More than 7,000 young men have been educated at Catholic High School, now at its third location at Hearthstone Drive and Claycut Road. TOP: The concrete sign, made by Brother Conrad BERGE in the 1930s, was moved from the old school.

Catholic High has been educating young men since 1894

Above: Brother Eldon Crifasi, the school’s alumni director, views the sculpture, “Dialogue of the Heart,” in the new Centennial Courtyard dedicated before the celebration of the school’s 100th anniversary in 1994.

Right: The Brothers of the Sacred Heart opened St. Vincent’s Academy on North Street in 1894 with financial help from the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

By CAROL ANNE BLITZER

When the Catholic High School Men’s Club holds its 66th annual stag barbecue Oct. 13, Firmin Leclercq Bozeman of the Class of 1942 is planning to be there.

“He comes every year,” said Brother Eldon Crifasi, a 1939 graduate and Catholic High’s alumni director.

The 78-year-old Bozeman, who lives in Cary, Ill., will drive in for the barbecue, joining a couple of thousand other alumni and fathers, along with every politician running for office in East Baton Rouge Parish.

To some, Catholic High is just a school. To alumni, it’s a fraternity.

What four Brothers of the Sacred Heart started more than a century ago with 106 students in a wood frame building on North Street is today a modern, progressive school with 900 students and 7,000 alumni around the world.

In 1894, the brothers opened St. Vincent’s Academy, named in honor of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which had made a significant financial contribution toward establishing the school.

The school originally accepted both elementary and high school students, with classes ending at the ninth grade. The 10th grade was added in 1914; the 11th in 1919; and the 12th in 1946, when all Louisiana schools were mandated to offer it.

In 1897, St. Vincent’s graduated its first class — Edward Wax, Stanley Miller and Louis Leurey. To get their diplomas, the students completed courses in religion, algebra, geometry, trigonometry, bookkeeping, business forms, commercial and higher arithmetic, commercial correspondence, commercial law, rhetoric, penmanship, surveying and physics.

Sidney V. Arbou, who attended St. Vincent’s Academy, said he remembers the old L-shaped building located behind St. Joseph Catholic Church, which is now St. Joseph Cathedral.

“The old wooden school building had no electricity, no gas and no water,” said Arbou, who graduated in 1937. “If you got there early on a cold winter morning before the good brother in the black hat would strike the bell, the doors would be frozen.”

By the late 1920s, the school had outgrown the old wooden building. Classes were held in the basement of St. Joseph Church and later in the old Peabody Building on LSU’s old campus near the...
Arbour never expected such a warm welcome to Cahill High. He said, "It was a large wooden barn crowded with black tar paper," Arbour said. "It was so warm in there in the spring and fall that the brothers held classes outside under the trees. It was cold in the winter that they held classes outside in the sunshine." Arbour still remembers the words, written in six-inch letters by a former LSU coach, "Come play on our team. You'll make a big impression on me," said alum Sidney V. Arbour, P.J. Mills and Brother Conrad Crifasi, from left, reminded employees of the 1935 basketball team "Come play on our team. You'll make a big impression on me," said alum Sidney V. Arbour, P.J. Mills and Brother Conrad Crifasi.

In the early days of Catholic High, most of the students lived downtown and walked to school. If you came to school in a car, you better have had a darned good reason or a note from your parents," said P.J. Mills, a 1935 graduate. "The only ones who had cars were the boys who had a need to go out. You had to be a real athlete or a real good basketball player just to pick up someone." Brother Peter Basso, who won the election in 1935, remembers his first day of school. "Brother Peter Basso, who won the election in 1935, remembers his first day of school. "The first three graduates of St. Vincent's Academy in 1911, anticipate Catholic High 100th anniversary on Wednesday, expects Catholic High 100th anniversary on Wednesday, expects Cahill High to be a national school of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education. Almost from the beginning, athletics were an important part of life at Catholic High. Arbour said he remembered that in the late 1920s, Cahill High had two volunteer college coaches, Tommy Thomas and "Doc" Fontenot. P.J. Mills remembers the school every day after he got off work at Standard Oil at 5 p.m. "We used to play football on East Boulevard across from the old McNealy High School," said Arbour. "We played on Sunday afternoons." Football, basketball and baseball were the three big sports. After the new school opened on North Street, near the old school, in 1929 with the name Catholic High School, even though the school continued to maintain and maintain classes outside under the trees. It was cold in the winter that they held classes outside in the sunshine." Arbour still remembers the words, written in six-inch letters by a former LSU coach, "Come play on our team. You'll make a big impression on me," said alum Sidney V. Arbour, P.J. Mills and Brother Conrad Crifasi.

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