



Home Greenlight classifieds Yellow pages PDX guide Advertise with us About the Tribune Photo sales Subscriptions

Search

Search by word

Search by writer

Search our classifieds

Quick headlines

Past Tribune editions

News

Sports

Business

Life

Weekend Life

Insight

Columnists

Dwight Jaynes
Kerry Eggers
Phil Stanford
Pete Schulberg
Promise King
Jill Spitznass
Barbara Ashmun

Sponsorship information

Special Section Archive

News partners

KPAM 860 am

KOIN News 6

Tribune links

ODOT traffic cams

TriMet

PDX arrivals and departures

Current weather

Seniors beat expectations

Private school's first graduates embrace work-hard philosophy

By TODD MURPHY Issue date: Tue, Jun 14, 2005

The Tribune

Sam Ford is starting to wear his hair in cornrows again. Not everything is different from the kid he was four years ago.

But as he proudly walked across the stage of a North Portland church early Saturday afternoon — to the cheers of friends and family and the other members of the first-ever graduating class of De La Salle North Catholic High School — he was walking a path entirely different from the one he seemed destined to tread a few years ago.

This fall, Ford will be going off to Lane Community College in Eugene, on a full-ride scholarship. He eventually hopes to transfer to the University of Oregon and study business.

And, among his classmates, he won't be alone. Fifty-two of the 55 members of De La Salle North's first graduating class are going off to college. Together, they've won more than \$2.2 million in college scholarships.

Based on the depressing demographics of education and society these days, most of these kids weren't supposed to make it to high school graduation — much less get anywhere near a college campus.

Roughly eight of 10 of De La Salle North's graduates live in North and Northeast Portland; about 50 percent are black, Latino, Asian or Native American. Eight of 10 come from families whose income is so low they qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches.

But after four years of work, four years of two hours' homework every day, four years of girls wearing skirts and heels to school and boys wearing white shirts and ties — and no cornrows — all but a few De La Salle North graduates will become college students this fall. They'll be attending Concordia University in Portland, Hofstra University in New York, and more than 30 other colleges and community colleges in between.

"I'm not a parent, but I feel like a proud parent," De La Salle North biology teacher Carrie Coleman said as students were finishing final tests at the school late last week. "This is nothing short of wonderful."

An unexpected pleasure

The number of graduates going on to college has surprised even De La Salle North leaders, who opened the school at 7654 N. Delaware Ave. in the fall of 2001. But it hasn't surprised them too much.

"This is a place about realizing opportunity and realizing potential," said Principal John Huelskamp.

Opportunity and potential are developed in some unconventional ways at De La Salle North. The most notable: Students attend classes four days a week, for about 10 1/2 months a year. On the fifth day of the week, they work a full day at one of 55 local businesses and corporations that now participate in the school's "corporate internship" program.

De La Salle North's program is modeled on Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in

▶▶ Email this article
▶▶ Print this article

Check out

TRIBTOWN

Even closer to home
Locate your nearest Tribune
by ZIP code or street

1-866-740-1351

2 weeks only
Call Now!

PAY NOTHING!

Try Comcast High-Speed Internet
FREE for 2 months*

PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL BEERFEST
JULY 15 - 17 2005

greenlight classifieds

Automotive
Employment
Real estate for rent
Real estate for sale

@home
A monthly section that focuses on the Portland Home

Subscribe to the Portland Tribune
click here



XLR8 articles
Around the Bend
Start Your Engines
The Fuel Factor
Wheel Love

Tribune Photography Sales and Galleries

Chicago. De La Salle North became only the second such high school in the nation when it opened four years ago; now, there are almost a dozen similar schools nationwide.

The work helps students pay for their schooling. About 70 percent of the \$9,500 annual cost of educating one De La Salle North student is paid for through that student's internship work, De La Salle North officials said.

But the internships have value far beyond the money they bring, said school President Matt Powell.

"Kids realize that these people (in professional jobs) aren't really any different than they are," he said. "They just had different opportunities. When our kids make that connection, it's powerful."

The internship money, combined with other fundraising, helps the school keep tuition and fees low — about \$2,500 a year. Still, about two-thirds of De La Salle North students receive financial aid from the school; about one-third pay almost nothing for tuition and fees.

A shock to the system

Even with the money issues resolved, entering De La Salle North freshmen often face a shock.

Often, they've come from middle-school lives where they seldom did homework, where they thought little about life beyond the 3 p.m. end of the school day.

At De La Salle North, they crash into a program with that dress code. A program with seven-and-a-half hour school days, with that extra work day, and with a school year that runs from mid-August to mid-June.

"It was a very hard adjustment," said Ve'Jon J'Ray Seamster, a graduating senior who attended Tubman Middle School and a Portland alternative school before beginning his freshman year at De La Salle North.

About 18 members of that first, 2001 freshman class didn't make it to Saturday's graduation, Powell said — some because their families moved away, some probably because of the school's academic demands.

"We're really asking kids to embrace a culture of education," Powell said. "And it's not for everybody."

But students soon learn that they're not alone in the struggle. They learn how devoted De La Salle North teachers are to their education, and to their lives, Huelskamp said. Coleman said teachers remember the ideals of St. John Baptist De La Salle, who started similar schools in poor areas of France in the 17th century: "Touch kids' hearts. Once you win their hearts, you can touch their minds."

Ford, talking proudly in his cap and gown before graduation exercises Saturday, said he often wonders where he would be if it hadn't been for the jolt in his life of De La Salle North four years ago.

Many of his friends from middle school are now in gangs, he said.

"If I didn't come here, I think I'd probably be doing the same thing they're doing."



Tribune web ads

Christian Supply online
Christian music
Bibles, Christian books,
Christian gifts
www.christiansupply.net

USOUTDOOR.com - Shop
for **Backpacks** online with
free shipping and no sales
tax.

Television commercials,
Portland **film production**
and independent video
production by Limbo Films ::
503-228-0844

Search engine marketing,
website templates, **portland**
web design and website
promotion by Webfu //
503.381.5553

Destination Downtown

Fandango

Movie listings



TOP NEWS BUSINESS PORTLAND LIFE SPORTS INSIGHT CUE
GREENLIGHT CLASSIFIEDS PRIVACY POLICY CONTACT US
© 2005 THE PORTLAND TRIBUNE

College Scholarships

Search \$24 billion in scholarships Brought to
You by CareerBuilder.com

Free Scholarship Search

Find money for college now! Search 500,000
awards worth \$2.4 billion.

Ads by Goooooogle