

Our Lady of Mount Carmel School modernizes campus

ESSEX – Our Lady of Mount Carmel School took a major leap into 21st century over the summer, heeding the call of Pope Francis to become better stewards of the environment.

Improvements to the power grid and stormwater run-off provided the foundation for much of the modernization, which honors the pope's 2015 encyclical on the environment, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Mary in Annapolis are the only parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore whose campuses include K-12 education.

Students returning to class for the 2019-20 school year in Essex were greeted to a lengthy list of improvements, which included new carpeting in the elementary school; new drop ceilings in the high school; a modernized chemistry lab; and brighter hallways and classrooms, thanks to fresh paint and a self-adjusting state-of-art LED lighting system.

Mike Naunton, assistant principal for the upper school and special assistant to the president, oversaw the summer project.

"This is my 28th year here at the school and I've never seen it look this good," Naunton said. "There's a sense of pride. "It was like we moved into a renovated house."

He gave credit for the school's transformation to Larry Callahan, OLMC's president, who in August received the 2019 Doris Musil Award, the archdiocese's highest honor for Catholic educators.

"He has always been open to the next project," Naunton said. "He wants ideas ... and then he sits down with his team and tries to figure it out and make it happen.

"Over the spring break, we were able to design a lab that's very sleek and modern,

with more storage, stations where kids can work together, and open space for robotics and forensics.”

Callahan, Naunton said, wanted the class of 2019 to witness those changes.

“He was committed to that,” according to Naunton.

Alexander Brodsky, director of athletics and alumni relations, said it’s a “significant amount of infrastructure” and pointed to a generous donor who made possible overhauling the power system.

Air conditioning was added to the gym, and fiber optic cable runs were completed, allowing for the use of up to 4,000 devices simultaneously and improved collaboration between teachers and students using Google School and Chromebooks.

With a grant from the Knott Foundation, students in grades 9-12 have take-home Chromebooks, while grades 6-8 have Chromebooks for in-school use.

“Our lives move faster,” reflects Brodsky, an OLMC alumnus who’s been on staff for six years. “We can harness those same powers (used in social media) too and engage them (students) academically.”

Brodsky described how students can review, collaborate, edit and submit assignments using Google Classroom from anywhere with Wi-Fi access.

Teachers display learning material on large flat screens using Chromecast.

“All the technology happens seamlessly. A lot of our assignments are handed out digitally (which) instills a certain level of work ethic and engagement.”

A partnership with the Gunpowder Valley Conservancy allowed for the creation of rain gardens and micro bio retention ponds to handle stormwater run-off from over 10,000 square feet of roof, which makes its way through Middle River into the Chesapeake Bay.

Native plants with root systems reaching some 30-feet deep allow for natural water filtration, while attracting pollinators such as butterflies. Staff are evaluating how

best to use those enhancements in the science curriculum.

“So many people have seen the quality of the kids we have and the quality of our teachers,” Naunton said. “Every improvement gives us an idea for another.”

Our Lady of Mount Carmel School has spent \$2.46 million on the renovations and improvements, according to Callahan. The school is in the second year of a capital campaign to raise \$3 million.