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so every student can become
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page 46



An Education Evolution

by **MATT COSENTINO** | photography by **JODY ROBINSON**

Blending history with modernity, **Father Judge High School** adapts to offer an array of opportunities so every student can become the best version of himself.

Of all the wise statements that Saint Francis de Sales was credited with making during a life devoted to service, perhaps the one that most rings true today, 400 years after he first spoke it, is this: “Be who you are, and be that well.”

The message seems so simple, yet many struggle on a daily basis to follow it, especially youths who may feel burdened by the expectations placed on them by family, peers, and society. At Father Judge High School, the words of its patron are taken quite seriously, and are part of the fabric that makes its educational model so unique.

“It’s not our job to tell kids what they ought to be; it’s our job to give every kid the opportunity for experience inside and outside of the classroom to figure out what they want to be,” says Brian Patrick King, a 1997 graduate of Father Judge and the current

president of his alma mater. “It’s our goal to help our students use their God-given talents to get where they want to be. I think parents like that, because they don’t feel as if their children are all being put in the same category and pushed along. Each kid has a different skill set, and we are genuinely trying to help every singular subset of student here achieve in their own way.”

An all-boys Catholic high school in Northeast Philadelphia founded in 1954, Father Judge has a rich history of building young men of character. It continues to embrace that tradition while simultaneously expanding its programs, adapting to the times, and preparing its students for real-world success.

Thanks to a forward-thinking administration and the generosity of alumni, the school has embarked on an ambitious mission to cater to every student who walks the halls. Whether a student has college aspirations,

envisions a life of military service, or chooses to enter the workforce immediately after graduation, he has a home at Father Judge.

“Through the process of working with community stakeholders, parents, alumni, students, and faculty, we got a genuine sense of what everyone thought about the school: good, bad, and indifferent,” King says. “Then we charted a course for what needed improvement, what was missing, and what we did really well that we needed to make sure we kept doing.”

One aspect that has been enhanced through that analysis is a focus on career/technical education and workforce development. For example, the school recently expanded its welding lab to meet the demand for those positions by employers such as the Exelon and the Navy Yard. King notes that the median income in Father Judge’s surrounding neighborhood is \$42,500 per year, but the students who complete the program will have certifications from the American Welding Society and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that put them on track to make significantly more.

“We’ll graduate 46 welders next year who are immediately workforce-ready,” King says. “These boys will be making



Brian Patrick King, president of Father Judge High School, says the school has adapted to cater to every student, whether he has college aspirations, envisions a life of military service, or chooses to enter the workforce immediately after graduation.

\$50,000 to \$60,000 a year coming out of high school.”

Father Judge will soon begin demolition of a building on its property that previously served as a dormitory for priests, and in its place will construct a 20,000-square-foot Career Pathways Academy. So far, the Career Pathways Academy building has been funded in part by \$3 million in Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program (RACP) grants supported by Sen. Christine M. Tartaglione and Gov. Tom Wolf.

Upon its completion, expected for the 2023-24 school year, the Career Pathways Academy will house the relocated welding lab. It will also host courses in coding and 3D printing, as well as training in the building trades, plus the Faulkner Institute for Automotive Excellence.

For students who are looking to continue their education, Father Judge not only has a highly regarded college preparatory program but also a partnership with DeSales University in which they can earn college credits. Since many of those courses are related to STEM (science, technology, mathematics, and engineering) subjects, all four of the school’s science labs are being renovated to better suit a 21st century learning environment.

“Our students can complete one year of college free of charge if they choose to take this opportunity,” King says. “DeSales University is a respected, state-accredited institution, and even if students decide not to go to

DeSales, those credits are all transferrable to any institution in the state.”

King is especially proud of The Father Brisson Center for Academic Excellence, which has been around for more than 10 years, but last year was refurbished with a \$1 million investment. The center was established to assist students in need of academic enrichment support.

“In most schools, the nicest parts in terms of classroom environments are generally dedicated toward that upper-tier group,” he says. “We decided we had to wrap our arms around this group because they need twice the support and twice the help, and we’re giving that to them every day here.”



The success of these programs and the ongoing improvements are being made possible in part by a devoted alumni network of more than 27,000 members. The Father Judge of today may look different than the one many alumni graduated from, but the school remains committed to developing Salesian gentlemen who follow the moral teachings of Jesus as promoted by Saint Francis.

“We have found that parents, both prospective and current, believe the safe and secure learning environment in a Catholic school is critical,” King says. “This ideal that we preach about being a Salesian gentleman—about how you carry yourself not just in school but outside of school and as you go on in life—is important to moms and dads. They like that we are pressing students to have a strong moral compass every day, and that’s what they get here.”

King has three sons of his own who are currently in sixth, fourth, and second grade, respectively. He can already see the distinctive talents that each one is developing, and he looks forward to seeing them build on those skills when they become Father Judge students.

“I feel like there really is something for everyone here, and you want that as a parent,” he says. “Father Judge is going through an evolution that’s required in education right now, and I think it’s one that people are looking for. That idea of helping every kid be the best version of themselves, that’s what we’re striving for.” ■

It’s our goal to help our students use their God-given talents to get where they want to be.”

—BRIAN PATRICK KING,
FATHER JUDGE HIGH SCHOOL

Father Judge High School

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