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St. Michael's celebrates School of Distinction award

BY REBECCA JONES • OBSERVER STAFF WRITER • APRIL 27, 2008

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The students of St. Mike's School don't want to brag, but the Gaels really rule.

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So say lyrics of a special song written by sixth-grade teacher Louise Hopping and a special award that the entire school community has been working toward since 2006.

On Friday, St. Michael School was awarded with the School of Distinction Award from the Michigan Association of Non-public Schools.

The award was created in 1985 to recognize exemplary schools that exceed standards through the accreditation process. St. Michael is the first elementary in southeast Michigan and the first school in Archdiocese of Detroit to receive the honor.

As footage of the school's living wax museum, presidents leaders and first ladies puppet show and drama club's presentation of High School Musical and Oklahoma were projected on the gym wall Principal Sister Carolyn Ratkowski

congratulated the school's more than 800 students, staff and teachers.

"We have worked so hard," she said. "You have put all your efforts into making this a No. 1 school of distinction. So congratulations."

The school, which opened in 1941, has been accredited through MANS since 1992, and decided to pursue the next step, distinction, in 2006. Its school improvement goals included strengthening math and language arts curriculum, instituting professional learning communities so teachers can collaborate on ideas, and integrating technology into the classroom.

"We have achieved those goals," Sister Ratkowski said.

Fifth-grade science and religion teacher Janet Salley led the School of Distinction Award committee.

At the assembly, eighth-grader and student council vice president Josh Palmer read a poem about the importance of goals. Students gave pink roses to staff members and Hopping, the hallway minstrel, strummed her new song on guitar for the student body to sing along.

Presenting the plaque was Brian Broderick, executive director of MANS, a 1980 graduate of St. Michael.

The work will continue. "You don't stop when you have a plaque on the wall," said Sister Mary Gehringer, superintendent of schools in the archdiocese. "You continue to work as a community to provide quality education for all the students."

The school has decide to tack on two extra weeks this year, to celebrate, said the Rev. Bill Tindall, pastor at St. Mike's. "I was just teasing," he said, after the students feigned a protest at the joke he's used before. In fact, everyone gets a day off, Friday, May 23, making the Memorial Day weekend even longer, he said. Tindall also reminded students that as they grow older, they will appreciate their time at St. Mike's.

"It's always going to be your home," he said.



St. Michael's principal Sister Carolyn Ratkowski receives the School of Distinction Award from Brian Broderick, executive director of the Michigan Association of Non-Public Schools. (Tom Hoffmeyer | Staff Photographer)



Kindergarten teacher Betsy Gabrish receives a rose, as did the rest of the staff members, in recognition of their efforts in helping St. Michael's School earn its School of Distinction Award. (Tom Hoffmeyer | Staff Photographer)

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