



Pulse of '62



Monday, January 16, 2012

(The Saint Louis Class of 1962)
www.saintlouis62.org

Volume IV- Issue I

The New Saint Louis School

By Brian Clarke



In November 2011, our Class of 1962 reunion committee spent three hours with Walter Kirimitsu (Saint Louis School President), Pat Hamamoto (Principal), and Duke Aiona (Executive V.P. of Development and Recruitment) while they presented information about the new Saint Louis (SL), which is vastly different from the school we attended in the early 1960s.

Shortly afterwards, I interviewed our classmate, Tom Miyashiro, for this article. Tom has been a teacher and a counselor at SL for the past 38½ years and he has strong feelings about the direction in which SL is heading.

As you'll see if you attend the reunion ceremonies in May, these are all inspirational, dynamic leaders who are committed to having SL flourish in the 21st Century. It is out of respect for them and their vision that I write this article.

Former Lieutenant Governor, **James "Duke" Aiona** (Class of '73) was hired at a time when SL desperately needed to raise enrollment to merely cover the school's operating expenses.

Aiona discovered that newcomers and locals alike were unaware of the new Saint Louis. "So we decided to spend money to make money," he said, "by developing an aggressive advertising campaign to educate the public to the SL mission." (Our readers may have seen the resultant ads on television and in the Star-Advertiser.)

Aiona's ad campaign touted SL as a college prep school (98% of SL students go on to college). The impact was immediate: enrollment rose from a low of 600 students during the 2010-11 school year to 617 students this year, a net gain of 67 students over the recent average decline of fifty students per year.

Aiona's current goal is to raise enrollment to 675 students in 2012-13. Although officials admit the school needs an annual enrollment of 850 to be on solid financial footing, listening to Aiona one gets the feeling that SL has turned the corner on enrollment.

A private school is a business that has to provide a competitive product to retain its students and ultimately make a profit. A school's product is encompassed by its curriculum, its faculty, and its underlying philosophy. The quality of a school's educational product is determined by its principal, who sets the context for effective learning.

In this regard, I was interested to hear from former Superintendent of Hawaii's State Department of Education, **Pat Hamamoto**, who has been the principal of Saint Louis for the past two years. Notwithstanding the lack of awareness about the school among island newcomers, Hamamoto inherited a school with a local reputation as a football factory with average academic standards. This is not necessarily the sort of school to which discerning parents want to send their sons.



Hamamoto knows there is no room for average academics in a 21st Century global culture. SL students must compete for slots at colleges

against the best students that other schools (even other nations) have to offer. She claims that "even our student athletes realize they need a strong academic background to succeed at a Division I university."

That's why she is committed to building a first-rate faculty who not only share her vision, but also have the up-to-date teaching skills needed to implement a 21st Century curriculum. This is a radically different curriculum from the one we knew in the early 1960s and from the one many current teachers are prepared to implement. In this context, one hopes that the sixty percent turnover among the SL faculty in the past two years, is the sort of growing pain a school must experience when new methodologies are demanded for the good of its current and future students.

The current student body starts with the 6th grade. The school doesn't plan to add lower grades because grades 6-12 gives it enough time to build a solid academic foundation for college and career success. In addition to a steady 7-year academic progression in mathematics and science, etc., students are also offered choices within these disciplines. In fact, the school uses new computer software that helps teachers, students, and parents adjust to the career inclination changes that most students experience as they progress from 6th grade through high school.

In the 21st Century learning and working environment, being computer literate is crucial. For that reason the whole campus is set up for wireless connection to the Internet, and every student has a laptop. Students in classes often work facing one another around tables with their lap

tops in front of them. This learning configuration fosters the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills young people need to be competitive and useful contributors beyond the 2020s.

One of my questions about Hamamoto was whether a woman can be both an example of and a champion for the ideal of the Saint Louis Man. According to Tom Miyashiro, Hamamoto expects all students and male teachers to be gentlemen. At our November meeting, a gentleman was defined as “someone who doesn’t hurt other people”. So how does one change the culture of a school where bullying runs counter to the image of a Saint Louis Gentleman?

One of the first things Hamamoto did when she was hired was to bring in a consultant to address the issue of bullying. There followed monthly in-service training sessions for the faculty, to teach them how to foster a brotherhood of students. One outgrowth was the recently observed Brotherhood Day, where students of all grade levels were expected to interact with one another as brothers.

Yet the idea of the SL Man encompasses more than non-violence towards one’s brothers. It also includes strong moral/ethical values and a sense of spirituality. Many people in our increasingly secular society still want their sons to have the sort of disciplined, moral education SL purports to offer and Hamamoto is committed to providing.

Walter Kirimitsu (Class of ’58) has been the President of Saint Louis for the past six years. We couldn’t have a better man to lead Saint Louis than the cheerful, astute Kirimitsu.



In Tom Miyashiro’s opinion, “Kirimitsu is a good administrator. He’s visible at Masses and assemblies, but he leaves day-to-day operation of the school to Hamamoto. He’s brought good people in to

improve the school, with Pat Hamamoto being the best example.”

Several years ago when he first became president, Kirimitsu spoke at a large gathering of SL alumni at a Waikiki hotel. His speech included plans for a new capital improvement program. In recent years, the school has built several state-of-the-art buildings, and current plans even include a smaller version of the Stan Sheriff Center Arena with an attached parking structure to be built on the site of the 30-year-old Gerber Field House.

Yet these glitzy additions belie the continuing reality of the school’s two building mainstays: Bertram Hall and Science Hall. Kirimitsu is quick to admit that, despite recent essential fixes, both buildings are shamefully dilapidated and outdated. In other words, the need for capital improvement funding is still just as relevant as it was when Kirimitsu spoke to the alumni several years ago.

The bottom line? The school needs 30 million dollars to bring its facilities up to workable standards and to fulfill Kirimitsu’s dream of a campus with classrooms and

sports facilities outfitted for learning and playing in the 21st Century.

Tom Miyashiro (Class of ’62) recently retired from teaching and counseling at SL, after nearly forty years. I interviewed him in late November 2011, knowing we couldn’t gain a better perspective on the new SL than the one Tom could provide.



My first question was how he felt about the changes being made to the curriculum. He thought for a moment before saying, “Positive. “We used to have thirty or forty students in a class; now we can’t go over 20 without permission. Smaller classes work,” he said. “We should use *that* in our advertising.”

I asked Tom whether the changes that Hamamoto is bringing in will make the school more competitive in the future? “Definitely,” he said. “The school recently went from seven 40-minute periods a day to five 60-minute periods. This is one of those changes we talked about for years. When Hamamoto came in, we did it.

“Before she came, I told myself, ‘I am going to stay here as long as I can to help the students and to improve the school.’ I’m so glad now that Hamamoto has come, because I can leave knowing the school is going to continue getting better.”

Miyashiro retired from SL in January, 2012 and immediately started an intern program in marriage and family counseling. As a deacon in the Catholic Church for the past thirty years, Tom does weddings, marriage preparations, and pastoral care. “But now, instead of referring couples for therapy,” he said, “I want to do it myself.

“Working as a school counselor and a teacher, you always see why kids are the way they are, and why we are having a hard time trying to educate them. I’m looking at the family and trying to prevent the problems that lead to drugs, and everything. So I’m moving on to a new career, but it’s just a continuation of where I was at Saint Louis.

“After the intern program, I’ll be working as a counselor under supervision for two years. Then I can get my Hawaii State license to become a marriage and family therapist. I’ll be 70. I figure I can give 10 years, whether full-time or part-time. I want to work in a spiritual and Christian setting, so I’ll work out of a Catholic Church.”

Tom wanted to stay at the school until graduation in May, so he could go out with the class of 2012 and the class of 1962. But his new career was calling. And one feels that he has left the school in good hands.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brian Clarke has directed fitness training programs for recreational athletes since 1979. He has written four books on the training process, and continues to compete at the top of his age division in distance running. Brian was a social studies teacher at Saint Louis from 1971-78.