

# GUARDIAN ANGELS

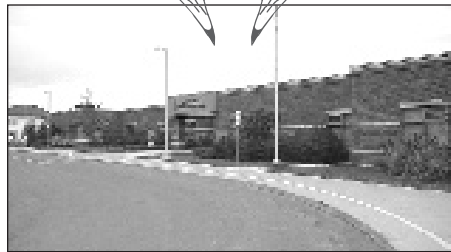
## CATHOLIC SCHOOL

**G**uardian Angels Catholic School in Stittsville began in September 1999, the result of continued residential growth which was straining the capacity of the only existing Catholic elementary school in the community, Holy Spirit Catholic School. This overcrowding at Holy Spirit had reached severe proportions by 1997, bringing about parent action to seek relief in the form of another Catholic elementary school in the community.

In August 1997, a Holy Spirit School Council Subcommittee on Overcrowding came into operation under the direction of parents Debbie Barr and Mary Pichette. Its activities included a letter-writing campaign urging provincial government funding action, a balloon-o-gram visit to Carleton MPP Norm Sterling's office in Manotick, and a documentary aired on CBC television about the overcrowded situation at Holy Spirit.

On Friday, December 12, 1997, a group of 12 parents from Holy Spirit Catholic School in Stittsville delivered 258 helium-filled balloons to the constituency office of Carleton MPP Norm Sterling. Each balloon represented a student in a portable at Holy Spirit, which, at that time, had ten temporary units on site. Student enrolment was 785 students, housed in a school with a design capacity of 465. The actions of the Holy Spirit parents were meant to draw the attention of the Provincial Government to the Stittsville situation, in the hopes that funding for the new school would be forthcoming. However, the end of 1997 brought other factors into play, with the creation of the amalgamated Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board as well as provincial government declarations of a new funding model for school construction.

The new school board gave high priority to the construction of elementary schools in growth areas such as Stittsville,



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but financing was contingent upon the province's funding formula for new school construction. By the fall of 1998, the province had released its new funding formula, which called for the elimination of surplus school spaces in the Board's jurisdiction before any grants would be provided for new schools.

Things looked a little bleak, since the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board at that time had a surplus of 3,773 pupil places at the elementary school level, which, according to the formula, would have to be eliminated before funding for new schools would be provided. However, MPPs Norm

Sterling of Carleton and John Baird of Nepean, in November 1998, brought forward their "Baird-Sterling Plan" which proposed advancing the construction of new elementary schools for the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board while still maintaining adherence to the provincial funding formula. The "Baird-Sterling Plan" called for reclassifying four adult day schools as elementary on the basis that these schools were built as elementary schools. This shifting of the secondary school inventory to the elementary panel created a larger shortage of student spaces at the high school level within the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board. This qualified the Board for funding for new school construction, which Mr. Baird and Mr. Sterling believed could be switched and used by the Board to pay for needed elementary schools. Mr. Baird and Mr. Sterling felt that this flexible approach would provide the funding for three new elementary schools, in Stittsville (which had 13 portables at that time), in South Nepean and in Bridlewood. In January 1999, the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board approved in principle the construction of these three new elementary schools.

The firm Pye & Richards Architects Inc. of Ottawa was appointed as the architect for the Stittsville Catholic elementary school in March 1999, as the Board by this time had received approval from the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training for funding for all three proposed construction projects.

In May 1999, Deborah Robinson was named principal of the new Stittsville Catholic elementary school. It would be housed at Holy Spirit temporarily in the fall while the new school was under construction. There were problems finding a site in Stittsville that could be developed in accordance with the school board's timetable for new school construction, but by the end

of June, the search finally ended. A proposal brought forward by Goulbourn Township meant that a property in the development area south of James Lewis Avenue in Stittsville would become available, with construction to proceed in time for a spring 2000 occupancy of the new facility.

The plan was to make the school site the first phase of the surrounding residential development. It could then become a registered subdivision and could proceed even though there were delays pertaining to construction in the rest of the area. As well, in June the school board established the attendance boundaries for the new school. In August 1999, Mag Eastwood Developments Inc. was awarded the contract to build the school in Stittsville, submitting the lowest (\$4,299,000) of six tenders received by the Board.

In October 1999, while its future students were housed at Holy Spirit Catholic School, the new Stittsville elementary school was officially named "Guardian Angels Catholic School." (Guardian angels are a matter of faith in the Catholic church. There are many stories in the Bible about angels guiding, protecting and singing the praises of God). The name was the overwhelming choice of parents and was approved unanimously by the Board.

The official sod-turning was held on Thursday, October 21, 1999 with construction work on the new facility continuing in the distance as the ceremony took place. The event included the blessing of the soil by Father Frank Scott of Holy Spirit Catholic Parish in Stittsville, and the blending of soil from the temporary home of the school at Holy Spirit Catholic School with the soil of the new school site. The sod-turning also included the burying of heart-shaped boxes containing the dreams and hopes of various student representatives at the ceremony. Construction of the 51,000

square foot, one-storey building continued throughout the winter, aided by unusually mild weather conditions and very little snow.

Monday, April 10, 2000 was the first day that Guardian Angels Catholic School students and staff occupied the new school facility on Baywood Drive in Stittsville. The school was situated on a 5.74-acre site adjacent to a future municipal park. The capacity of the school, as determined by the provincial government, was 534 pupils. It had four kindergarten rooms, a child care room that could be used by the school during the day, 18 classrooms, an oversized gymnasium with a retractable stage, a library and a computer room. The school facility was fully air-conditioned and totally accessible to the handicapped. It also had a child care centre, called the "Baywood School Age Program," which offered a before and after-school program for school children. It is operated by the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic Child Care Corporation.

Shad Qadri, a community representative on the Catholic school council, donated a guardian angel statue in September 1999. This statue was placed outside the front entrance to the school, welcoming all visitors.

Since its opening, Guardian Angels Catholic School has seen increasing enrolment as residential development continues in Stittsville. Several portable classrooms have been located on the site to meet this burgeoning enrolment, which reached more than 750 students by 2004.

The school immediately became a vibrant Catholic community, with strong parental support as well as a close connection with Holy Spirit Parish. The parental involvement through the Catholic school council included fundraising, which resulted in playground improvements for the

school. In the spring of 2004, Guardian Angels became the first elementary school ever to host a daytime "Relay for Life" event. Under the direction of Vice-Principal Francesca Hernandez, the students raised funds for cancer research in honour of grade 6 teacher and cancer victim, Mary Ann McCuen.

This was not the school's first foray into major fundraising for a worthy cause. The school's "Jump Rope for Heart" event in the spring of 2003, organized under the direction of grade one teacher Josephine Shelton and her committee, raised more money for the Heart and Stroke Foundation than any other school in Canada. This success resulted in a visit by Walter Gretzky, a spokesperson for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, in the spring of 2004, to kick off the "Jump Rope for Heart" event and to thank the school community for its large contributions in the past. Fundraising and helping causes have become a tradition at Guardian Angels. In 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006, the staff of Guardian Angels participated in the "Relay for Life" overnight run, thanks to the spirited leadership of kindergarten teacher Christine Brosseau-Laroche.

Guardian Angels Catholic School played a major role in the participation of Todd Nicholson as captain of the gold-medal winning Canadian sledge hockey team at the 2006 Paralympics in Italy. Todd had been in hospital for five months prior to the Games and had considered withdrawing from the national sledge hockey team; however, it was the support, which he received from the students and staff at Guardian Angels that enabled him to find once again the drive to pursue his dream and play for Canada. Todd had been an inspirational speaker at Guardian Angels Catholic School during their "Jump Rope for Heart" campaign the

two previous years. Each time he spoke about the importance of being physically active and never giving up on a dream. His inspirational message obviously worked, as the students responded and Guardian Angels became the top fundraising school nationally in “Jump Rope for Heart.” When the students heard that Todd was in the hospital and might not be able to pursue his dream, they sent him cards, drawings and good wishes by the hundreds, encouraging him not to give up and telling him that they were watching and wishing for him to make a quick return to his dream. This encouragement and these messages worked, helping to put Todd back on track. He captained the Canadian sledge hockey team to a gold medal in the 2006 Paralympics.

Todd Nicholson did not forget the role that the students and staff at Guardian Angels Catholic School played in all of this; he visited the school in March 2006, shortly after the Paralympics, to thank them for their support and to show his gratitude for all that they had done for him. “My hat goes off to each of you, each and every one of you in this school ... the students, the teachers ... everybody,” Todd told those at a jammed and cheering assembly, “because those letters you guys sent me...to never give up on my dreams...literally came back to haunt me and made sure that I didn’t give up on my dreams.”

The activities of the school are not limited to fundraising events and helping others. In June 2002, the school held *Arts Alive*, a musical presentation that took place in the theatre at Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Stittsville. Under the direction of Victoria White and with staff and parent volunteers helping, this musical extravaganza included the participation of every student in the school. Guardian Angels has also implemented anti-bullying, peacemaking and “Stop, Think and Choose” programs. The school has participated in all

of the Board-wide musicals and a “buddy day” is held weekly. Electronic portfolios are commonplace at Guardian Angels, where students have eagerly and willingly utilized computers and technology. The school takes part in all Board sporting events, runs a full intramural program and has many student clubs. It features a large school choir.

Given the school’s vibrancy and activity, it is not surprising that Principal Deborah Robinson and Grade 6 Teacher Kelly Brownrigg received the Prime Minister’s Award for Teaching Excellence in 2002. In addition, Teacher Laura Justinich received a Capital Educators Award in 2002 and Teacher Liz Arkell received a Junior Education Recognition Award for Ontario in 2000.

### Present Principal

Brenda Wilson (2003-present)

### Past Principals

Deborah Robinson (1999-2003)

### First Teaching and Support Staff

Deborah Robinson, Principal  
 Karen Zanetti-VanWesterop  
 Cheryl Laffin-Lepage  
 Tamara Creaser  
 Linda Scrivens  
 Laura Justinich  
 Valerie Moodie  
 Shannon Carragher (McLeod)  
 Carolyn Carpini (Joseph)  
 Stacy Santos  
 John Palmer  
 Pamela Hassenklover  
 Christian Pouliot  
 Elizabeth Arkell  
 Mary Ann Albert (McCuen)  
 Janet Steele  
 Carole Conway  
 Chantal Paquin (McAlpine)  
 Nathalie Leman-Abbott  
 Anne Marie Smith

Brenda McNally  
 Terri Kelly, Office Administrator  
 Christine Woodley, Librarian  
 John Hughes, Custodian

### School Colours

Navy blue, cranberry and white  
 These colours appear on the school logo, with a hint of gold showing for the halo.

### Logo

The school logo features angels’ wings in a heart shape, symbolizing love and embracing learning as symbolized by an open book in which the motto is written. A halo sits above the wings and book. The logo was designed by Grade 4 Student Lauren Jamieson, Parent Chris Dorey and Teacher Val Moodie.

### Motto

“Hope, Wonder and Dream.” This motto was the result of a combination of over 170 submissions made by staff, students and families.

“Hope” in the motto has a strong scriptural basis. St. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, writes: “The faith and love that spring from hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about is the word of truth, the Gospel.”

“Wonder” in the motto: Angels played a huge role in supporting, guiding and comforting Jesus on earth. They also proclaimed the news of Jesus’ birth. Their actions created wonder and awe for people. Learning also begins with wonder and then discovery.

“Dream” in the motto suggests a vision of tomorrow and the whole concept of setting and achieving goals in life.

### Team Names

“Gators” is the name for all school sports teams. The name was unveiled at an assembly at the school in 2006, the culmination of a process, which began during the previous school year when the initiative to come up with a name for the school teams was announced. A suggestion box was set up and the students were able to submit possible names. The school staff then selected the top 30 submitted names and, in June 2005, circulated this list among the classes in the school, with each class being able to select its favourite six names. After the top six names were identified through this process, the actual selection of the winning name was very democratic. Around the time of the 2006 federal election, balloting was held at the school with every student getting to vote on the name for the school’s sports teams. It turned out that “Gators” was the name that received the most votes. A banner proclaiming “Home of the Gators” is next on the “to do” list, along with the holding of a contest to design what the gator should look like. There will then be a “Name the Gator” contest.

### Song

The school’s song was written by Teacher John Palmer and was recorded by the school choir at Sacred Heart Catholic High School.

