

Room to dance, place to sing, space to play

Sacred Hearts Academy's performing arts classes have a brand new home

By Anna Weaver

Hawaii Catholic Herald

Sacred Hearts Academy took a reverse approach to the maxim, "If you build it, they will come," when it came to its performing arts curriculum.

"We built the program first and then we built the building," said head of school Betty White during an interview at the Kaimuki school's campus on Aug. 28. "We had a good choral program, we had a good band program, and we had a good dance program. But we just didn't have the facilities."

Now the days of holding band practice in a portable classroom, choir rehearsals in cramped spaces, and hula class on the auditorium stage are over. When students came back from summer break, they got to tour the newly completed, two-story, \$10 million Mother Louise Henriette Performing Arts Center that now spa-

ciously houses the band, choir and dance programs, and the 700 girls who participate in them, under one roof.

The new facility, which has been under construction from May 2007 until August 2008, will be blessed on Sept. 12, an event that will also kick off a year of celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of the Academy's founding in 1909 by the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. (See sidebar)

The Performing Arts Center has been in the planning for the last eight years. It is the second of a three-part capital improvement project that began with a renovated visual arts wing and the air conditioning of the entire school and will end with the completion of a new \$6 million student center in 2010.

"It's big stuff to us because this is the first [building] construction that we have done since 1978 when we built the gym," White

said. Back then, the Sacred Hearts Sisters loaned the school \$1 million for the building. It is also the first time the school has sought outside donors for a building project.

One of those donors is the First Hawaiian Bank Foundation, which contributed \$200,000 to the arts building. The foundation's president, Sharon Shiroma Brown, said she was impressed with the amount of financial aid the school gives to students and with how the arts curriculum had been cultivated.

"The teachers, the faculty and the administration have done such a superb job in building a great curriculum for the students. We wanted to be a part of it," she said. "I think having a performing arts center helps in terms of rounding out the curriculum."

White agreed. "It's certainly part of the school's mission that we want well-rounded students. And the fine and performing arts is a big area," she said. "At a lot of schools it's the first thing that's cut if there are budget restrictions."

Band director and music chairman Matthew Martin said he and other arts faculty members appreciated being included in the planning stages of the facility. The project's architect, Lorrin Matsunaga of Urban Works, took into account the teachers' recommendations on equipment, layout and design when designing the building.

"That really gives us a superior facility," he said.

Spacious dance floor

That was evident on an Aug. 28 tour. The building has a band room



Hawaii Catholic Herald photo by Anna Weaver

Shanita Akana leads a school choir in one of two choir classrooms.

Continued on next page

Performing Arts Center

with two soundproof practice rooms, lower and upper school choir rooms, a dance studio and a bathroom.

As workers put up donor name markers on a wall, hula instructor Pohai Souza led her advanced class through a practice of Kealii Reichel's "Kawaipunahale" in the nearby dance studio. The 18 girls wearing pa'u skirts and school uniforms had more than enough room to move about the "sprung" wood floor.

Cubbies for school bags, dance barres, and two teachers' desks completed the room. The only missing elements were wall mirrors that would be installed the next week.

Souza said the room is "absolutely beautiful" and a vast improvement from when the dance program first began in 1998. Back then, she said, hula was taught in a small office space where the current business offices are.

"We had 25 girls and it was so small that we could only get five girls up at a time," Souza said. "Now it's just fabulous to have a place to call home."

Dance technique teacher Micki Kolberg was thrilled to see the new building when she was hired at Sacred Hearts this year.

"I'm so excited to be working in this space. This is a bigger studio than the one I grew up dancing in," said the former ballerina who has taught in Mainland dance schools. "On the Mainland especially they



Hawaii Catholic Herald photo by Anna Weaver

THE NUMBERS

The Mother Louise Henriette Performing Arts Center

\$10 million: cost of the project

15: number of months to build

2: number of floors

10,720 square feet: ground floor

4,929 square feet: second floor

2: choir classrooms

1: dance floor

1: band room

700: number of students in performing arts classes

don't usually have dance programs in academic settings."

Above the dance studio, an eighth grade choir class taught by Shanita Akana was making use of the room's two sets of risers while practicing. The room easily accommodated a baby grand piano. The neighboring choir classroom for the elementary grades had primary colored risers and child friendly instruments.

A high school hula class practices on a spacious dance floor.

Room for a marching band

The even more expansive first floor band room was big enough to hold the entire 140-member marching band at a rehearsal a few days before. Band director Martin repeated the observations of some teachers who had sat in on practice.

"They said to me, 'Now I know why they needed such a large facility.' They saw the enormous size of the ensemble," he said. "Then they said, 'How did you do it before?'"

The answer? They didn't but instead practiced in sections before going out to the front parking lot to rehearse marching formations. While the band still marches outside, they can "balance" their complete sound in the practice room ahead of time.

"It was always more challeng-

ing that way," Martin said. "The new room is really more conducive to educating the students."

Junior Briana Schiff thinks using the new music room will better prepare the band when it goes to London in December for the city's 2009 New Year's Day Parade.

"Now that we're in here we can practice more and live up to our reputation," the trombone sectional leader said, of being the largest all-girls marching band in the county.

The band program grew from being a part of the Saint Louis School band into its own program beginning in 1993 and expanding to the size it is today.

Schiff and other students were glad to get out of their former interim practice place in the school auditorium. She finds everything about the new building pretty

Harmonic fountain

Still being installed during the first weeks of class was one unique aspect of the Mother Louise Henriette Performing Arts Center — a large sculpture and water feature named "Puukani" in the front of the building.

Landscape architect Lester Inouye designed the piece with the help of his son, who is a conductor. According to a news release, Inouye was inspired by the "naturally occurring aural phenomenon ... harmonic overtones," which can be heard in all musical instruments including the human voice.

A 14-foot bronze music ledger will sit above a small waterfall and fountain. When water hits parts of the bronze sculpture, people will be able to hear the harmonic overtone "C" note. Another feature will allow students to "play" music with a set of Crotales Bells.

—Anna Weaver

awesome — the instrument lockers, the sound panels and directional cones, the practice rooms, the air conditioning, the bright interior accent colors, and even the lights that come on automatically.

She's not the only one, said Martin. "[The students] love that building," he said.

And now that Sacred Hearts has built "it," they expect the building to attract even more to students to come and participate in the performing arts.