



# GESU SCHOOL

Educational Excellence in North Philadelphia in the Jesuit and IHM Traditions

## “We All Stand on Somebody’s Shoulders”

### NEW GESU SPEAKER SERIES EXPOSES STUDENTS TO WORLD BEYOND NORTH PHILADELPHIA

Inspiration, life direction, and career exposure are just a few of the benefits Gesu’s 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders reap from the new Gesu Speaker Series spearheaded by President and CEO Chris Beck. The series, which opened with Mayor Michael Nutter in the fall, highlights talented and accomplished African Americans from a variety of backgrounds and professions. Speakers have included Lisa Thomas-Laury, T.V. reporter and news anchor for ABC; Linda Bari, presidential campaign volunteer for Barack Obama; Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, widely published professional photographer and widow of civil rights advocate and tennis great Arthur Ashe; and Claire Lomax, General Counsel of The Lomax Companies and CEO of the Lomax Family Foundation. Scheduled for the spring are alumnus Daryl Shore, as well as a return visit from Mayor Nutter, who will close the series. **Despite their diverse backgrounds, the speaker’s unifying message has been unmistakable: EDUCATION IS KEY.**

### UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY 6, 2009

Gesu’s Gala: Reach Out and Touch & the presentation of the Gesu Spirit Medal to Aline & Al Martinelli and Sue & Bill Shea

MAY 30, 2009

Alumni Reunion, Classes 2001-2008

JUNE 9, 2009

8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation

Speaker: Hon. Michael A. Nutter

Visit [www.GesuSchool.org/announcements.htm](http://www.GesuSchool.org/announcements.htm) or call 215-763-9077 for more info.



Mayor Nutter opened Gesu’s Speaker Series in the fall. The students’ enormous volume of questions prompted the promise of a return visit in the spring. The mayor also committed to speaking at this year’s 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation on June 9<sup>th</sup>.



Acclaimed photographer Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe helps 3<sup>rd</sup> grader Anaya identify a photographic image in a lesson on photography and “seeing.” Her talk, which took place on February 6<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of the death of her husband Arthur Ashe, emphasized the importance of recognizing the shoulders on which we all stand. Photo ©Christine S. Beck

### DISTINGUISHED PHOTOGRAPHER JEANNE MOUTOUSSAMY-ASHE TALKS WITH GESU STUDENTS ABOUT THE LEGACY OF HER LATE HUSBAND ARTHUR ASHE TO MARK BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

It may be hard to imagine, but many of today’s youngsters who have grown up seeing the Williams sisters dominate international tennis have never heard of Arthur Ashe – an unparalleled role model in life and a trailblazer who paved the way for future generations of African American athletes. Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe, an accomplished professional in her own right, spent a day with Gesu’s students to help educate them about the talents, achievements and altruistic endeavors of both her late husband and other well-known and less familiar African American leaders from all walks of life. “We all stand on somebody’s shoulders,” Moutoussamy-Ashe explained to the students.

Moutoussamy-Ashe’s visit highlighted the new book *Breaking Barriers*, a compilation of

material culled from the Aetna Foundation’s well-known annual African American History Calendar. The book celebrates African American accomplishments and presents significant African Americans as role models for the next generation. Activities to engage students with material from the book (dedicated in Ashe’s memory) have been developed through a partnership between the Aetna Foundation and the Arthur Ashe Learning Center. Gesu teacher Shirley Bright helped create the lesson plans for a *Breaking Barriers* companion curriculum, which was introduced during the first week of February at Gesu School and at middle schools in five other cities.

- Contributing writer **Lauren Somers**

## FROM THE PRESIDENT DEAR FRIENDS,

Difficult times require people – and organizations – to ask tough questions. Are we making the right choices? What are all the options? In the case of nonprofits, how can we best use our resources to fulfill our mission successfully?

As you see in this newsletter, many positive things are happening within our walls – and within our children! We remain committed to giving the best possible education to the under-served children of North Philadelphia, and we try to practice the IHM mantra, “Every child can learn.”

Nevertheless, Gesu School is not immune from these challenging economic times. After a number of Finance Committee meetings with key trustees, I have already announced to our faculty and staff that there will be a salary freeze for fiscal 2009-2010. But there is more.

Because donations are down, we also gave serious consideration to reducing or eliminating a number of extremely important programs. Although we will monitor revenue and expenses more carefully than ever, we have made the decision to maintain all our programs, at least through June 30, 2010. Of course, we will try to reduce expenses as much as we can.

Recently, Sister Ellen and I attended an informative lecture by David Pink whose best-selling book is titled *A Whole New Mind: Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age*. One of his major themes



was this: **We need to prepare our children for their future, not our past.** Think about that!

At Gesu we believe strongly that art, music, computers and phys ed are not “fluff,” but rather as important as reading and math for developing the whole child. We will do our best to avoid the elimination of these programs, a common occurrence when schools have to cut budgets.

In addition, we are committed to finding a way to preserve our seven strong after-school and summer programs that are vital for our student’s enrichment, self-confidence and success. What could be more important than YET, a literacy program that works with primary grade children significantly below grade level to help them advance to grade level in reading?

We are extraordinarily grateful for your belief in our mission and our children and for your loyal support to ensure that Gesu Works! Moving forward, we need your help more than ever, and I hope we can count on your support.

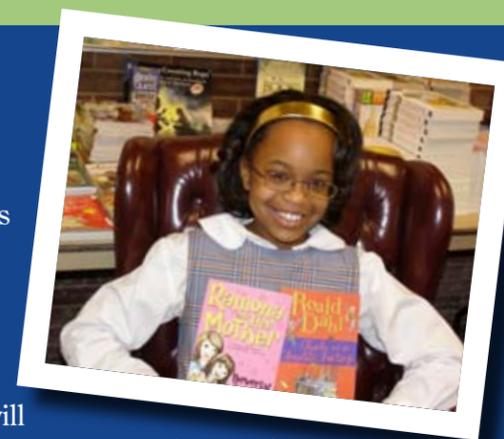
With thanks and blessings,

*Christine S. Beck*  
President and CEO

## BOOK DRIVE SURPASSES HOPES

Countless angels donated nearly 4,000 books to Gesu School through the Devon Barnes & Noble’s holiday book drive, coordinated by: Gesu Volunteers Pat Murphy and Barbara Hildenbrand; the Conestoga High School Key Club; and Barnes & Noble’s Community Relations Manager Maureen Montecchio and Store Manager Brad Wary.

Throughout the year, each of Gesu’s 460 students will receive books to celebrate special holidays and occasions. So far, the gifts have delighted the children on Christmas, Inauguration Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. In addition to encouraging book donations, the Barnes & Noble employees donated their own time to staff a gift wrap station that raised over \$333 for the school to purchase additional books. Thank you to Barnes & Noble and to the many of you who contributed to the drive!



## THREE CHEERS!

**Ashton Miller '04** was elected President of his freshman class at Princeton University... **Ashley Tinsley '06**, a junior at Springside, was awarded the Vera Logan Essay Scholarship from Thankful Baptist Church to be used for college books... Teachers **Chris Harris**, **Janet Maldonado**, and **Sarah Weir**, and trustee **Scott Miller** all recently welcomed new babies to their respective families... Gesu’s new **Youngest Scholars Program**, spearheaded by trustee **John DiIulio, Jr., Ph.D.** and his wife **Rosalee DiIulio** and coordinated by teacher **Colleen Comey**, was featured in the fall issue of *Momentum* magazine. Copies of the article are available through the Development Office... 8<sup>th</sup> grader **Ernie Ross** received a full scholarship from North Carolina Outward Bound to attend a 2 week wilderness course in July... And thanks to publicist and friend **Charlene Guyer** and writer **Lauren Somers**, Gesu’s story is well known throughout the region.

## CHILDREN’S SCHOLARSHIP FUND PHILADELPHIA HELPS PARENTS AFFORD TUITION

This year, 37 children received a total of \$28,932 from the Children’s Scholarship Fund towards their Gesu tuition. CSF is the largest provider of Kindergarten - 8<sup>th</sup> grade scholarship money in Pennsylvania and has served over 5,800 children. Its mission is to provide educational alternatives to low-income Philadelphia families, who use their CSF scholarship awards at the schools of their choice. Gesu is honored to be the chosen educational alternative for our Children’s Scholarship Fund students.

## “WAG TALES” WOVES YET STUDENTS

Each Tuesday afternoon, several unusual volunteers patter down the hallway to the Youth Education for Tomorrow (YET) afterschool literacy program. The volunteers listen attentively as the students read stories out loud to sharpen their reading skills. While “woof” and “ruff” are the volunteers’ only comments, their friendly demeanor and unconditional acceptance delight the struggling readers and boost their confidence.



*Second grader Zabriya reads to dog Lacey and Lacey’s owner Dr. Amy Brenner.*

Who are these amazing volunteers? They are two West Highland Terriers, a Standard Poodle, a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, and a Havanese, accompanied by their owners and equally dedicated volunteers Amy Brenner, Sarah Brenner, Jesse Brenner, Edna Adelberg, and Libby Sherry. “Wag Tales,” as the group calls itself, began coming to Gesu’s YET program after veterinarian Amy Brenner heard about a Chicago-based literacy program for children and dogs called Sit-Stay-Read. Brenner was further encouraged by the research indicating that students who read to dogs show significant improvements in their literacy skills.

This year fifty 1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> graders benefit from the YET program coordinated by teacher Val Haley. YET targets students who are below reading level with one-on-one reading assistance four days a week. The program is possible thanks to a generous grant from the Hamilton Family Foundation, as well as a growing army of volunteers and teachers who read with the children.

## NEW “YOUNG FRIENDS OF GESU SCHOOL” GROUP GAINS MOMENTUM

Over 50 young professionals from the Philadelphia region gathered at the Pub & Kitchen in February for the 3<sup>rd</sup> happy hour sponsored by the Young Friends of Gesu School. Thanks to the efforts of planning committee members Paul Chryssikos, Mary Petroni, Steve Shea, Heather Tashman, Julia Rafferty, and Mike Wham, the group has already raised \$1,945 towards their goal of providing tuition for one child this year. Next year they hope to raise the full cost of one child’s Gesu education, \$5,800, through regular fund-raising happy hours and other events throughout the city. For more info about the Young Friends of Gesu School, visit [www.GesuSchool.org/young\\_friends.htm](http://www.GesuSchool.org/young_friends.htm).



*Eighth grader Ernie is dressed to impress for the inaugural ceremony. Gesu's faculty works hard to make education relevant to today's world.*

## STUDENTS RIVETED BY PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION, MARK OCCASION WITH CELEBRATION OF THEIR OWN

"Obama! Obama!" echoed throughout the student body as our nation's first African American President appeared on the big screen erected in Gesu's Sherrerd Gymnasium. The live broadcast of the historic event provided a real-time lesson in civics and government for Gesu's 460 students, who came to school in dress attire for the celebration. Following the broadcast, the students enjoyed their own Inaugural Ball to commemorate the occasion. "Our goal is to make this day a day they will always remember," stated Principal Sr. Ellen Convey, IHM.

Thanks to Senator Bob Casey, Jr., 5<sup>th</sup> grade boys' teacher Chris Harris and his son Devon, an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Gesu, received tickets to attend the inauguration in person. When asked about the experience, Mr. Harris described it as "life changing." Senator Casey's generous support of Gesu School began after college, when he taught at Gesu as a Jesuit Volunteer in the 80's.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**123** - the number of students with scholarships through the Sponsor-A-Child Program this year.

**98.5** - the percentage of Gesu families who require some form of tuition assistance. (Stated tuition is \$2010 per year). Last year, tuition covered only 12% of the school's expenses.

**70** - the percentage of Gesu students who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program.

**220** - the number of Gesu students receiving EITC (PA Earned Income Tax Credit) scholarship money this year, thanks to the generous business owners who support the program.

**460** - the number of students growing towards their full potential at Gesu School, thanks to your generosity.

## NOW ONLINE AT [www.GesuSchool.org](http://www.GesuSchool.org)

### GALA INFORMATION

Performer bios and additional Gala ticket options are now available online. This is a party you don't want to miss! And it's all for a good cause!

### SYMPOSIUM RECAP

The transcript, photos, and more from the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium on Inner-City Education and Phillies Rally are now available online.

### EMAIL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Do you want to receive periodic emails from Gesu with news and event info, such as announcements for the Symposium, Dr. Seuss Day, and more? Email us at [information@GesuSchool.org](mailto:information@GesuSchool.org) to sign up!

## NEW INITIATIVE PROMOTES WISE HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION FOR GESU'S INNER-CITY STUDENTS

Navigating the complex process of selecting and applying to an appropriate high school can be daunting for students with ample resources at hand, let alone for our students in North Philadelphia. But help has arrived! Starting this year, Gesu's 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders are receiving additional assistance with the high school selection and admissions process through the help of volunteers Mary Klein, a retired school counselor from the Philadelphia Public School District, and Kristin Hayes, a retired attorney. The two volunteers have worked in cooperation with the students' parents and with M.M. O'Neill and Sr. Pat McGrenra in Gesu's counseling office to give Gesu's students the best possible edge on the high school selection process.

### HIGH SCHOOL ACCEPTANCES TO DATE:

Academy of the New Church	Mount Saint Joseph Academy
Bishop McDevitt	New Media Charter
Cardinal Dougherty	North Catholic
Charter H.S. for Architecture & Design	Roman Catholic
Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA)	Saint Joseph's Prep*
J.W. Hallahan	ShIPLEY School
Mercy Vocational	Springside School
Merion Mercy Academy	West Catholic

\* All three Gesu students participating in the Saint Joseph's Prep Buddy Program qualified for admission and received full tuition scholarships. An additional student received conditional admission.



*Dh'Myni, Kindergarten, approaches Santa with awe. Members of Jesuit parish Old Saint Joseph's brought Christmas magic to Gesu with gifts of books, hats and gloves for the students in pre-K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.*



*7<sup>th</sup> graders perform an environmental awareness play in science class. Gesu continues to make strides towards its Middle States goal of strengthening the science curriculum through the LabLearner program and other science initiatives.*

*(Right) Lotty Washington speaks to the students about the role of quilt codes in the Underground Railroad. The boys were especially engaged by the action-packed history lesson. Some classes even made their own coded quilts with Ms. Washington's help.*



## ATHLETIC CORNER

**Basketball: Girls Varsity** won the CYO Region 8 Championship and advanced to the Final Four in the Archdiocesan CYO Tournament.

**Boys Varsity** lost the CYO Region 8 Championship in a toughly contested game, but advanced to the Final Four in the Archdiocesan CYO Tournament. **Boys JV** also put forth a respectable season. But possibly the biggest win is the overall improvement in discipline the players have shown in school since the beginning of the season, which highlights the role of sports in students' social and moral development.

**Students Run Philly Style:** This year, 10 Gesu students have signed up for the citywide running program that helps students train for the

Philadelphia Half Marathon. The students and coaches also compete in the Broad Street Run and other local races. Congratulations to Rachael Baxter and coach Erica Asaka, who capped last year's Students Run season with the Rothman Institute 8K race held in conjunction with the Philadelphia Marathon.

**Track:** Over 71 students have turned out for this year's track season. Coach Leaf could still use volunteers to help on Saturdays or after school. Call the school office at 215-763-3660 for more information.

**Did you know, over 90% of Gesu's graduates complete high school in four years, a rate well above the citywide average of 51%?**

Gesu School admits students from the six zip codes closest to the school on a first-come, first-served basis. There are no selective academic admissions to attend Gesu.

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*Students in Ms. Asta's Kindergarten class refuel with a snack during Terra Nova standardized testing. Signs stating "I am smart!" boost the students' confidence. Gesu's students, who often enter Gesu behind grade level, typically struggle with standardized testing. Photo ©Christine S. Beck*



*Pre-K and Kindergarten parents listen attentively to the guest speaker at the parent breakfast and workshop sponsored by the counseling office. A Gesu education touches the entire family!*



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*Address correction requested*



*Najeen, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, enjoys a sewing class in the Gesu Extra Mile (G.E.M.) afterschool program. G.E.M. offers 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders numerous options to broaden their horizons. Classes have included subjects such as Latin, yoga, Spanish, and cooking.*



## CHARITY NAVIGATOR RECOGNIZES GESU'S SOUND FISCAL MANAGEMENT, AWARDS GESU COVETED 4-STAR RATING FOR 3<sup>RD</sup> CONSECUTIVE YEAR

"Only 10% of the charities we've rated have received at least 3 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating the Gesu School consistently executes its mission in a fiscally responsible way, and outperforms most other charities in America. This 'exceptional' designation from Charity Navigator differentiates Gesu School from its peers and demonstrates to the public it is worthy of their trust," wrote Ken Berger, Charity Navigator's President & CEO, in a letter to the school. Learn more at [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org).

Remember, our United Way Donor Choice Number is 7408 (Gesu Community Service Project).

Does this newsletter look expensive to you?  
**Did you know it only cost \$0.51 to print?**

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