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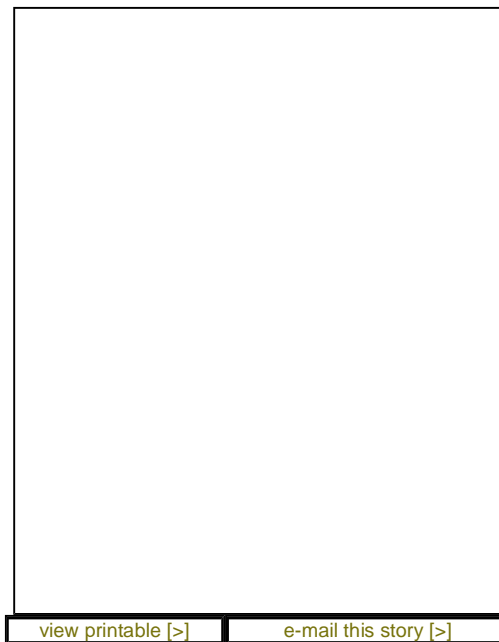
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A Chance to Change Destiny
Capable, Interested, Motivated—Absolute Buy-In
 Required at De La Salle North High School

By Bridget Barton



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“To make a change in your life, you’ve got to commit. It’s all about hard work,” says Tim Hennessy, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at De La Salle North Catholic High School. “There are three words in our mission statement—you’ve got to be capable, interested, and motivated.”

And for those who meet those three qualifications, the school offers an outstanding academic experience supported by a unique Corporate Internship Program (CIP). “Teams of four kids work with a client,” explains

weekends and hang out with friends and do my homework, so I think I’m getting the full experience of a teenager plus some experience for when I’m an adult. I have a better expectation for when I go into jobs, and other kids will be just starting out.”

On the job, Phillips says she keeps it businesslike—slacks, skirts, stockings. “I don’t really like stockings. The dress code at the school is the dress code here. We practice at school and here for when we get older.”

“She’s earning her money, but we’re getting our

Hennessy. “Firms such as Stoel Rives law firm in Portland pay \$18,500 per year for those four kids. The difference between the cost to educate, less what the student earns at their CIP job is the balance, and it’s about \$2,200. That’s what we call tuition. Of that \$2,200, about one third of our parents can pay that, one third can pay about half, and one third pay a minimum.

“But everybody has to contribute—to get an absolute buy-in to this concept,” Hennessy says. “And we believe that the parents have to be motivated as well, so \$5 a month is the minimum we ask.”

Hennessy tells how De La Salle got started. Back in 1999, Matt Powell had an idea for a high school that would serve low-income Portland students, a high school that would produce academic excellence, a high school where kids would graduate prepared for both college and work. Powell flew to Chicago to look at the highly successfully Cristo Rey Jesuit High School that serves immigrant families from Chicago’s west side.

He saw the school, liked it and got underway not knowing how the school would be funded. But because they had been trying to get a school operating in Northeast Portland, the Christian Brothers, who also run LaSalle High School in Southeast Portland, soon pledged about \$1.6 million over five years.

This year the Cristo Rey network has 11 schools, and Portland’s De La Salle is part of that network. The Chicago model started nine years ago, but it was not replicated until five years ago.

At about the same time as Powell visited Chicago, a venture capitalist from the Bay Area, B. J. Cassin, also found out about Cristo Rey. “Cassin went to see the Chicago school, said I love this, I want to replicate it, I’ll put in \$9 million to replicate it in cities around the country,” says Hennessy. “In classic venture capitalist mindset, Cassin said he wouldn’t give money to schools for year-to-year operations; he would give them seed money, and they’d have to develop the model and make it work. So he gave money on a year-by-year declining

money’s worth too,” says Self. “It’s not like giving money away. We’re getting a service in return. But yet we’re doing something with the community and giving something back also. It’s a win-win. It makes the De La Salle program really successful and different. They’re coming here to get work and practical experience, and we expect them to do the job. We expect them to be here on time, follow our procedures, do the work properly. We counsel them if it’s not working just like other employees.”

Robyn Saryn, Director of Human Resources for Stoel Rives, says the firm started out doing some legal work for De La Salle, but before long they were approached to be sponsors. First says Saryn, “You sort of weigh, do you have openings, or not? You wonder what will happen. It actually has worked really well. Now we’re doing it every year; we actually budget for those openings. We hope to keep doing it year after year. We think it’s a great program for the kids, and they do add value. They understand the business world by the time they graduate.

“They meet everybody—when they do the mail runs they get to know everyone. Our mail, our records are important,” emphasizes Saryn, who is responsible for all employees in the firm’s cities across the West. “Our files, do you know how important they are? These are jobs that take responsibility and common sense.

“If I’m not happy, I go back to the school and they can talk to the student or replace them. But they’re great kids. They want to be here, they understand that it’s a business. These are kids that have a lot of potential and it gives them an opportunity to see what’s out there. The program at the school gives them good orientation on how to dress, how to act, what to do if there’s an issue.

“It works for us,” says Saryn, “and we’ve been called by others thinking of doing the program.”

basis, forcing schools to create self-sustaining models.

“So Cassin said, ‘I’ll give you money. Doesn’t anyone want to replicate this?’ In Chicago, Father Foley, the principal of Cristo Rey, said that there was some crazy guy in Portland (Powell) who came to visit. He thinks he wants to do it. So Powell and Cassin connected and next thing they knew they were starting the school,” says Hennessy.

“Then Bill Gates found out about it through a Cristo Rey school in Denver. Gates said he would give money to our network, in fact he would match Cassin’s gift. So between them, \$18 million came into the network to set up schools.”

Now Matt Powell sits on the board of the Cristo Rey Network. Model schools have opened in Tucson, Santa Fe, Waukegan, two in Ohio, two in the Boston area, and two in New York, including one opening this fall in East Harlem. Powell has been a part of that process.

A Way That Works

Thus was born one of Oregon’s most unique and entrepreneurial high schools. Every student attends classes four days a week, and on the fifth day students take their place in the world of coats and ties, suits and high heels—the professional adult work world.

“It worked out well,” says Hennessy. “As money decreases, corporate sponsorships and enrollment should be at the self-sustaining point. We have 38 corporate sponsors this year. Xerox, in Wilsonville, took four teams of kids. They’re new, and Cisco Foods next door is also new. Seventy percent of our operating budget is covered by student work.”

“The program gives low income kids a chance,” says Corporate Internship Program Director Michael Jacobson. “The professional world is foreign to them. We take for granted having parents that worked. Not them. But this is the future work force.”

Back to School

Academics at De La Salle are top notch. Polly Waibel teaches American History, Civics, and Freshman Social Justice, in which students examine neighborhood associations, citizenship and politics—and their obligation to contribute to the world around them. One of Warble’s favorite exercises is to have her students do a budget on minimum wage and then another budget on their intern wage.

Waibel also has her students complete an interview of their business to find examples of how that business gives back to the broader community and helps those in need. Service is a big part of what De La Salle teaches its students. Students are given opportunities, and they are taught to give back to others.

“The school is a place where any kid you meet can apply and go there,” says Hennessy. “Ninety percent are from Northeast Portland, some from Vancouver, Scappoose and Sauvie Island. We don’t turn kids away for financial reasons.

“This year will be the first graduating class, with kids in grades 9-12. Every student is considered college bound. All take the PSATs. It’s a college prep curriculum. One of the things we’re most proud of is that academic growth from entry to PSAT test was 10-15 percent.”

Despite time spent in downtown offices and corporate parks, students exceed the state seat time requirement. But the school year does have an additional three weeks to make up for students’ work days.

Academics, work, extra-curricular activities—in that order—are the priorities at DLS, unlike many other schools. But the school has built a steady list of extra offerings including student leadership, service, drama, and athletics: volleyball,

But work is not the primary focus at this model Northeast Portland high school. “The real focus from the teachers and staff is a commitment to helping these underserved kids make a change,” says Hennessy. “What we’ve got for them here is a pretty rigorous college-prep education in a faith-based environment. It’s small—it’s what the Christian Brothers have been preaching forever—with direct interaction between the student and the teacher. That’s what De La Salle is founded on. There will never be more than 300 kids, and our maximum is 20 students per class.

“The engine behind this whole thing is the work program. It provides incredible life skills; it provides monetary means for these kids to go to school; it provides an opportunity for sponsors to reach out and touch their community. We bring the community right to them. It’s all about the education, but our corporate internship program is the engine that drives it.

“There are some kids that aren’t ready for corporate, professional jobs but they’re working too,” says Hennessy, “at places like Assumption Village, where the kids help with day to day care of seniors, or the Red Cross or the Humane Society. Those sponsors don’t pay, but we still place kids there and they’re learning skills. We have kids with heavy ADD, but we want them to get some life skills. They’re kids, and some aren’t ready. No student doesn’t work.”

Organizing student schedules, working with employers, and getting each student assigned into the internship program, and then delivered to and from their jobs is no easy feat. In 2000, when De La Salle first got underway, CIP Director Jacobson says that Cristo Rey’s principal in Chicago actually came out to Portland to put together the first schedule.

On the Job

For Bernadette Miller, who used to attend Portsmouth Middle School, the switch last year to De La Salle High School was kind of a family choice—her cousin who was a junior talked her into it. Miller worked at Providence

basketball, cross-country, football, baseball, softball, swimming, track, golf, tennis.

The school uses gymnasium facilities at the University of Portland, Salvation Army, or nearby Holy Cross School. And while they’re grateful for the space, says Hennessy, “We get the dregs of gym time. We have a kid who gets up at 4 a.m. to iron his shirt, make breakfast for his brother and sister, practice at 5 a.m., and then he goes to work. But he wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Built on Trust

Five years ago, Matt Powell was a teacher at LaSalle High School in Milwaukie, and his good friend Michael Jacobson worked at Wells Fargo Bank. “The school was a new idea that hadn’t been tried here,” Hennessy explains, “so they went to their friends in the business world and said, ‘Trust us.’

“I came from high tech,” Hennessy adds. “I was selling IBM and Hewlett-Packard. I’d known Matt for years and he said, ‘Come and help me build a school.’ This job has been the best thing I’ve ever done, by far.”

With no alumni, and no parents of means like schools such as Jesuit, St. Mary’s or LaSalle in southeast Portland, De La Salle cannot rely on these typical sources for financial help. Nevertheless, the school has embarked on a capital campaign to build and remodel the school facilities. Phase one is a \$5 million plan for an L-shaped two-story classroom and administrative offices. The high school will break ground in June ’06 and hopes to complete construction by December ’06. The second phase is a new \$4 million gymnasium. Later De La Salle will add a dining hall, chapel, and performing arts center. The total for all phases is \$15 million.

Though definitely a “school that works,” it’s been

Radiology Group. “They don’t treat you like a kid—they treat you like an adult. I file, do data entry, mail, mail claims, any jobs. Now that I’ve been through it, I think I might want to work from 8-4:30. I used to babysit, but that’s all. But I matured, learned how to be in an actual office.”

The money Miller earns, about \$55 a day, pays 70 percent of her tuition. And Miller quickly figured out that money she would earn last year over spring break would be hers to keep—a side benefit, but definitely a real world incentive.

Briana Prom, a senior, who transferred last year from Central Catholic, also figured out quickly how to convert her internship into summer savings. “I asked around Christmastime, months in advance, if I could be hired over the summer because I knew there were other people working. My supervisor said she’d talk to H. R. and I got hired. I was thinking of the future—money for college. I come from a single parent family (her mom cares for five children at home). Money is pretty tight. I was thinking ahead as far as applying for college and applying for grants. That’s what I was thinking.”

Prom worked last year and was assigned again this year to Stoel Rives law firm in Portland. She says, “You kind of have to step up to the bar. I work in the library of the law firm. That’s where I’ve spent my internship. I’m treated well. Because I’ve worked there so long and I worked over the summer, they’ve inch-by-inch given me more responsibility.”

Prom says that the firm has come to treat her like any other employee, relying on her ability to get the job done, maybe even forgetting sometimes that she’s just a kid. “It’s a lot harder than it was when I first started,” says Prom. “One time they gave me oodles and oodles of filing. But they weren’t really asking too much of me, and I try not to complain. But I was kind of like, oh gosh. I just stayed late so I could finish up my work. I think my age kind of slipped their mind on that one. But it wasn’t too bad.”

tenuous at times, says Hennessy. “But everything has been falling into place—several major foundations are in the process of grant approval to support the capital campaign. Together, we’re giving these kids a choice and a chance to change their destiny.”

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PHOTO CAPTION: In classroom – student with tie by window – Akeem Griffin

PHOTO CAPTION: Mr. Jim Joy is Academic Vice Principal – “Some of our juniors have been doing systems dynamics for a couple of years—looking at a model in urban demographics. It’s visual, a way to deal with physics. There are very few places where change is the core teachable piece. Systems dynamics talks about how things are connected and how things change. It’s visual, but also intensely mathematical. It’s interesting and challenging.”

PHOTO CAPTION: Center: Matt Powell, President of De La Salle North Catholic High School, left: Tim Hennessy, Vice President for Institutional Advancement; right: Michael Jacobson, Corporate Internship Program Director

Sidebar: De La Salle North High School Staff

Matt Powell President
Don Huelskamp Principal
Mike Jacobson Director CIP

Sidebar: 2004-2005 Corporate Internship Program Participating Sponsors

Albertina Kerr
American Heart Association
American Red Cross
Archdiocese of Portland

And Prom will take with her some valuable lessons about work and career. “When kids are younger they’re in such a hurry to grow up and they think everything’s going to be fun,” she says. “I don’t always have fun. I’m around lawyers all day long. They do a lot of studying. I didn’t know they did that much work.”

Over this past summer Prom worked two jobs—part time at K-Mart and part time at Stoel Rives. “I was working longer hours at K-Mart,” says Prom, “but my checks were bigger at Stoel Rives. I guess the whole money aspect of it pushes me to want to get a better job and a better education.”

Rick Self, Administrative Services Supervisor, has been with Stoel Rives for 13 years, and often supervises the De La Salle interns. “The school sends us good students and we plug them right in,” he says. “We just treat them like any other employee, do on the job training, and turn them loose and let them do their job. We expect the same thing from them as from any other employee, and they have fulfilled our expectations.”

This year Self supervises several interns, including Sabrina Phillips, a sophomore. Until CIP Director Jacobson introduced her to the upscale Portland law firm, Phillips had no job experience other than babysitting and volunteering with her mom helping homeless women.

“I’m trying to get all the experience I can,” says Phillips. “The main thing I’m looking at now is being an ObGyn, but I’m also interested in law. I’m trying to get experience in each field and see what I like best. It was scary at first but after awhile you just fit in. Everybody treats you normally and everybody’s nice. If there’s a problem they talk to you—not like a baby. They come at you like you’re an adult.”

What’s it like being a kid in a grown up’s world?

“I usually meet with my friends who work around downtown to eat lunch—we find a place, or we try out restaurants,” says Phillips. “And I still go out on the

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 Care Oregon
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 D Amore and Associates
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 McMenamins-Kennedy School
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