academy of the sacred heart celebrates 185 years

GRAND COTEAU — The spirit of the Academy of the Sacred Heart in Grand Coteau is alive and thriving, and on Thursday, the school turned 185 years old.

Students, faculty, staff and parents of the Academy celebrated the school's historic birthday Thursday with an assembly in the gym that included a barn party complete with hay bales and a cow plus a group photo of all the current students of the all-girls school.

"Today we celebrate the single-gender education of schools of the Sacred Heart here in Grand Coteau," said Mary Burns, headmistress for the Academy. "This is a milestone and a testament for all to recognize that we're a part of a tradition that's weathered storms, the Civil War, yellow fever and the Zika Virus. We'll be here for another 185 years, too."

"I'm excited that I get to be a senior in the 185th year of this school and I can't believe this school is that old. I don't believe it," said Sarah Edwards, 17.

The school received celebratory letters and salutations from other schools in the Sacred Heart network around the country.

Deborah Warren is the proud parent of an eighth-grader at the Academy of the Sacred Heart and said she's glad an institution like the school exists to build confidence in young women.

"We've seen a lot of what's happened here at this school," Warren said. "We've watched and been proud of the fact that it's been here for 185 years educating girls and making them into women."

Teachers at the Academy are feeling the spirit of the celebration, too. Darlene Smith, who has taught seventh and eighth grades for 35 years at the Academy, said she's proud of the tradition the school carries, having had aunts, grandmothers and other family members attend the school.

"We're training girls who will become women of power in the country," said Smith.

Kindergarten students wait to enter their classrooms to begin the day.

Academy of the Sacred Heart This afternoon, see a video story on the school. Go to grandcoteu.com.

"There's a great legacy here in this school. A lot of teachers in the field now were taught here at this school." The all-girls school was founded on Oct. 5, 1821, in Grand Coteau with funding from a wealthy widow who offered the religious of the Sacred Heart a two-story building and 50 acres of land. The school was originally called the Institute for the Education of Young Women and started with five pupils.

Over the years, the school expanded its campus by 200 acres and added several buildings. It has 365 girls enrolled for the current school year. This year, St. John Berchmans School for boys was opened on the 50-acre campus.

Rose Opper said the school is working on a new master plan for the entire facility and intends to build additional structures and classrooms to accommodate students.

"I'm very pleased with the education my daughter has received and feel that it is the best education this part of the country has to offer," Warren said.

"I'm glad I can be a part of it," said Simone Dominguez, 17, a junior at the school. "I'm glad I can be a part of a Sacred Heart school. Overall, I'm glad that I came to this institution."