

Lost and found: If it goes to school, it can be misplaced

By Suzanne Molino Singleton

Review correspondent

Loyola Blakefield has what's referred to as *musical blazers*. As long as a boy has a coat on his back, he doesn't care whose it is.

That notion comes by way of Sheila Brune, assistant to the dean of students at the Towson school. With a campus full of blazered boys as part of Loyola's uniform policy, it's common for a student to waltz into her office, pluck a lost blazer from Lost and Found and mosey onto class – all to avoid detention.

"Our lost-and-found pile is unbelievable," said Brune. "I'm staring at 15 lunchboxes right now. Stuff is on the bench, on the floor and behind my desk."

Found are North Face jackets, ties, books, sweatshirts, shirts, pants, an errant shoe, shorts – even underwear.

"They take it off and it stays there," said Brune. "We find stuff all over the school – outside, on benches, in cubbies, in the dining hall – everywhere."

A second Lost and Found, located in the gym, is added to Brune's office pile monthly.

As the mother of five girls, Brune seems to have difficulty in comprehending boys' casual attitude of possessions.

"Girls are more protective of their things," she said. "When a boy looks for a lost item, he walks in, stands at my office door, looks to the left, looks to the right and then shrugs in conclusion as if to say, 'It's not there.' "

The lost items scenario is repeated in other schools around the archdiocese as well – boxes are jam-packed and piled high. Yet nowadays, it takes more than a box to hold the surplus of found items. St. Ursula School in Parkville has a "self-serve" shelving and hook unit near the lunchroom.

"We call it 'Found But Not lost,' " said Bobbie Triplett, secretary. Similar to Loyola, items awaiting their owners include lunchboxes, sweaters, sweatshirts, a glove, a shoe, and the occasional lonely sock.

A teacher at St. Joseph School in Cockeysville, reported finding a bikini bottom once in their Lost and Found.

Notes are sent to parents ahead of Catholic Schools Week, parent/teacher conferences, and Home/School Association meetings, suggesting they sort through Lost and Found in an effort to match item and owner. Still, many items are never claimed.

It's a definite issue, said Triplett, in spite of parents being reminded to label their child's possessions.

"That's even written in the handbook," she said. "Even on the first day of school - a half-day - there will be something in the lost and found."

Yes, it's a plain fact of school life: kids lose things. One might presume that misplacing possessions is indicative of school-age children, and yet, Colleen Craig, director of development at St. Louis School in Clarksville, said, "It's not just the kids; We find coffee cups, reading glasses and umbrellas."

Their receptionist's desk boasts a drawer full of more valuable items such as jewelry and prescription eyeglasses.

In an attempt to address the issue of identifying belongings, St. Louis held an online fundraiser offering personalized labels.

"I can guarantee that people bought them," said Craig, yet apparently they aren't using them. She referred to the school's Lost and Found area as "a mess. It seems to be overflowing most of the time."

Located in the guidance counselor's office, a shelving and bin unit houses lunchboxes, coats, sweatshirts, shoes and more. So do students bother to retrieve their items?

"Yes, when they're in trouble," Craig said, "like if they lost their prescription glasses." As a lifelong eyeglasses wearer, that's the collected item that surprises her the most.

At the four schools mentioned, staff members periodically wade through items to see if it is labeled; it is then returned to the student.

Yet what's a "lost" situation for students becomes a winning one for the organizations that benefit from the

donated items at the end of the school year.

Loyola Blakefield donates its Lost and Found contents to St. Gregory the Great Parish and the Franciscan Center, both in Baltimore City. St. Ursula launders the leftover clothing and then drops items into the St. Vincent de Paul clothing bin in its church parking lot. St. Louis also donates to St. Vincent de Paul.

And yet some wonder: What happens to that one shoe and one sock?