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ECHOES

Welcome to Blue Echoes, our annual finance edition.

In this issue you'll read about how Smithville Christian High School invests in research and development, in our students, in our new relationship with Beacon Christian School and in our future. You'll also find out how our spring fundraising campaign blesses families, how some dedicated volunteers have blessed our school for decades and much, much more.

Is the Blue Echoes dull?

No way. Find out how our financial stewardship is a way in which we are a community that Belongs, Believes and Succeeds.

Portfolios Pay Off

BY MARLENE BERGSMAS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

One of the ways to measure the value of a Christian education is to ask the students themselves. And one of the ways students are able to assess the value of their experiences is through portfolios.

Similar to an investment portfolio, a student portfolio at Smithville Christian High School is a collection of valuable items that are expected to pay dividends.

Since 2007, Smithville Christian teachers have asked students in every subject area to select one item from each class that represents what they learned. Students often choose projects or

essays of which they are proud. Each student is then asked to fill out a single-sheet questionnaire about that item, which asks them why they chose it, what they learned from the work, how it helps them think about the future, how it helps them discover their gifts, and how it meets the program goals of the school.

These items are then filed away for safekeeping. Each student will end up with a portfolio of 30 or more items.

In May of the students' final year in high school, the portfolios come out again, and Portfolio Day is planned. Panels of teachers, parents and board members are assembled, refreshments and lunch are ordered, and each Grade 12 student is allocated a 15-minute time slot with a panel.

Students begin their sessions with a short speech, in which they introduce themselves and describe three of the items they included in their portfolios. They

Continued on page 2 ...



Photo Caption: Grade 12 student Ian Attema at Portfolio Day 2011. Members of the panel, from left: Cynthia Buist, Janet Zantingh, Wayne Schilstra and Jim Vanderlinde.

Continued from page 1.

explain why they chose the items, how the items meet the school's program goals and how the items helped the students grow. The remaining time is allocated to questions and comments from the panelists. Many of the panelists use the time to affirm and bless the students, and the session closes with prayer.

Many students say they are grateful for the chance to reflect on what they've accomplished in the four years of high school.

"It was nice to look back and remember what I'd done," said Madeleine Bonsma, class of 2009, who is currently at the University of Waterloo. "And it was nice to know these people were genuinely interested in what I had gotten from the experience."

Ryan Veldman, class of 2011, says he remembers being "irrationally ner-

vous" for his portfolio panel, especially because his father joined. Yet the process of sifting through the items he had selected brought back a flood of good memories: "my table from shop class, a really good math test, a script I wrote for a play."

Ryan, who is currently enrolled in Queen's University's Arts and Sciences program and who is living and studying at Herstmonceux Castle in East Sussex, England, also admits to being uncertain about the value of the exercise.

"I remember being slightly doubtful at first about if this was really an important thing to do. I assumed that I would just come up with a few words here and there and it would be over," he said. "But as I got closer to the time when I would present my three pieces of work I realized that there was so much more to it than just answering the questions

without putting any heart into it. And that's when my memories all came back: the first day of high school, waiting for the bus, just as nervous as my first day of grade school, my first exams, and then I looked ahead to where I was going. I was going not just to university – I was going abroad! That's what being at Smithville Christian had helped me do!

"It was a really good, reflective process," recalls Katie Monster, class of 2009, who is at Redeemer. "You don't necessarily appreciate it when you're in Grade 9 and you don't like it when you are doing it, but when you get to Grade 12 and you are applying to universities, it helps you to focus. It makes you think about what you enjoy doing."

Katelynn Folkerts, class of 2011, who is also at Queen's, says she had her doubts too.

Similar to an investment portfolio, a student portfolio at Smithville Christian High School is a collection of valuable items that are expected to pay dividends.

"I was a little skeptical at first but I am glad that we had to do it. It forced us to see the progress we've made over the years, and assured us that our teachers, our parents and the Smithville Christian community genuinely want us to succeed and are proud of us.

"I loved being able to go through work that I'd done over my four years of high school and see the progress I'd made," said Katelynn. It was hard to choose, "but I incorporated items that showed progress, or a learning experience, rather than accomplishment. There is only so much you can say about a stack of tests!"

Katelynn even enjoyed the panel.

"I found my interview extremely uplifting," she said. "At a time when you

know your life is really about to change, it is encouraging to have three adults who you have looked up to for four years tell you that you're ready, that you've done well at Smithville Christian and you're going to continue to do well when you leave. It showed me how strong our community is and how so many people are supporting us and want us to succeed as students and individuals."

Ryan agrees.

"I'll never forget that Smithville Christian showed me that I belong, helped me to believe, and proved to me that I could succeed!"

Excerpts from the program goals at Smithville Christian

- 1 Demonstrate Christian character and wisdom in order to
 - act with integrity, respect and honesty
 - promote justice and mercy
 - commit to further learning and growing
- 2 Identify his or her personal gifts and be ready to use them to
 - give leadership
 - promote justice and mercy in a hurting world
- serve obediently and boldly for the sake of God's kingdom
- 3 Understand how to build community
- 4 Communicate with clarity
- 5 Identify and wonder at God's handiwork in creation
- 6 Understand and form a biblical perspective on the forces that shape human culture
- 7 Image God with creativity
- 8 Exercise good stewardship.



SCHOOL DAYS

Above: Junior Boys basketball.
Below: World Vision 30-Hour Famine.



Who can afford Christian education?

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS



Outgoing Spring Fundraising campaign chair Sandra DeVisser, right, hands over campaign documents to incoming chair Lisa Scholman.

Every year, every dime raised through Smithville Christian High School's spring fundraising drive is allocated toward only one thing: bursaries.

That's a change from the old days, when the spring drive was used to reduce the cost of tuition for everyone.

Now, many families are paying the true cost of sending their children to this school, said administrator Ted Harris.

"We have learned we have to charge what it's worth," said Harris. "It makes the school financially healthier."

Some families are blessed with significant financial resources and don't need any help paying tuition, he said. Those families should pay the true cost.

But many other families ask for and receive assistance, and it is help that is gladly given, he said.

With the spring drive raising between \$110,000 and \$150,000 each year, dozens of families receive bursaries. Often

as many as one-third of the families who choose Smithville Christian are getting help, he said.

That's why it's important for people to continue supporting the spring drive, said Sandra DeVisser, outgoing drive chair.

In 2009, when the school changed to a true-cost tuition structure, some donors to the spring drive didn't like it, she said.

They wanted their donations to benefit all families, she said.

But donations still do benefit the entire community because the school is richer when more families can choose it for their children, she said.

"People need to know that we are all in this together," said DeVisser. "That we are making Christian education affordable for everyone."

So what's the answer to the question about who can afford Christian education?

Thanks to the annual spring drive and Smithville Christian's bursary program – almost everyone.

"It's incredible for me as an administrator to be able to sit down with many families and make it work," said Harris. "I seldom send anyone away."

If you want Christian education for your child, let's talk.

This year's Spring Drive March 26 to 30, 2012

We're all in this together.

Investing in Solar Power

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

Smithville Christian High School is pursuing the prospect of harvesting solar energy – as a way of walking the talk in stewardship of our planet and as a means of generating revenue to help our school bless Christian families.

The school has already obtained a Solar FIT contract with the Ontario Power Authority. On the basis of a cost analysis, the project has great promise to provide revenue to the school. The up-front costs are certainly significant, though the cost for panels has settled over the last few years. The fact that our school is currently without debt will help us greatly as we move this project forward. The return on our investment will give us opportunity to put the money paid out by our government to good use for the sake of a kingdom cause like Christian education. At 71.3 cents per kilowatt/hour over

the course of twenty years, the anticipated gross revenue will likely be \$120,000 per year; this is almost as much as the revenue generated in one of our Spring Drives (though certainly not a reason to stop doing them!).

When discussing the Solar FIT prospects with members of the public or school supporters, it is clear that there are varying perspectives on the program and our participation in it. Though I understand the reservations about government spending, there are a few reasons which have me well in favour of moving ahead full steam. First, this is our school's opportunity to participate in an initiative which moves our culture in the direction of better Earth-keeping. This will be a valuable learning opportunity for our students. Second, the contracts are being given out to many groups and organizations in our province; having one of them benefit the cause of Christian education is one way of participating in

a positive way with our culture. Third, it needs to be recognized that other major positive cultural shifts have warranted investment by governments to ensure that they moved forward. The movement toward solar power is a positive one, and the long-term benefits will outlast the start-up challenges.

I would like to express our profound gratitude to Donna Feddema, who is the school's point person on this project. Her incredible devotion to the future viability of Christian education has been an inspiration, even as her own children move beyond their Christian high school years.

So what's happening currently? The school is confirming weight-bearing specifications and awaiting adjustment to the local power infrastructure which will enable our contract to move forward. Please pray that the Lord will bless our efforts to be good stewards of our world and our school.

Administrator Ted Harris looks over blueprints of the school's roof. An engineer will determine if modifications will be required to bear the weight of proposed revenue-generating solar panels.

We'll Take Your Pennies

... and your nickels, your dimes, even your quarters.

BY BRENDA WAGTER, SMITHVILLE CHRISTIAN PARENT

When it comes to long-term fundraising, this group gets the job done.

Did you know there is a devoted group of supporters within the Smithville Christian community that has existed since the school first opened its doors in 1980 and that has raised money for the school every year? That's 31 years, and it's not been through selling plants, hosting a golf tournament, canvassing businesses or selling grocery vouchers. The supporters simply ask for your spare change and take the time to roll it.

Before Smithville Christian opened, ladies society groups existed in Hamilton and Niagara Christian Reformed Churches which raised funds through penny-rolling for the area's only Christian high school – Hamilton District Christian High. When Smithville Christian opened its doors for west Niagara families, the ladies societies of the area switched their penny-collecting efforts to the new school where they sent their children, and started rolling pennies and coins from their church members.

More than 30 years later, the penny-savers in the Dunnville area are still hard at work, collecting accumulated spare change every October and contributing it to the school. To their knowledge, they are the only one of the original ladies' society groups who have kept the collecting up. They used to collect twice

a year but switched to once a year because, as Mieke Eikelboom explains, "it's just not worth the gas nowadays to drive around and collect like it was 20 or 30 years ago." The ladies collect change mainly from members of Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Dunnville.

As we sat down and went over the records from the past 31 years, the amounts raised varied from \$1,300 to \$500. On average, Mieke estimates it's about \$700.

"When we switched to collecting once a year, the figures went down," Mieke said. People tend to forget about that little tin can that sits on top of the fridge, she said.

Mieke and long-time member Marie DeKlerk, have been collecting since the beginning, with Marie starting when her family was originally involved with HDCH – about 45 years ago. But the women have recently talked about stopping.

"You can't expect the young moms to take over," she says. "They are on the larger fundraising committees and many moms are working outside the home and don't have the time." Mieke said the federal government has discussed taking the penny out of circulation. "Maybe that would be a good time for our group to stop too," she says with a grin.



Mieke Eikelboom rolls coins from the boxes and cans filled by penny savers.

On behalf of the entire school community we extend our thanks to these ladies for their faithfulness. The quote on the original penny box says "Share the Cost" and they have taken it to heart. Thank you for sharing with us your vision of the big picture: if we all do our part we can make Christian education affordable for everyone.

Thanks to all who saved their pennies, with a special thanks to the dedicated volunteers who have been on the committee: Marie DeKlerk, Alice

Hessels, Willy Zantingh, Alice Westerveld, Mrs. Mulder, Helen Mans, Nell Korten, Ann Hoekstra, Agnes Keen, Regina Wagter and Mieke Eikelboom.

(Our apologies if anyone's name has been omitted.)

Thank you so much! We appreciate your hard work!



An original penny saver can.

Start Now, Pay Less Later

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

Parents who start saving for Christian education early are reaping the benefits of tax free savings.

For one Smithville couple, who didn't want to be identified, there was never any doubt about where their children would go to school. The husband graduated from Smithville Christian in the late 1980s and the wife graduated from Beacon Christian in the early 1990s.

Both had been blessed by their years of Christian education and both knew that's what they wanted for their own four children.

But when their first child was in Grade 1 at Covenant Christian School, the couple made a decision to make sure they could continue the blessing.

They worked with a financial planner to establish a tax free savings account and began making monthly contributions.

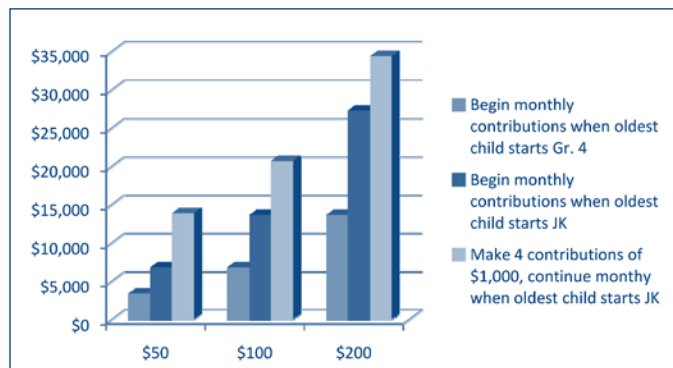
"It gets taken off every month and it's one of those things you don't even notice," she said.

It's a wise move, said Henry Koornneef, executive director of the Foundation for Niagara and Hamilton Christian Schools.

By starting early and making monthly contributions, the tax free earnings really add up, said Koornneef.

For example, parents who put aside the price of a cup of coffee a day each when their first child starts kindergarten, will have their first year of high school paid for by the time that child reaches Grade 9, said Koornneef, and that's using a conservative earnings estimate.

Couples who can double their contribution to \$200 a month and keep it going through high school, will end up with enough money to pay for four years of high school, with half of one year's tuition covered by tax free earnings – a gift. Starting when your child is born with a \$1,000 lump sum payment for each of four years results in a fund worth over \$34,000!



This chart shows how making regular contributions to a tax free savings account can add up. The savings amounts are calculated using 5% interest.

"A tax free savings account is an excellent way to do it," said Koornneef, "and it really works by starting early. The earlier you start, the better."

The Smithville couple says saving for Christian education in advance seemed natural.

"You save up for a new vehicle, or a new furnace, it's just kind of a given that you save for your kids' education," she said. Having served on a committee at the Niagara Association for Christian Education, she's become even more convinced of the value of Christian education.

Their example is serving as inspiration for others. They have friends whose children are also years away from high school, but they are planning ahead too.

"It just makes sense," said the mom, on her way to meet with their financial planner.

"If we are socking away money in RRSPs for our future, why not save for our kids' education?"

Our Investment in a Partnership with the Beacon Community

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

I am sure that supporters of Smithville have heard plenty about the partnership which has begun with the Beacon community as we seek to work together to bless our region with an excellent choice for Christian high school education. Establishing such partnerships takes effort on both sides. It is our desire as a school to make our supporters aware of exactly what we are doing to invest in what we hope will be a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship.

You may recall that when Beacon Secondary School closed last June, a plan was put together by the boards of Beacon Christian Schools and Smithville Christian High School. The Beacon board actively advocated for a transition from Beacon to Smithville Christian, while our board and administration put in place a transition bursary and transportation plan to make the transition much smoother. This paved the way for a 70% retention of students after Beacon closed their high school.

We are so pleased with the inaugural year of this partnership. Transferring students and families have spoken very highly of their experiences, and Smithville Christian High School is a healthier school as a result.

We have come to realize, however, that such investments are not a “one shot deal”. Year two of this partnership will also require some investment. This requires some planning and carries with it some dilemmas. Treating one partner el-

ementary school constituency different than another is not healthy in the long term, and yet assuming that we have built a relationship which will yield ongoing commitment after one year is short sighted. With these factors in mind, we have put the following in place for year two (2012-2013):

- The bus from Beacon to Smithville Christian will be funded by Smithville Christian High School for one more year.
- The transition bursary offered to families who pay tuition at both Beacon and Smithville Christian will be continued for one more year. While this bursary was set at \$4000 for the current year, it will be set at \$2000 for year two.
- It is the goal of the Smithville Christian High School board that these encouragements will be discontinued after the second year.

It is our intention that all would be aware of the investment we are making in the direction of making our high school the school of choice for Christians throughout our catchment area. This is done in an effort to equip as many young people as possible with an excellent education grounded in a Christian world and life view. Continue to pray that our school will bless many lives.

It's fun being debt-free but there's always need for renewal.

Following the amazingly successful Gateway Capital Campaign of 2006, Smithville Christian High School is blessed by being debt-free. But there are areas of the school that need renewal and there are exciting things that can enrich student learning, said principal Ted Harris. That's why the Finance Committee plans to launch a new Capital Campaign in 2013. Plans include a professionally-run campaign, with proceeds being used to improve the appearance and entrance of the school, upgrade washrooms, improve the stage, boost the endowment fund and enrich student learning.



*Smithville Christian teachers at a recent research and development session.
From left: Linda Booy-Korvemaker, Neale Robb, Marg Horvath and Bob Andree.*



From left: John van den Boogaard, Nicole Brouwer, David Wonder and Gord Park.

Investing in Instructional Excellence

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

Our school vigorously pursues ways to enable young people to do three things: belong, believe, and succeed. While we target all three simultaneously, the time has come in the life of our school where the third pillar will get more focus.

We certainly have a track record for helping students succeed; our students clearly find success at our school, and our data shows that the vast majority of our students are admitted to their first-choice scenarios for post-secondary education. Colleges and universities know that we send students who are ready to learn and know how to learn. Nevertheless, there are some students who do not succeed to the degree that we hope. In addition, the recent Cardus study on the results of private Christian education throughout North America and other indicators show us that instructional excellence will need increasing focus in the coming years.

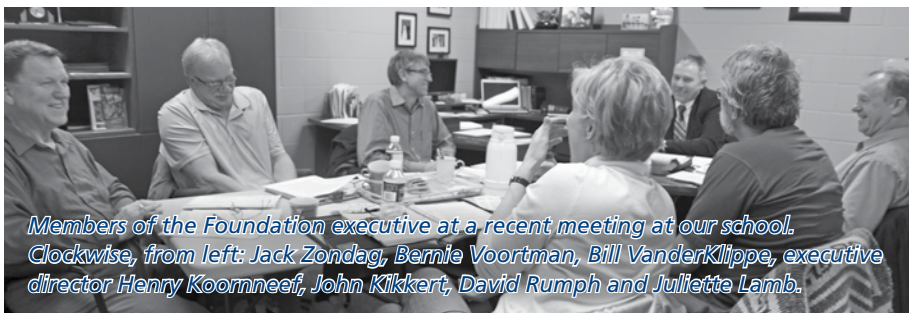
One of the key ways in which our school is pursuing instructional excellence is with the advent of R & D Fridays. Friday R & D (Research and Development) will alter the schedule for every Friday. The day will begin at 8:15 a.m. with a teach-

er R & D session. Student learning will begin at 9:30, classes will be shortened by three minutes, lunch will be a shortened nutrition break of 28 minutes, and the day will end at the normal time. All of this will allow for a greater investment in the area of teacher growth.

So why the big shift? Plenty of research has been conducted regarding the brain, the nature of learning, and how schools need to adjust to meet the needs of learners. Whereas schools changed little during the 20th century, they will undergo much change during the 21st century. Schools like ours are much more adept at adjusting to a changing educational climate; a smaller ship is much easier to steer. Steering will take work, however, and having our teachers spend time each week learning, discussing and practicing new approaches to education will help us greatly in our focus on instructional excellence.

So what kind of investment will this all take. First, it will require time on the part of our teachers; every week they will meet for focused learning time. In addition, they will need to invest time to test out and refine new approaches to lessons, units and courses. Second, the new model will require an investment of administrative time and leadership. The administrative team, consisting of myself and vice-principal of program and development, Will Lammers, will spend a significant part of each week gauging the needs of the instructional team and the program and planning for meaningful interaction each Friday. Third, this initiative will require modest increases in what we budget for professional development. Outside speakers and facilitators will be called upon occasionally to help us develop new skills, and teachers may at times need to visit other educators who are piloting methodologies we are investigating.

Will this be worth the investment? I am certain it will be. As Christian educators, we are stewards of a blessing. It is our prayer that God will find us faithful in pursuit of excellent Christian instruction so that many may be drawn to and blessed by what we offer. We ask for your continued support as we break into new territory as a school.



Members of the Foundation executive at a recent meeting at our school. Clockwise, from left: Jack Zondag, Bernie Voortman, Bill VanderKlippe, executive director Henry Koornneef, John Kikkert, David Rumph and Juliette Lamb.

SMITHVILLE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION*

Growing...again? Or better to be standing still?

Nearly 20 years ago there was a small group of people, including committed Smithville Christian High School supporters, who saw a need for Christian schools to come together and establish a foundation. Feeling the Lord's guidance, they believed it was time to develop a framework for long-term financial sustainability for Christian education.

Most of these founders did not see this as merely a one-time effort: getting a few of the local schools to formally work together under the auspices of a single foundation. While it seemed obvious to start with the five OACS schools in the Niagara area because of their proximity and established relationships for sports, professional development and busing, many of the founders saw this as only the starting point, and envisioned a day when more schools might ask to join.

Early planning, for what was to become the Niagara Christian Education Foundation in December of 1997, included the decision to incorporate federally rather than provincially. With a provincial corporation only 'persons' can be members, while an 'entity' such as a school, can be a member of a federal corporation.

This early decision to incorporate federally was significant in two ways. First, it meant our schools were the member

owners – which serves as a constant reminder that our foundation is accountable to its member schools. Conversely, as owners, the member schools have a direct responsibility to help it grow and flourish. Secondly, in 2008, when six OACS schools from the greater Hamilton area requested to join (rather than follow through on their plans to establish their own foundation), welcoming them as full members was accomplished through a simple By-law approval and a special resolution to change the foundation's name.

There continued to be Board members and donors who believed we needed to be open to further growth opportunities. Their encouragement was not that "bigger is better," but rather that working together means working smarter and reducing confusion. This helped launch a strategic planning journey in late 2010 that culminated in the development of a Guiding Document in June of last year. (Copies are available to anyone upon request to the foundation office.) This Guiding Document paints in broad strokes a vision for a coming together through formal consolidation, collaboration or otherwise, of the various organizations and foundations in our province that are raising financial support for Christian education and schools. A bold vision for sure – however, we don't have a small God!

In the meantime, our foundation organized a Roundtable in late November that brought together key representatives and Board members from many organizations and foundations in Ontario; an event that set the stage for a transparent dialogue about the Guiding

Document, a dialogue that encompassed both the opportunities and the challenges it represents. (A Roundtable Summary report, as prepared by our foundation, is also available upon request.)

Currently we are strategically – and prayerfully – planning the possible next steps; likely a good time to also pause and reflect. Should we proactively seek to grow again? Could this better help ensure our Christian schools survive and thrive? We'd love to hear from you. Your opinions matter. Have several questions first – or need clarification on some finer points? These we welcome as well!

Our Lord has certainly blessed our efforts to date. Please pray with us for his guidance moving forward.

Inquiries may be forwarded to:

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or to any Board Member

<http://www.schoolfoundation.ca/board2.html>

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How far is our foundation's executive director willing to go to protect his clients' confidentiality? He's a regular visitor to the office paper shredder, and one day, even his tie was not spared!

You Can Serve Smithville Christian for Decades to Come

Do you love Christian education? Do you want to do what you can to make sure it's affordable for decades to come? Then join the board of directors of the Foundation for Niagara and Hamilton Area Christian Schools. This rewarding position allows you to make decisions that will bless Christian families for years to come. Not your thing? Recommend someone else. Our school has the chance to nominate someone for the board and we want to hear from you. Contact principal Ted Harris at tharris@sdch.on.ca



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