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Christ the King: A Recession Success Story

What A Difference A Year Makes: A Groundbreaking School's 1st Year Draws to a Close

CHICAGO - JUNE 20, 2009: *Last Day of the First Year of School*-- Growing up in a gritty arena of high-crime, violence and the ravages of a cruel economy, teens from Chicago's West Side face terrible odds. Meet a dedicated group of young people who are working hard to beat those odds: Christ the King Jesuit High School's Class of 2012, 100 freshmen members of a college preparatory school which provides a virtually free education for talented, but poor students.

These young people live in a community that has only 7,000 seats at local high schools for the 14,000 high-school-aged youth in the area, and where less than half of students finish high school, and of those, only 38% go on to two and four year colleges. In a world where we are always looking for good news, this inaugural freshman class is proving that with the commitment of community leaders, staff, and their parents, anything is possible.

Christ the King opened in August 2008 and is the first new Catholic high school in the Austin neighborhood in 85 years. When they look back on the early days of Christ The King as a start-up, school leaders will most likely remember the onslaught of naysayers who laughed at them and said "not now, not in this economy."

"The economy makes the pain here a lot worse," says vice chairman of the board Joseph Nemmers, a retired executive vice-president for Abbott Labs. "But the efforts of people who have stepped up in these hard times to give and help has been amazing to watch. There is no right time. We believe these kids need the school now more than ever, and that is what this is all about."

Indeed, a sluggish economy hasn't deterred the visionaries who are committed to giving teens a chance to change the direction of their lives. At Christ the King, supporters are not taking this recession lying down:

Here are 10 ways Christ the King is making a difference – in the middle of a recession:

1. Along with Mayor Daley and Cardinal George, broke ground on the new 25-classroom, 100,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art school building at 5088 W. Jackson Blvd. slated to be opened late in the fall of 2009 and eventually house 600+ students.
2. Welcomed more than 100 freshmen – the inaugural class of 2012, on August 25, 2008.
3. Opened the first Catholic high school on Chicago's West Side in 85 years.
4. Became the 20th Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in the country, bringing the total network enrollment to 3,000 students nationwide, with a 98 percent success rate at sending graduates to college.
5. Raised \$19 million of the \$33 million capital campaign.
6. Provided a sanctuary for safe learning and professional growth in a pocket of danger and despair.
7. Provided a rigorous, quality, college-prep education to 100-plus students; toured Notre Dame, Northern Illinois and colleges throughout the Midwest.
8. Created employment opportunities: in addition to the students who filled 25 full-time jobs at law firms, hospitals, financial institutions and businesses throughout Chicago, CtK provided 48 new jobs to Austin community residents through a comprehensive local employment program.
9. Established several community service projects between teens and the area's homeless, including food collections, and Saturday morning "Dignity Breakfasts," feeding more than 200 homeless at Basilica of Our Lady of Sorrows Parish, 3121 W. Jackson Blvd., Chicago
10. Made central in the lives of more than 100 teenagers, 25 staff and hundreds of volunteers the salient characteristics of the Jesuit School "Grad at Grad" mission. This mission sets forth goals and characteristics of graduates and the people who work with them: religious; intellectually competent; open to growth; loving; committed to justice and seasoned and responsible workers.

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