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Brad Ryden, Head of School



XVI SWEET SIXTEEN

BY MARY CLAIRE BROCK
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Geneva School celebrates its sixteenth anniversary

THEN AND NOW

They held hands and took the jump. When they took this leap of faith, they didn't know they had stumbled upon a wonderland full of new adventures. The journey, at times, was daunting and full of surprises. There were new doors on the left and the right. Some doors shut soon after they were cracked open, but others opened up to even more hallways and resources than seemed possible.

The first few doors took courage to open. Each new door brought more wisdom, more understanding and more stability. The first courageous few experienced sweet times but also late nights of planning and sacrificing their time in order to find new doors and expand the wonderland that is Geneva School of Boerne.

This year, Geneva enters its sixteenth year as a school. Founded in 1999 by three families, the school's heritage was filled with faith and prayer. Robert and Joanne Thornton, Bret and Paula Wacker, and Brian and Cindy Fowler all held hands and jumped through the rabbit hole to start this new adventure.

One of these founders, Robert Thornton, says that even during times of seemingly unanswered prayers, each person reminded one another, “‘It’s okay, it’s a closed door; it’s God’s will.’ Closed doors are as good as open doors most of the time.”

In eager anticipation of the opening of new doors, each of the first families marched ahead, following closely after one another. Mr. Rob Shelton, Rhetoric School headmaster, recognizes that “for the sake of the school, parents and students alike would jump in and do whatever was needed, and nobody elected someone else to do it.”

David Brock, one of the school’s first board members, says, “We would meet once a week for six or seven hours, then spend a good amount of the rest of the week chairing committees. We were all new to the job and admittedly inexperienced at organizing, managing and growing a school – much less a classical Christian school. In the end we would pray and, despite our inexperience, God, in his infinite wisdom, would provide.”

The early years of development brought along unique opportunities like walking to the library once a week or taking a trip to the duck pond on special occasions.

Geneva was built on a foundation that genuinely valued family. Jason Cone, Geneva parent and previous board member, and Ginny Lipe, mother of four, encourage parents to embrace the opportunities Geneva provides to “jump in”.

“Geneva affords parents and other family members numerous opportunities to participate in the school experience with students,” Cone says.

Lipe also adds that “as an old timer, if there was one thing I’d like to pass along to the newer families it is that you owe it to yourself to ‘embrace’ every opportunity you have to be a part of the Geneva family. You will receive ten-fold what you put into the Geneva family.”

Each of the previous doors uncovers an array of memories, from the years St. John Lutheran Church hosted Geneva to the moving to our current location on Cascade Caverns Road. The years of infancy hold precious times of growth and nurturing for the school and its pioneering families.

Beverly Johnson, mother of two graduates and Grammar School coordinator, says, “The old Geneva started with families with a pioneer spirit. They didn’t know what the Lord was going to do but they knew that we had something good going

because it was founded on God’s principles and we wanted good things for our children. We wanted them to have a classical education because that’s what our founding fathers had and it seemed to work out pretty well for them.”

Thornton explains that, by the time Geneva had grown out of the St. John Lutheran facilities and was ready to move to the Cascade Caverns location, “we were already established and a real organization and not viewed as experimental.”

We grew and grew and grew; the unknown became a little less frightful and a little more inviting.

Head of School Brad Ryden recalls that, at times, the student population grew by more than 30 percent. “There were periods where it felt like Alice in Wonderland after she ate the cake marked ‘eat me.’ It was definitely a ‘curiouser’ time,” Ryden says.

New avenues to explore and new perspectives to be gained accompanied



this constant growth. Johnson acknowledges that the internal and external growth of Geneva has attracted men and women with expertise and experience who are willing to teach and further the students' knowledge in specific areas. Parent of two Geneva graduates, Michelle Travis, remembers times when the Lord brought teachers barely in time for the school year to start, but nevertheless provided in miraculous ways for Geneva.

"It is overwhelming to me to see the number of teachers that God has brought to Geneva. I remember several years when we didn't know who would be teaching certain classes, even weeks before school was starting. It seemed almost impossible that God would bring teachers to Boerne, Texas that would be classically minded, love the Lord and love our kids. But the Lord delivered over and over again, above what we could ever ask or imagine. So when I see all the teachers walking over to pray in the mornings, I am reminded God provided," Travis says.

After sixteen years of doors opening and closing, Geneva, who opened her doors with only 13 students, now welcomes 671 students every single morning. Permanent buildings are being established. Graduates, who once made their way to the St. John Lutheran chapel on Friday mornings to recite their latest bit of knowledge, are awakening the world around them with truth and conquering new heights. The school is no longer anxious about the outcome of this so-called "experiment" but is certain that the Lord has created a beautiful foundation at Geneva. It is no longer following in the footsteps of giants. Geneva is now leading other schools around the United States who, like Geneva's courageous few founding families, want to open and explore the doors of the Christian and classical school movement.

"We have inquires and visitors from other schools on a regular basis, and it is a joy to be able to share with others what we have learned. Regents School of Austin served us in a similar way as we were growing," Ryden says.

Though the school may look different in size and by nature, sixteen years has only produced a more stable ground to foster and incubate the original ideas and principles of the first door Geneva opened. In Ryden's words, "The qualities that make us unique—a sound Christian and classical academic program, a personable and supportive faculty and a close

and caring parent community—were there from the beginning and will be, Lord willing, with us for as long as we exist."

It is obvious that Geneva was not just a wonderland, stumbled upon by happenstance. Every student would agree it is practically impossible to be a part of Geneva without acknowledging God's omnipotent orchestration by being in this place at such a time as this. Sixteen years of provision have passed. It is time to eat more cake and be a part of walking through even more new doors that the Lord opens.

FUTURE OF GENEVA

Over its sixteen years in existence, Geneva has experienced immense physical growth. The molding and foundation of the school is already set in place. Now that the school has experienced the growing pains that every sixteen year old goes through, Geneva can look forward to growing in depth and wisdom.

As Amy Metzger, development director and mother of three, says. "Our growth is not going to be massive as it relates to number of people or even in the growth of our facilities. Is there room for growth? Absolutely. But I don't envision Geneva growing beyond what our founders and current board have desired in terms of size. We are not on this rapid growth of facilities, we're not going to be busting out hundreds of more acres somewhere or tripling the size of our student body, but we are going to refine and shape those things that we already are, and continue to go deeper."

The future is hard to precisely predict. Like parents predict how their child will look and talk and act, Geneva can make assumptions about where the school is heading based on the foundation that has been set in place.

"When my children were two or three, I wasn't quite sure how they would look," continues Metzger. "I could look at other people in my family, just like we could look at other schools, and say 'I think my children will look like this or be a little bit like that.' The physical growth is huge from when they were toddlers to where they are now. Now that they are older, I have a pretty good idea of what the adult versions of my children are going to be."

At age sixteen, Geneva has gracefully established itself. It has already witnessed five graduated classes of exceptional students go out into the world as well prepared and educated ambassadors for Christ.

Shelton says, "Just as a teenager gets older and gains perspective and loses some of that uncertain angst about the future, so Geneva has matured. Unlike the early days of Rhetoric School, parents and students aren't as worried about whether the 'experiment' we call Geneva could actually produce graduates. With several graduated classes

under our belts, students and parents seem less anxious."

For a while, Geneva was unsure of where it would be, say, sixteen years down the road. The school imitated pieces of other Christian and classical schools. Johnson says, "We've gleaned things from other schools that will work for Geneva and then we've 'Genevized' those things."

Now that Geneva is more mature, it has become known as a leader in the Christian and classical school realm. It is more obvious the direction in which the school will go in the years to come but, as Metzger says, "We know who we are, we know who we want to be, but we do not know exactly the opportunities that will arise or who the Lord is going to bring to this campus. Those things remain to be seen. We can trust that the Lord is going to put in front of us, as He always has, the right people at the right time and the right opportunities while continuing in the same solid mission that we've always been."



There are a lot of reasons to celebrate Geneva's "sweet 16". The school has moved campuses, built gymnasiums and classrooms, and grown tremendously in size over the past years. Now, because of all the architectural additions to the campus over just the past five years, the school's exterior looks entirely different compared to the tiny Shepherd House at St. John Lutheran Church where classes originally met. Often, these outward changes are the most telling of Geneva's incredible progress and growth. Buildings like the Lyceum, the Competition Gym, the Logic and Rhetoric academic village, and the Multi-Purpose Building are tangible and physical reminders of God's providence throughout the past 16 years.

Robert Thornton, one of Geneva's founders, says, "Wherever we've been, St. John or Cascade Caverns, it's always been really clear that it's been God ordained because God just opened the doors and allowed us to get established so easily. Having a viable facility is necessary not only to conduct classes. Having a viable facility and a presence is also very critical in your physical presence and marketing, and your ability to tell the community, 'Hey, we're real.'"

In 1999, Thornton came in contact with a member of St. John Lutheran Church named Betty Thomas. She reached out to him and graciously offered the church's facility as a campus for Geneva School. The three families that founded Geneva approached the St. John congregation council and presented their ideas for the school, in the hopes that the church would allow Geneva to share the campus.

Henry Schulte, pastor of St. John at the time, was a part of the decision board. He describes how impressed the church was by Geneva's blueprints for a classical Christian curriculum. The school was equally affected by St. John's hospitality: "They were always great, great hosts. We really invaded and it


went from a sleepy campus to a place of lots of activity with parents and teachers and volunteers each week, and they never once were alarmed," says Thornton. "There were never any argumentative moments. They were gracious hosts and very good to us."

Within five years, the school grew exponentially and was "literally bursting at the seams," according to Schulte. Geneva had more than 100 students, and desperately needed bigger facilities. Once again, Thornton hunted the Boerne-San Antonio area for the perfect property that would accommodate Geneva's rapid growth. A man named Sonny Davis, who had lived in Boerne his whole life and worked in Thornton's offices for several years, suggested that the school check out his 32-acre piece of field and farmland on Cascade Caverns Road. Davis' terms were perfect for Geneva's financial situation. Thornton says, "Because we didn't have the money to just write him a check, and we couldn't really go to a bank to borrow the money because we weren't old enough or financially stable enough, we needed a piece of property where whoever we were buying from would be willing to carry a note [promissory bank loan]. So, Sonny's terms were, 'I'll let you buy it, but only if you'll let me carry a note.' Funny how that worked out." Five or six families signed the note, taking on the responsibility to pay Davis back in full, and the Geneva School of Boerne moved onto its very own campus.

The 2004-2005 school year, the school's first on the Cascade Caverns campus, was not trouble-free.

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Robert Thornton, School Founder



Amy Metzger, the school's development director, says, "When we moved in to the new campus, obviously we were super grateful for these portable buildings and this land. But the first kind of 'wow' reality moment was the fact that we still didn't have power until the Friday before Labor Day weekend. I remember thinking, 'Okay. We're going to have classrooms without electricity on the first day of school! It is what it is, I guess,' and then finding Susan Dunn [headmaster at the time] jumping up and down because the light switch in her room finally worked."

There is a distinct parallel that can be drawn between that first experience and this year's Grammar School construction complications. After all the Grammar School portables were relocated in August of this year, Brad Ryden was scrambling to get electricity, internet and working telephones up and running before the first day of school; Metzger says that it was "interesting to watch that mirror [with Geneva's first year at Cascade Caverns]."

Along with the school's first few difficult years came several invaluable lessons. Geneva learned to depend on God and trust that He would bless the school's sixteenth year as much as He blessed its sixth.

Metzger believes that those early years laid a critical foundation for the many years

that followed. "I believe the Lord gave us that kind of year that was cold and wet and a huge challenge because we were void of chances that year for our students to stand up and present, which is a huge part of who we are as a school that teaches classical rhetoric... At the end of that year, we raised money to build the entire MPB [Multi-Purpose Building]... because God opened our eyes to the need for a place that students could stand up and practice being articulate."

She remembers several other incredible gifts with which God has blessed Geneva—seemingly simple things like paved roads, extra classrooms, gyms and gathering places that Geneva needed and God provided. "And that's what I've seen most in the past 16 years at Geneva, from a facilities standpoint; that it wasn't one and done, but the Lord's timing has been perfect and has allowed us to continually depend on Him."

Metzger continues, "He gave us electricity at the last minute. He showed us our need for a place where our students can gather together and practice speaking rhetorically, and then provided us with the funds to make it happen... all of those things coming in His perfect timing. The Lord provided exactly what we needed and helped us to know what we didn't know."



FROM THE INSIDE OUT

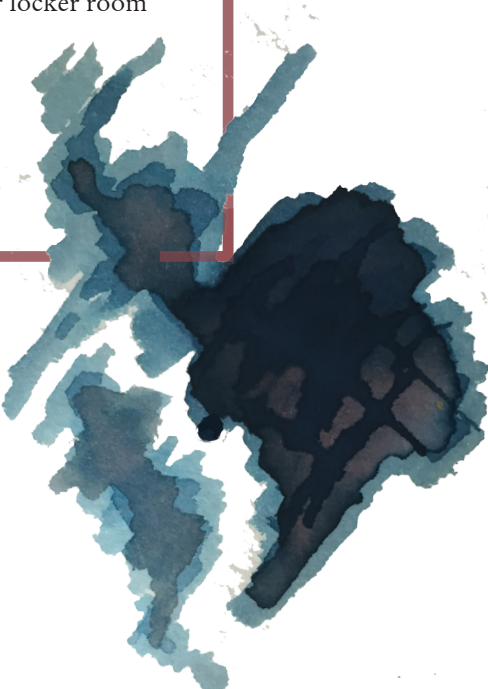
BY CARISSA GEORGELOS

Happy Birthday to the Geneva School of Boerne! Geneva's new age has brought about a lot of changes in all three sections of the school: Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric. In Geneva's sixteen years, we have seen the addition of first Logic School and then Rhetoric School. Both have multiplied exponentially since their conceptions. Logic School has grown from one sixth grade section in 2009 to three sections per each grade in sixth, seventh and eighth. Moreover, until this year, Logic School shared faculty members and classrooms with Rhetoric School. For the first time in Geneva's history, Logic School and Rhetoric School have entirely separated campuses and faculty, with the exception of three teachers.

Logic School Headmaster John DeSario agrees that a separation of the Logic and Rhetoric schools was a positive change because "there is a big difference between the structure and freedom in the sixth grade and twelfth grade classroom. It was time for our Logic School to develop its own culture, which necessitated having a dedicated Logic School faculty."

Geneva's middle school culture has also grown significantly. DeSario says that the Logic School has impacted Hill Country Daily Bread, a local ministry, immensely. In addition, the community dynamics have improved with the faculty, including "discussion, fellowship and discourse from school to other topics."

Although Logic School has grown, it still has some improvements to make over the next 16 years. Logic School is lacking an outdoor pavilion for lunch and a larger locker room that provides more space and convenience. Regardless, Geneva is blessed to continue to grow in size and structure. Geneva celebrates its sixteenth by appreciating how far it has come and trusting that God will continue to bless it in the future.



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