

# suburban life



In celebration of 150 years of transforming young girls into confident women, **Villa Maria Academy High School** takes another step forward with the unveiling of the **Theresa Maxis Student Union**.

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# Let's Acknowledge Our Benefactors of The Theresa Maxis Student Union

SONS CHAPEL



# Stronger Than Ever

Kathy McCartney, Director of Advancement (left), and Sister Regina J. Ryan, IHM, Ed.D., Principal, bookend members of the student body in Villa Maria's newly opened Theresa Maxis Student Union.

**IN CELEBRATION OF 150 YEARS OF TRANSFORMING YOUNG GIRLS INTO CONFIDENT WOMEN, VILLA MARIA ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL TAKES ANOTHER STEP FORWARD WITH THE UNVEILING OF THE THERESA MAXIS STUDENT UNION.**

by **MATT COSENTINO**



A new school year always elicits feelings of excitement for administrators, faculty, and even students: reconnecting with old friends, reengaging academically, and discovering new interests and passions.

At Villa Maria Academy High School, the normal back-to-school mood includes a palpable energy that permeates the picturesque grounds. The private, Catholic preparatory high school for girls is celebrating the 150th anniversary of its founding and its storied tradition of empowering young, confident women to make a difference in the world. In addition, the school is pushing into the future with a remarkable addition to its Malvern campus.

The Theresa Maxis Student Union, named after one of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (IHM) Congregation's Founders, came to life through a two-year capital campaign and about a year of construction. Located between the Marian Center and St. Joseph Hall, the new building is home to a vibrant cafeteria, a peaceful chapel, a counseling center, and administrative offices. The building is the culmination of an idea that was first hatched five years ago.

"It turned out exactly how we wanted it," says Kathy McCartney, director of advancement at Villa Maria. "This building is truly a student union. It has a little bit of office space, but the cafeteria is going to be a central hub for everyone—our students and our faculty—and it's also a nice place for our families and alumnae to use. It's really going to be the heart of the campus."

The timing of its introduction was hardly coincidental. Villa Maria wanted to unveil the new building as part of the school's 150-year celebration.

"The theme of the campaign was 'honoring our past, building our future,'" McCartney says. "I think that resonates with people because we do have a very rich history and a great alumnae base, and we're not letting go of any of that; we're actually celebrating it even more by continuing to grow and improving the campus. We want to make sure Villa Maria is around for another 150 years."

Faith and spirituality are key aspects of the Villa Maria experience, and Parsons Chapel is a peaceful place to join others in prayer. The chapel houses the altar, tabernacle, and

several statues from the previous chapel, but new elements include stunning stained-glass windows. The chapel holds nearly 100 more people than its predecessor, allowing entire classes to celebrate Mass together.

"It's right on your way to the cafeteria, so we're blessed to have Communion Services every day right before the lunch period," says Sister Marie Claire Matsinger, entering her 15th year in campus ministry at Villa Maria. "Many times, early in the morning when the girls arrive, they stop in the chapel just for a quiet moment to get their spiritual energy for the day."

Sister Marie Claire is a member of the Congregation of the Sisters, Servants of the IHM, a community of educators who founded Villa Maria back in 1872. Throughout its history, IHMs have played a profound role in empowering young women who seek intellectual, spiritual, and social growth.

"We're constantly honoring the memories of the people who have gone before us and have given us this sense of reaching out to others, discovering the gifts we have, and then sharing them with other people who are in need," she says. "That sums up what we call our IHM charism: love, creative hope, and fidelity. Over a four-year cycle, we concentrate more deeply upon intentional ways of giving living expression to our charism."

"In successive years," she continues, "we focus on being anchored in love, lifted by hope, called to fidelity, and walking with Mary, the icon of human potential. Hopefully, an awareness of these gifts takes root in the hearts of our girls."

Lauren Machita is a proud Villa Maria alumna who credits the school with helping her focus academically and develop her strong



faith. When her daughter Leah, now a junior, was looking at various high schools to illuminate her educational path, Leah wanted to follow in her mother's footsteps by attending Villa Maria.

"This was definitely the right choice for her," Machita says of Leah. "I knew she was going to get the benefits of being really well-prepared for college and receive the strong faith foundation that I received. She has found that Villa is an even more welcoming and warm community than when I was there."

Leah has been involved in student council since freshman year, and is currently vice president of her class. She plays volleyball and paddle tennis, and volunteers at school and in her community.

tions with Leah."

Villa Maria will be holding a 150th anniversary gala on Sept. 30 to honor the school's past and celebrate its future. The event will feature a Mass at the Marian Center followed by a reception at nearby People's Light performing-arts theater, where alumna Anna Wilson and her husband, Monty Powell—both acclaimed Nashville songwriters—will perform a concert.

McCartney can't wait for the festivities. She has been at the school longer than anyone currently on staff, and has filled many different roles during her 35-year tenure. In a time when some Catholic schools are struggling with enrollment and even facing closure, she is proud of Villa Maria's success.

"It's a great place for kids to spend four years, and it's a great place to work because everybody is like-minded and shares the Catholic school mission," she says. "I think kids need a good moral foundation, and you get that here, coupled with great academics, great extracurriculars, and great athletics. ... We're flourishing, we're going strong, and our kids are happy. There's no quit in Villa Maria." ■



## Villa Maria Academy High School

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[VMAHS.org](http://VMAHS.org)