VCS: A blue ribbon school

Vermilion Catholic scores high in national ‘exam’

By Bruce Murray
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BEBEVILLE — Like riders in a traditional Mardi Gras krewe, the group of Vermilion Catholic students set out into the night in search of necessities for the upcoming event.

But it was not gumbo ingredients they needed, nor was it a feast they would attend. They were in search of knowledge for the variable-crunching math exam the next day.

The students drove around the neighborhood, searching for the house where they would find answers to their questions. Finally, they recognized the house they were looking for, the residence of their math teacher, Sister Therese Gregoire.

Gregoire joined the group and proceeded to spend the entire evening with the students, working through the meticulous material.
Studies. Of those, 60 percent graduate from college and 45 percent pursue graduate degrees. Additionally, Vermilion Catholic has a zero percent dropout rate and an absentee rate of less than 2 percent.

Bohin said he discovered these figures when he first began researching the Blue Ribbon program three years ago.

"I was struck by the number of people from Vermilion Catholic who go to college and are successful," he said. "The more I read about the Blue Ribbon Program, the more I saw it fit with what we were doing."

Dr. George Laird, Vermilion Catholic principal, said that to him, the recognition is not just an award for this year, but for all of the years Vermilion Catholic has been doing it right.

"This is really the culmination of a long history," he said. "Things that were done prior to my time have been ongoing, and we are finally being recognized for them. Now the pressure is on to keep up the excellence."

In being selected as a Blue Ribbon school, Laird said Vermilion Catholic not only had to demonstrate academic excellence, but also show "what is unique about our school."

Primary among Vermilion Catholic's strengths, Laird said, is its high level of parental involvement.

"Maybe it's because they're paying tuition, maybe it's because of the Catholic faith — but when you have parental involvement, research has proven that in either public or private schools, you're going to be a school of excellence," he said.

Theresa Gaspard, who has a daughter at Vermilion Catholic, said she is one of many proud parents at the school.

"We're thrilled about the recognition," she said. "We have a dedicated faculty, parents who are supportive and a family-like atmosphere. All of those factors make us a school of excellence."

Laird said safety is another important factor judges considered when evaluating schools for the Blue Ribbon award.

"They look at the environment of the school," he said. "Is it a safe school? Is it a clean school? Is it comfortable for kids to move from class to class? Are you producing an academic environment conducive for any child to learn?"

Laird said Vermilion Catholic scored a strong "yes" in all of these areas. The fact that Vermilion Catholic is a private school made this easier to accomplish, the principal conceded.

"We are able to eliminate students who just don't want to learn," he said.

Laird added that the Blue Ribbon panel considers not only how well the school educates its "elite," but also how it aids its less advantaged students.

"They look at your special education programs, how you reach out to single families — what you are doing for those students," he said. "Another thing they look at is what you are doing socially. What are you doing about drugs and alcohol? What are you doing about abused kids? What are you doing for kids of single parents?"

In areas that are not necessarily quantifiable, Laird said Vermilion Catholic always puts a little bit of lagniappe in whatever it does.

"We offer virtually the same curriculum as other high schools our size. All high schools offer basically the same title courses," he said. "It's what you're doing with those courses that counts."