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Providence: 25 years after 'the decision'

In its 76 years of existence, Providence Catholic High School has had its ups and downs. But by far the most ominous was 'the decision': to close down the school. It happened 25 years ago, but Providence is still going strong!

NEW LENOX—Providence Catholic High School began the 1993-94 school year with an all-time record number of students. Ironically, this year marks the 25th anniversary of the "decision" to keep Providence open.

That's right—Providence almost closed!

The time was the late 1960s, and the still new New Lenox campus was scheduled to close due to financial problems and an enrollment of only 500 students (as compared to this year's record-breaking enrollment of 1,146).

THE AREAS of Homer Township, Orland Park, Mokena, Frankfort and New Lenox had yet to reach the growth projected for them.

A special committee determined that at least one of the diocesan high schools had to be closed and sold to raise money. Providence was the logical choice. It was the most marketable, and it had the best location.

The late Bishop Romeo Blanchette assembled a special education board that recommended the diocese should close Providence, sell the campus at a profit, and have the student body be absorbed by other area Catholic high schools.

The Providence community objected strongly and it was willing to do something about it. In 1967, the

students raised \$40,000 through a candy drive.

"THE MONEY gave us a one-year reprieve," commented Rick Lorenc, a 1969 graduate. "The following year we raised even more money."

Bishop Blanchette, during a historic meeting on Jan. 13, 1969, disregarded the recommendation of his own board and decided to keep Providence open. He made the decision based on the spirit and potential of Providence and its family of members.

The school has grown in leaps and bounds physically and academically over the past 25 years. In fact, the school was forced to change to a president/principal leadership model because of the growing demands placed on a single principal.

The school announced Jan. 5 that current principal, Augustinian Father Richard McGrath, will assume the office of president, while current pastoral director, Augustinian Father John Merkelis, will step in as the new principal.

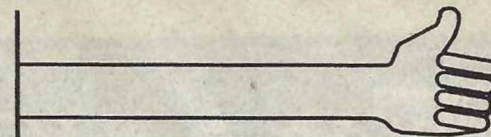
The school owes much to Bishop Blanchette and the men, women and students who worked to make Providence an educational leader in the community. It is through past and current dedicated individuals that Providence continues to achieve excellence.



ORIGINAL SCHOOL—In its 76-year history, today's Providence Catholic High School has met the challenge of change, including name change and relocation. Providence got its start as St. Mary's Academy, shown in this 1915 photo, which was located at Cass and Ottawa streets in downtown Joliet.

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