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# K-K, Pius to merge

## New School to be built in U. Providence

By GARY PULEO, Times Herald Staff



NORRISTOWN — Joe Shemar readily admitted he was happy about Monday’s announcement that the new Catholic High School would be built in Upper Providence.

Along with the news that morning came the disclosure that both Kennedy-Kenrick Catholic High School and Pius X High School in Lower Pottsgrove Township would be closing.

“Look at the place,” Shemar said, gesturing toward an artist’s rendering of the new school, which was hanging on the wall outside the Kennedy-Kenrick gymnasium.

“Absolutely, what’s not to like about it? New gym and a beautiful baseball field. It’s an impressive facility,” he allowed.

Shemar’s jubilation did not come without a few misgivings.

“My concern is the commute for the kids. The trip up 422 won’t be so bad, but what about the way back home for them?” he said.

By the time the \$65 million facility opens in 2010, his own students will be Kennedy-Kenrick alumni, just like their dad and mom.

But what happens in the meantime, he wondered, minutes before the start of a men’s basketball game Monday evening.

“Will kids still enroll here when they know they’re going to graduate from another school? And I don’t know how kids from here will feel about going up to Royersford.”

According to an Archdiocese of Philadelphia press release, the as-yet-to-be-named school will feature

30 wireless classrooms, office science labs, fitness center, three computer labs, a media and library resource center, television studio, two art rooms, choral/band rooms, a 90-seat chapel and a 1,200-seat auditorium.

Construction of the new school is scheduled to begin in summer 2008 at the intersection of Rittenhouse and Township Line Roads.

“I am so pleased to make this announcement as we begin Catholic Schools Week,” said Cardinal Rigali in the release. “This investment in the future demonstrates the commitment of the Archdiocese to provide the very best Catholic education for generations to come.

“It is through modern, state-of-the-art schools and facilities such as these that our administrators and teachers will continue to provide our students not only with formation in the Catholic faith, but also with the best educational tools students need to excel in academics and in life.”

Pending adherence to the construction schedule, Kennedy-Kenrick and St. Pius X will relocate at the end of the 2009-10 school year.

Students who are enrolled at these schools during the 2009-2010 school year will receive fast-tracked admission to the new school and begin classes in September 2010.

The completion of a new Hilltown Township facility will prompt the relocation of Lansdale Catholic High School in 2012.

Shemar, a 1977 Bishop Kenrick graduate confessed that he and his wife Donna, who graduated in 1976, were “diehard Kenrick” folks who would follow the school “wherever it goes.”

“I think people will miss having a Catholic high school in this area,” Donna Shemar said. “I think it will be a sad loss. There was a lot of work done in the last few years to keep the school open. It’s a shame to see it close after all that hard work. But I hope they keep the spirit up and try to make it a positive experience for the kids during their last two years here.”

While munching on a hot dog fresh off the George Foreman grill, Rick Vennera, admitted that the announcement took him by surprise.

“I feel bad because the school has been here for a lot of years. I went here and my son goes here now,” he said.

A more vocal basketball fan, who requested anonymity, didn’t mind letting the resentment fly in an assessment of the move, saying that the Archdiocese should be “ashamed of itself for lying outright” to parents and administration when it promised that Kennedy-Kenrick would not close if enough money could be raised to keep it going.

Numerous benefactors indeed came up with the funds, but the Archdiocese went back on its word, “like it lies about everything else these days,” the individual noted.

The Rev. Joseph Rymteika, President of St. Pius X High School, said that he had accompanied 15

ninth graders to the Archdiocesan office in Center City that morning to hear the announcement.

“The freshman class will be the first to graduate from the new building, so the older kids aren’t as excited as the younger ones,” he noted.

“We’re sad to see the name of Pius disappear, but we’re really going to be the same school ... we’re just taking that school to a different location.”

Calling the Upper Providence site an ideal location “halfway between” Kennedy-Kenrick and St. Pius X, Rymteika said that “our people are excited about it. Some people in the Pottstown area are a little sad to see this transition, but our population center has moved down to where the 422 corridor is more than Pottstown itself now.

He noted that the 92-acre property was one of the few areas in Upper Providence not already under development.

“Across Township Line Road in Limerick Township they’re putting in a Wal-Mart and some other things. And there’s development going in across Rittenhouse Road from our site.”

With an expected 1200 students, the new school will have the space to offer many more programs than either of the existing schools could handle on their own, Rymteika said.

Kennedy-Kenrick administration did not return the reporter’s calls for this story.

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