



ECHOES

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6488 SMITHVILLE RD.
P.O. BOX 40,
SMITHVILLE, ON
L0R 2A0
PH. 905.957.3255
FAX 905.957.3431
smithvillechristian.ca

CONTACT:
MARLENE BERGSMA
mbergsma@smithvillechristian.ca

Are we getting what we're paying for?

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

Overheard in the office at Smithville Christian High School

Father: "I'm here to pick up my daughter. She's expecting me. But I'm early and she won't be happy about that. She doesn't like it if she misses any school, which is kind of funny because both my wife and I didn't like high school very much. But our daughter loves it.

"So whatever you're doing here — keep it up."

Ask almost any student at Smithville Christian high school what they think of their high school experience and they'll say they are very happy to belong here.

But what about our graduates? What do they have to say about their school?

In this issue you'll find the answer to that question, and it's one that might surprise you.

Continued on page 2 ...



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You will also find information about money we're spending on instructional excellence, and an invitation for you to join us in making Christian education available for everyone who wants it.

There's also exciting news about our future plans, and ways in which we are constantly updating our approaches to both raising and spending donors' money.

Psalms 78 calls believers to tell their children the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord. This is our annual finance issue, in which we invite you to see our stewardship of those resources with which we have been entrusted to teach your children. We invite you to both partner with us, and to tell us what you think.



Members of one of Smithville Christian High School's student praise teams participate at a Christian music festival, at which they were encouraged in their worship leadership skills.

Q. So, are we getting what we're paying for?

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

A. Parents who choose a Christian education for their children invest a lot of money. Donors are also very generous. It would be nice to know if those investments are paying off.

Now, for the first time, we can say with certainty that the answer is "YES!"

Earlier this year our school received the results of its Cardus alumni survey. Over 100 Smithville Christian graduates took part in a credible, professional study comparing Canadian graduates of public, Catholic, private and Christian schools. Our school had more respondents than any other Ontario Christian school, which not only earned us a personalized analysis of our data, compared to other Ontario schools, but also improved the accuracy of our results.

The Cardus Education Survey was not meant to be a feel-good exercise. It was

deliberately conducted to answer hard questions about the millions of dollars being invested by Canadian parents and donors in independent Christian schools.

As lead author Ray Pennings said, the Cardus Education Survey was conducted in part to answer the criticisms of our detractors: people who say Christian schools are for religious kooks who are willing to sacrifice the quality of their kids' education or who want to hide their kids away from the world.

But Cardus researchers wanted to know if Christian teenagers leave their high schools and continue to walk with God, to see themselves as kingdom citizens, and

to contribute in meaningful ways to their communities.

They also sought to answer the question: "Is Christian education for the common good?" said Pennings.

It is important to know that the survey evaluated ONLY graduates from Christian families of similar socio-economic backgrounds. In other words, the differences reported are the result of their high school education. So when we compare a public school graduate and a graduate of Smithville Christian High School, and ask them how developed they are academically, how stable their marriages are, how active they are in their churches or how generous

they are in sharing their time and money with their churches or other kingdom causes, we are comparing apples and apples. Both kids grew up in Christian homes, both kids say they are Christians.

That's why the results are so astonishing.

In almost every respect, a graduate of Smithville Christian High School outranks the Christian kid who went to a public high school. The same is true for our graduates' comparison to Christian graduates of Catholic and non-religious private schools.

Smithville Christian graduates are more likely to be in stable marriages, to attend church, to take on church leadership roles and to give to church and other kingdom causes. They also have a strong work ethic and are keenly interested in justice in their workplaces.

But that's outward stuff. What about their personal spiritual lives?

That's where the results get even better.

Our graduates are more likely to describe themselves as having a personal relationship with God and as seeing their lives as being part of God's plan. More than other respondents, they engage in practices that strengthen their faith. They also outrank others in experiencing spiritual fulfillment, spiritual peace and communion with God. They read the Bible, they pray and they participate in small groups. They also live Jesus' command to be salt and light, by being willing to share their faith with both strangers and friends. And they are happy!

Are there areas where our graduates don't score the highest?

Yes, there are. Smithville Christian graduates are less likely than graduates of public or private schools to consider religion a private matter, to experience doubt about their faith, to turn away from God or to read a newspaper. They also earn slightly less money.

The graduates of non-religious private schools also outrank our graduates on their participation in international mission or development trips, and both public and private school graduates outrank ours in volunteering their time for non-religious causes such as the arts, health care or aiding the poor, youth, or the elderly. Despite this, our graduates donated more generously to both religious and non-religious causes.

Our graduates also scored slightly lower than their public, Catholic and private school counterparts on their pursuit of post-secondary education, although that might be related to the anecdotal evidence of our graduates' high level of involvement in family businesses and other entrepreneurial endeavours.

A surprising finding of the Cardus Education Survey is the apparent value of a Catholic high school education. Looking at the province-wide results, we see that there is no discernible difference between a teenager who graduated from an Ontario public high school or an Ontario Catholic high school. We would like to think that a Catholic education is a Christian education, but somehow, that's not what the lives of their actual graduates revealed.

Yet, for the Smithville Christian High School community — both current families and former ones — the results of the Cardus Education Survey are reasons to be joyful and to give thanks. Not only do our graduates live lives of faith, they are also having an ongoing impact in the kingdom of God.

Psalm 78 provides a compelling argument for Christian education: we donate money or we send our kids to Christian schools so that God might ultimately be glorified. Thanks to Cardus and to the alumni who took the time to provide their answers, we now know that we indeed have much to be thankful for, and that God is being glorified in the lives of our graduates.

"Christian education doesn't guarantee anything," Pennings said. "But it does seem to be a big step in the right direction."

Psalm 78: 4b, 6, 7

*We will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power, and the wonders he has done.
So the next generation will know them,
even the children yet to be born,
and they in turn will tell their children.
Then they would put their trust in God
and would not forget his deeds.*

Vibrant, authentic and relevant: Our investment in

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

As you may know from our last edition of Echoes, we sent a team of six teachers and staff members to visit a school called High Tech High in San Diego, California in January.

This trip was an investment in the instructional excellence of Smithville Christian High School. Our school is exploring and implementing new ways of learning which are consistent with the needs of 21st century learners.

Our desire is that our learning is vibrant and engaging for students (rather than meaningless drill work or passive note taking), that it is authentic (allowing students to produce real products that enhance their learning and at times bless and serve others), and that it is relevant (having a connection to the world or communities around us).

High Tech High is widely known for developing a learning community and learning situations that meet these criteria. Smithville Christian High School is becoming known for this as well; but there is still much more to learn. Students at our school

are beginning to experience more of their learning by way of projects which meet our criteria for active, engaged learning. This journey will take continuing investment in our teachers. Though it is a blessing to begin with a strong instructional tradition, education is by no means static. Teachers strive continually to hone their craft and find new ways of approaching instruction. Much of the time at our Friday morning Research and Development sessions is spent in “tuning” (sharing, critiquing and improving) the projects our students have done recently so that the next time goes even better.

Last month our board passed a motion which enhances the funding put in place for teacher professional development. Our teachers are grateful for this visionary action of the board. It is also an encouragement to hear, via the Cardus Study results, that our graduates are strong in their faith and make a major difference in their communities. This sound return on the investment of those who gave leadership in our school in years past motivates us to continue and improve this tradition.

Our teachers will do their very best to make sure that the investment our community makes in them will yield great opportunities to be used by God for training the next generation of kingdom citizens and Christian leaders.



Teachers Gord Park, Will Lammers and Al Korvemaker work on project-tuning during a recent staff R&D session.



Teachers Neale Robb, Michelle Slump-Houwer, John van den Boogaard and Dave Wonder at a project-tuning session.

It's not just students who are being evaluated

One way that we can improve the quality of students' work is by improving the quality of the projects they are assigned. At recent R&D sessions, various teachers have presented their work for their colleagues' review. This review process has been structured according to a system known as project-tuning protocols, in which the critique of colleagues is sought through defined steps.

Some of the steps include:

- Presentation of the project
- Examination of the teacher's handout and a sample of a student's work.
- Feedback is sought in a way that is hard on content and soft on people, and in ways that are kind, helpful and specific.

The types of questions that teachers ask of each other include:

- Does the student work accomplish the goals for the project?
- How could this work be shared with our community?
- What could I do to improve this project if I were to do it again?

Teachers are also invited to ask probing questions such as:

- How did you come to a decision to... ?
- How did the students demonstrate their understanding through the final products?
- What evidence did you gather that project goals were accomplished?

The goal is always to encourage each other to encourage our students to be the best they can be.

The Blessings of the Smithville Christian High School Bursary Program

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

Bursaries have become a major part of the way our school operates, and a major way of pulling a wide array of people together in support of families desiring Christian high school education. It was only a half-dozen or so years ago that we offered “deferred payment” of tuition as our means of supporting families who did not have the means to bless their children with a Smithville Christian High School education. Though our bursary program does not remove all such challenges, it has nevertheless come of age in certain respects. Consider the following:

- All the funds for our bursary program for next school year will be in place by May 2013. This means that bursaries are awarded based on a full knowledge of what is available. Our finance committee set this as a goal several years ago at a time when our funds were being spent backwards after our spring drive. Our board now has a policy that all bursary awards be supported by existing funds.
- The sum of our bursary expenditures for 2012-2013 was virtually equal to the sum of the income from last year's Spring Drive and other bursary income through our Foundation. This was made possible through a Finance Committee plan over several years to bolster the amount of bursary funds being carried forward.
- Total amount of all bursaries awarded in 2012-2013 to help families access a Smithville Christian High School for their children: \$145,510
- Total number of families receiving bursary support: 39
- Bridge Bursaries awarded (\$2,500 bursaries for eligible families who also pay elementary tuition): 22
- Discover the Blessing Bursaries awarded (for families new to Christian education): 3
- Needs-Based Bursaries awarded (ranging from \$1,000 to \$8,800 based on income): 22



Our Spring Drive is scheduled for April 1-6, 2013. Our goal is \$135,000. Most of the bursary program described above is funded by this drive. I hope it is clear that this drive is very important to a lot of our Smithville Christian High School families. I hear their gratitude constantly.

I am part of bursary discussions every year which end with both the parents and me in tears because of what the community is doing to support them. I encounter parents constantly who tell me how happy they and their

kids are that our bursary program is allowing them to be part of our school community.

Please join us in being part of this program. Dozens of families are being specifically blessed, but we are ALL enriched by their presence in our school.

Who's Calling?

BY MARLENE BERGSMA, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ADMISSIONS

Some time during the week of April 1 to 6, you can expect to receive a phone call from a Spring Drive Canvasser. We invite you to receive this call with joy.

Why?

Because you are being offered an opportunity to participate — in a big way or small one — in the exciting ministry of Smithville Christian High School. No matter how many zeros are on your cheque, or whether your donation is \$20 or \$2,000, the students and school community of Smithville Christian will be blessed. And so will you!

In his moving book, *The Spirituality of Fundraising*, Henri Nouwen says that sharing a ministry vision and inviting others to join in accomplishing that vision is a spiritual act because

you are helping the kingdom of God come about. The results of the Cardus Education Survey clearly show that at Smithville Christian High School, we are having a powerful kingdom impact. Now you can help ensure that we can continue to bless every family that attends our school. Whether a family receives bursary support or not, our learning community is enriched by their presence. The dynamic vibrancy of our school relies on enrolling as many teenagers as we can — which is why we need them all and we need to be able to offer bursaries.

Bonnie Ludwig is one of our canvassers, and her contribution, and that of other canvassers, is a blessing to all our students.

Ludwig says she agreed to help with the spring drive last year because she knows that the money raised helps us all.

"And when I am done paying tuition, I will donate to the drive too," Ludwig said.

Drive chair Lisa Scholman said she is grateful for the work of Ludwig and the other canvassers.

"A canvasser believes in Christian education, and wants everyone to be able to benefit from a Christian school," Scholman said. "Remember, every little bit helps, and may God bless you in your giving."



Lisa Scholman



Bonnie Ludwig



Boldly and Wisely — getting ready for a capital campaign

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

Members of the facilities renewal team look over blueprints of the school. From left, board chair Al Elmers, administrator Ted Harris, architect Jason Brouwer and finance committee member John Klompmaker.

One item on the strategic plan for our board of directors this year is to develop a plan for a capital campaign. The February board meeting featured a lengthy discussion about the nature of this plan. This discussion yielded a few principles which the board will adhere to as it moves forward with this plan:

First, the board feels strongly that a campaign should be conducted. It has been several years since we drew a wide range of supporters into involvement with the mission of our school.

A campaign draws many into a shared vision and a realization that what we do together in Christian education is of vital importance.

Second, we have no intention of getting our school back into debt. Our last campaign (Fall 2006) erased our debt; we do not want to slide back into it, especially when we do not need additional building space. We have seen too many examples where communities followed a flawed “If we build it, they will come” perspective into debt and empty building spaces. Therefore it is intended that any building improvements be fully covered by the campaign.

Third, we are committed to limit overlap with other local campaigns as much as possible. We are taking stock of elementary school and church campaigns as we make our plans, and though supporters need to speak for their own involvements in responding to invitations to be involved in a campaign, we want to anticipate these sensitivities.

Fourth, our board is committed to invite involvement in more than just a building program. Though building modifications will be part of our campaign, bursary programs in connection with our Foundation will also be a significant part of the plan.

So what is happening now? We have begun discussions with an architect who is helping us develop plans intended to enhance the aesthetics and the function of the school building. His plans will be brought to the administration and board in April for further discussion. Our strategic plan dictates that a decision be made about the scope and the timing of our campaign before the end of the school year.

Dinner theatre: an innovative new approach to fundraising

BY TED HARRIS, ADMINISTRATOR

If you look over our school calendar, something may seem to be missing in the month of May. For many years we have hosted a dinner and auction in late May.

Last spring we reviewed all evening activities and fundraisers connected to our school. We are committed to making sure that every school event is vibrant and exciting, and one that draws those who attend into the learning activity, the vision and the community of the school. It became apparent in this review that most school supporters are no longer excited about coming to an auction to get more stuff to fill their homes.

But the funds raised in this annual community event, roughly \$18,000 to \$24,000, are extremely valuable to our school. We use this money to purchase items that go straight into the learning experiences enjoyed by students, such as SmartBoards, kitchen upgrades and significant sporting goods equipment. We can't just give this up!

Members of the fundraising committee have been at the heart of this discussion, and they are changing their approach. The event being planned for this spring will therefore be a dinner that has a greater connection to what's happening in school in May. Anyone connected

to our school would know that one significant thing that happens in May is our Spring Production. The fundraising committee is planning a night out for a dinner and a show on Friday, May 10, 2013, the night before closing night of our spring production. The play this year is *Copies*, by Brad Slaughter. The dinner will precede the show and will feature great food as well as other presentations from our students.

Though the performance of the play that night will not be for an exclusive

dinner audience, we promise a very enjoyable evening which will raise funds for the projects being planned by our fundraising committee. We hope that our supporters will see this as a great opportunity to get a table full of people together to enjoy a night out, see a great show and support Smithville Christian High School.

Make your dinner reservation by contacting Lorraine VanderHeide at office@smithvillechristian.ca. Seating is limited.



Students from last year's play, from left, Megan Schilstra, Marisa Scholman, Katherine Buist and Crystal Elmers

Planning for a dynamic future

BY CYNTHIA BUIST, SECRETARY,
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Vision Statement: Smithville Christian High School is to become a dynamic, growing Christian school, equipping students for lives of learning and service through excellent, Christ-centred instruction and diverse programs where students and support community contribute enthusiastically.

The Board of Directors would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all who participated in our Location Survey this past November. We would like to share with you the background for the survey as well as our conclusion.

The Board has developed a Strategic Plan to keep Smithville Christian High School dynamic and growing. One of the objectives of the plan was to conduct a study to determine suitability of the school's current location for future growth. The data collected showed 50% of participants felt the school is currently in the best location to service the Niagara Peninsula, the remaining data varied and was inconclusive. The Board did not see the results as warranting serious discussions about a potential move and our goal has always been to remain accessible to all families who desire a Christ-centred education for their children.

The end result is a commitment to stay where we are for the foreseeable future. We can now look towards fulfilling our objectives with some small-scale facility improvements as well as a capital campaign. The Board feels it is very important to engage our supporters again in the vision for the future of Smithville Christian High as well as being stewardly with the gifts God has entrusted to us.

Thank you once again for your participation. Our membership and community's insight is an integral part of the future of Smithville Christian High.

Still only one at a time



SMITHVILLE CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL FOUNDATION*

The vision in the mid to late 1970s to establish Smithville Christian High School didn't just develop overnight. Rather, it was one that grew, quite literally, one person at a time by those who embraced the vision and believed there was the need to branch out from an overcrowded Christian high school in Hamilton and establish an additional site in the mid-peninsula.

The early 90s vision to establish our foundation also grew one person at a time. Those involved early on in this process embraced the understanding that the fruits of these labours would likely not be realized for several decades. The work to promote planned giving (legacy gifts) began in earnest about 12 years ago with the Niagara area Christian school supporters, including those from the Smithville Christian High support community. Similar to any successful capital campaign that requires time to build momentum and see tangible results, promoting planned giving comes with the expectation that it takes time and patience to bring many supporters to a place where they indeed follow through on their good intentions and/or embrace the opportunity to commit to a legacy gift as part of their estate planning. Developing these sorts of donor trust relationships also required an investment of time and resources. It was also recognized that many of the confirmed deferred gifts would not be realized for some years, decades in some instances. Definitely no shame in that!

It is my honour to share that some of the earlier estate gift commitments are now being realized – but again, still only one at a time. I invite you to look to the upcoming (Foundation) Spring newsletter issue for a testimonial about the first Family Fund to be established from an estate gift arriving soon. This Family Fund will also support Smithville Christian High through an annual gift of several thousand dollars.

Borrowing from an article as found in a 2008 Foundation newsletter issue: "I recently heard a retired pastor say that every message must incorporate three specific questions."

What do I want you to know?

What do I want you to feel?

What do I want you to do?

I encourage you to view this past issue at: www.schoolfoundation.ca/pdf/spring_2008_newsletter.pdf Reflecting only briefly on the second bullet, when a community rallies together, amazing things certainly are accomplished. Looking out our side windows and rear-view mirror we must declare our God has been good! Christian education as offered by Smithville Christian High School for over 30 years has benefited many students – and it has been a benefit to our society as a whole. The Cardus Education Survey has confirmed this without a doubt.

Going forward, do you feel Christian education is as important now as it was 10 years ago, or as it was when the original vision for Smithville Christian High School was first formed?

What might your role be – as an individual, a couple, a business, or even as a family in building a strong and lasting foundation to support this vision? It is sometimes said that planned giving is not unlike family giving because in many cases it comes with the need for parents to have intentional conversations with their adult children. This can be a very healthy exercise for most families. As well, how we envision our role as stewards of the resources God places in our temporary care is ultimately defined by our Last Will & Testament. What will your legacy be? A straightforward question...yet one intended to make one think.

I encourage you to follow through on your good intentions. Whether you use my services, those of any professional advisors you are currently working with, my services in conjunction with your current advisors, or the services of our partnering organization, Christian Stewardship Services – it's all good. The important thing is to get started – today.

What unique and special opportunities we are all afforded in response to how we have been blessed. I invite you to be the next one to seize them!





Dwight teBrake C.A.
Professional Corporation

T. 905-899-2424 • F. 905-899-2426
dwight@tebrake.ca • www.tebrake.ca
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