayor's office.

Judge Gene Zmuda graduated from St. Francis in 1977 and was in three musicals, including Professor Higgins in *My Fair Lady* and *Curly* in *Oklahoma!* He was encouraged by a friend to try out, struck by the talents of fellow Knights such as Tom Dreese (SFS '75) Tim Korhumel (SFS '75) and Jim Murtagh (SFS '76), who were "boffo every time they performed." He credits the musical with starting a path of self-discovery. "More than anything," Judge Zmuda recalls, "it helped me find who I was and the gift that God gave me to express myself."

Judge Zmuda used the lessons of confidence and self-expression to perform to the best of his ability as a lawyer and ultimately as a judge. While he doesn't perform as much anymore, he still loves to see musicals as opportunities to move and to elevate his spirit. "Theater helps us to find part of ourselves that becomes expression, and grow as a consequence of that." As his schedule permits, Judge Zmuda has continued to use his theatrical talents over the years. He has directed and performed in the Gridiron Show, a performance event hosted each year by the Toledo Jr. Bar association at the Valentine Theatre.



torch that kept it lit. "I think the fire started with those who came to see it," shares Barb Murtagh. While that first cast had the spark of something special on that stage, it was the next generation in the audience that caught fire with the excitement of someday having their chance, as long as there are young men and women in the audience that fall in love with the theater. Joe Dennehy (SFS '91) saw his sister, Audra (NDA '86), perform with Ian Knauer, and he knew that St. Francis was where he wanted go. "I saw

it with my parents and told my Dad, 'whatever school did that is where I want to go.' Funny, most choose SFS for sports or education. But me? The musical."

Everyone that I spoke to had their own reasons for doing the musicals; to make friends and socialize, to get an art credit, or a friend dragged them along and they ended up loving it. More often than not, however, it was because they saw a family member or family friend or neighbor performing when they were young and they wanted to follow suit. I was struck by how many people were inspired to join the musical because of a production they saw. It was funny and poignant, because it was clear there was no way for those in the production to truly recognize the impact they were having on their audience. They are too busy making sure the set doesn't fall down or they get the right dance steps or playing the right notes. They often have no idea who is watching, what member of the next generation is watching from the audience and falling in love with theater. It may have been a spark started by Mr. A in 1970 that got it started, but it was the passing of the

Kessler noted that being on stage as a professional is quite the same as at St. Francis. "As a professional, that magic is not there in the same way. The magic was finding the right people and learning the right words and hoping that it all comes together in the end. Gloria instilled that idea in us: it's got to be magical. But it's on me to keep that magic alive." Gloria continues to advocate for the magic of musical theater today. When I asked her what was the most important lesson to take away from the shows, she didn't hesitate. "I really believe in the magic of theater. Teaching students to go out there and make magic."

The Value of A Musical Theater Program

There are 588 students enrolled at St. Francis de Sales High School this year. About 10% participate each year in

the musical, whether on stage, behind the scenes on crew, or in the pit. This year, 36 Knights auditioned to be a part of the cast, and the crew meeting hosted more than 25 interested students. I asked leaders of the school, Fr. Rose, Fr. Olszewski, and Fr. Newman, what they thought the

aspect of the production. It is really special."

THE NEXT CHAPTER

This year not only marks the end of 50 years of musical tradition, but the beginning of a new chapter of leadership. While Karen, Mr. Collier, and the Skibinskis continue to lend their talents to our production, they are joined by a new-ish face with Mr. Ward Ensign as director. I say "new-ish" because Ensign has a long history with St. Francis, having worked as director of Campus Ministry in the mid-90s. Today, he works at St. Francis as a counselor. But his experiences with the St. Francis musicals go back even farther. "I remember my first St. Francis musical," Ensign recalls. "I came to support a friend of mine from NDA who was in 42nd Street in 1989. No offense to my previous directors at Clay High School and ToDAY Productions, but I was stunned at how amazing the show was. My jaw must have been on the floor the whole time! I've seen sev-

eral shows since then and I believe it has always been one of the top high school productions in the region." Ensign is excited to take on this challenge, but recognizes it won't be like a typical theatrical production. "Directing theatre at a high school is not just being a creative director. It's being a producer, scheduler, manager, etc." More than the logistical challenges, it will be on Ensign to carry on the traditions of the St. Francis musical and pass those on to the new crop of students this year. "Traditions are great. When, for example, current students know and sing songs from shows that were perhaps done 20 years ago but have been passed down from cast to cast, there is something magical about that. They are connecting with their brothers and sisters from the past who began the tradition all those years ago. There's something very special about that."

Everyone has advice for the new director on what it means to be a part of a St. Francis musical. One current student pointed toward the traditions as a big part of the show, that "continuing traditions keeps bringing people back." This



value of participating in a musical production was. "The arts in general make us more human," noted Father Olszewski. Fr. Newman noted the power of music and theater to change hearts and minds. "I think it's hard for students in the arts to believe that their work participates in the salvation of the world," shares Father Joe. "That's a big idea, but think of the countless members of the cast, crew, and audience who were just a little bit transformed because of the musical. A little more forgiving, a little more merciful, a little more courageous, joyful, gentle, or strong." Through the musical, students are able to learn a powerful lesson. "You can accomplish so much together than you cannot accomplish alone," points out Father O. Father Rose sees this team effort in play, not just with students. "What has surprised me, is the unbelievable quality of each production. The students are so very talented, and work so hard all year round to hone their craft, it really shows. But beyond the student talent, the absolute dedication of parents and alumni, who work on sets and costumes, and every

was echoed by alumni like Kevin Tennant, who noted that “the traditions were high level and super important to the shows successes each and every year.” Mrs. M encouraged Mr. Ensign to “listen” and to “share the magic with all the students involved.” More than anything, Mr. Ensign recognizes the value and potential of the program and the importance of the traditions. As Father Olszewski notes, “Traditions give us our roots, our foundations. Good traditions elevate us to reach, and go beyond.” It may only be his first year, but already Mr. Ensign is bringing a balance of fresh perspective and deep respect for the history of the musicals. It is exciting to imagine what the next chapter will hold.

The shows are no longer performed at Start High School. Room 100, the site of countless dance rehearsals, was transformed into a new resource center, and students today practice in the wrestling room. The girls from McAuley High school no longer compete for leads. Members of the religious are not as common as they were on the production staff, when Sr. Marie Roman was the Music Director ('74-'84), Brother Richard Eberle was the Technical Director ('74-'78), or Brother Dorazio was the vocal director ('72). But the traditions continue, though the form changes. Mrs. Moulopolous is back in Toledo and would love to get a cup of coffee with you. Elementary students continue to see the show, and dream of a time that they will take the stage. Just as Jim McGowan (SFS '74) watched Tim Brophy, how Joe Dennehy watched Ian Knauer, or how Jeff Kerscher (SFS '04) watched Dave Hemmert (SFS '00). I was flattered to learn that Pete Blank (SFS '05) came to the shows to see me, and I'm certain that subsequent generations were inspired by Blank's Beast to follow in his footsteps.

The St. Francis musical continues to find great success, onstage and off, for the past half century. It begins with a staff of talented and dedicated people. Whether the bonding is through the hard work and shared sweat that is left on the dance floor, as Karen believes, or whether it is the “magic” of everything coming together, as it did in that first musical in 1970, the bonding is intangible and undeniable. The bonds of friendship are formed, as a group of students with diverse talents and backgrounds are united by a common goal. Over the course of many months, they learn to work together, trust each other, and create something magical on stage. It brings together students from all

backgrounds, whether athletes or academics, extroverts or wall flowers. Sam Boteck, Jeff Wawrzyniak (SFS '85), and Thomas Joseph (SFS '05) were all stars on the football field as well as leads in the musical. Whether on the field or on the stage, students strive for excellence in their performance. If nothing else, that tradition of excellence and passing that spark of passion on to the next generation will inevitably lead to 50 more years of unforgettable St. Francis musical productions.

Under the direction of this talented staff, a St. Francis musical is first and foremost a theatrical production, a learning experience for students who wish to tap into their creativity. Before the curtain rises, however, it has transformed into something greater. These are not just a group of people - cast, crew, orchestra - coming together to put on a show. The students are friends, with unforgettable memories and undeniable bonds that will last for decades. The staff are not merely professionals; they are mentors, role models. They are teachers. They share with their students the love and passion for theater and art. In turn, the students share that love and passion with their audience, inspiring the next generation that will carry the St. Francis musical tradition into the next 50 years.

A sincere thank-you to all those who contributed their memories, reflections, and photos in the course of preparing this article. The phone calls, meetings, and social media postings created a joyful journey for me through 50 years of experiences of musical magic. Understandably, not all 50 years of experiences could possibly be done justice in a few short pages. I appreciate your time and efforts, and I hope that this walk down memory lane can continue as we gather together and celebrate at the 50th Anniversary Gala in April.