

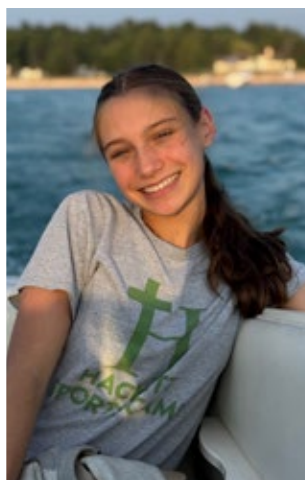
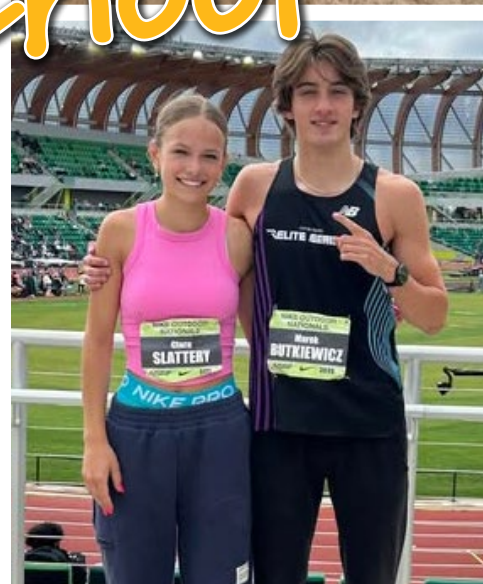
FALL 2025

THE IRISH CONNECTION

A publication for alumni, family, and friends of the Catholic Schools of Greater Kalamazoo



Summer + Fun =
Back to School



You Can't Go Home Again *(but many of us tried)*

"So, what did you do over the summer?"

We began soliciting photos to answer this question in July, probing for everything from goofy dads at the grill to selfies by the Eiffel Tower. While we struck out finding goofy dads (apparently we don't have any), we made up for it in Eiffel Towers, capturing both the French original and the Las Vegas replica.

In total, our Irish family submitted more than 80 pictures so have fun looking for recognizable faces and places on pages 6-9. I contributed a favorite of me standing in front of the Troubadour in West Hollywood, the legendary club that has been a flashpoint of contemporary music since it opened in 1957.

Of course, for all the breezy lake and amusement park pictures, there were many others with some significant backstories, some somber, some wonderful.

On the somber side, the day before my trip to the Troubadour, I had the surreal experience of touring my

boyhood town of Altadena, CA, which was significantly destroyed in the Eaton fire in January.

I was too awestruck to feel more than numbness; more a sense of eeriness than distraught. I was able to find the lot where our house stood, identified by the address marker placed at each property by the Army Corps of Engineers, but the streets were empty of cars, people or recognizable landmarks. I tried to remember the houses of former neighbors.

I drove for miles past the ruins of former schools, retail districts, the country club, and at least a half dozen churches. Sacred Heart Catholic Church was scarred but mostly saved, reportedly due to the heroics of a Deacon with a garden hose. In total, 14 churches were destroyed or damaged.



On the happier side, it was particularly moving to learn about the incredible homecoming shared by Valerie Florian, preschool and enrichment teacher at



St. Augustine Cathedral School. Valerie sent several pictures of their family trip to Ireland, which featured a celebration of the life of John and Nancy Maher and their 15 children. Valerie's husband John-Paul is a great grandson of John and Nancy.

The weeklong celebration reunited over 200 family members ranging from children to great great grandchildren, coming from the US, Australia, and England to join the rest in Ireland.

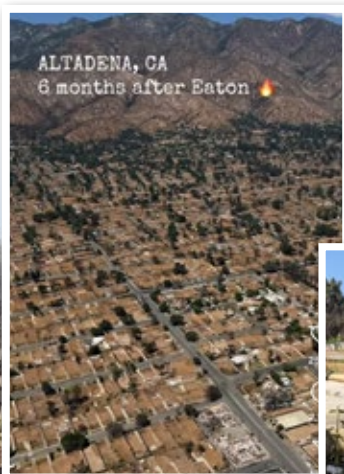
John and Nancy were devout Catholics and are buried outside the cathedral where they were parishioners. Among the many highlights of the celebration was the planting of 15 trees outside the cathedral, to commemorate their 15 children.



What a fantastic homecoming and a great way to celebrate family.

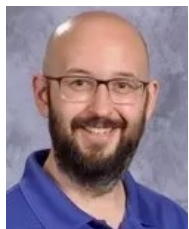
Keith Crowell

Keith Crowell, Advancement Director
Catholic Schools of Greater Kalamazoo
KCrowell@csgk.org



I was too awestruck to feel more than numbness; more a sense of eeriness than distraught.

- Keith Crowell



Welcome to a new year at Hackett. Our team has been preparing for this school year with great anticipation. We are thrilled to welcome a Dean of Students to our administrative team as well as five new teachers. This year's focus is on recognizing the good in our students and our school. We are expressing that through our theme, "Committed to the Culture," the daily decisions and choices that make Hackett a celebrated community of faith and academic excellence. Let us mutually support each other in prayer now and always.

In Christ,
Trevor Scoles



As we begin the 2025-2026 school year, I am grateful to welcome each of you back to our community where we live our mission of faith, knowledge, and stewardship. Whether you are a returning family, a new student stepping into our halls for the first time, or a preschooler beginning your educational journey with us, know that you are a unique and loved child of God.

This year we are especially excited to roll out our new logo, a visual representation of our faith community and mission. We are also hosting the MNSAA Accreditation site team on November 5 and 6. Please keep our school family in prayer throughout this school year. We will keep all of you in prayer!

Pax Christi!
Andra Zommers



I am so thrilled to welcome you all back to the 2025-2026 school year. I hope you enjoyed a restful summer, filled with family and friends. As we transition from the summer, we are filled with renewed enthusiasm for the new school year. Let us embrace our shared mission to provide a Christ-centered education that nurtures our students' minds, spirits, and hearts. As we begin this year, we are reminded about God's many blessings and St. Monica's

words that "Nothing is far from God."

Peace,
Jennifer Crawford



Veteran teacher Jennifer Crawford takes the reigns at St. Monica

St. Monica welcomes a familiar face in a new role as Jennifer Crawford steps into the position of principal.

"As a teacher, there's always a special excitement with the start of a new school year and now as principal it's a whole new perspective," says Crawford, who began at St. Monica in 2023.

Crawford grew up in Paw Paw and, following high school, attended Western Michigan University where she earned a BS in Elementary Education. "We were a close-knit family growing up and even though we weren't Catholic, my parents taught regularly about virtues that are core Catholic teachings."

Crawford's first teaching job came in 1997 when she began teaching 4th grade at St. Mary in Kalamazoo. This was also the beginning of her Catholic journey.

"Being immersed in that wonderful place I had the epiphany of feeling of 'I'm home' and hearing the voice of God saying, 'I've been waiting for you!' It was truly an incredible time of my life that hit a peak when 21 students came to an Easter Vigil to show their support for me. I will never forget that, and it's a way of living I want to nurture in others."

As Crawford looks ahead to goals for the first year, she looks back at that time and to her childhood, for inspiration. "These hallways need to be a haven, a place of kindness and virtues for our students and teachers. We face new challenges every day. That's just life. But what we hold in our hearts will serve as our compass for how we'll react."

WELCOME NEW TEACHERS AND STAFF!

Catholic Schools of Greater Kalamazoo

Denise Betterley
Transportation Manager

Colin Hopper
Accountant

BethAnne Tanksley
Senior Accountant

Hackett Catholic Prep
Nolan Brockway
Math

Ryan Durkee
History

DJ Florian
Theology
(Hackett & St. Monica)

Jeffrey Hiemstra
Geometry & Algebra

Jimmy Pierucci
Physical Ed/Health

David Secondi
Food Service

Neola Secondi
Food Service

Kevin White
Dean of Students

St. Augustine Cathedral School

Molly Williamson
Math & Theology

St. Monica
DJ Florian
Theology
(Hackett & St. Monica)

Jimmy Pierucci
Physical Education

Ann Schultz
Office Secretary

Coaches

Basketball (Boys)
Dan Hoff

Competitive Cheer
Jenna Ruddell

Golf (Girls)
Benny Raymond (Head); Lydia Schubkegel (Asst.)

Soccer (Boys)
Jared Butler (Head); Rolfe Behrje, Logan Flynn (Assts.)

Strength and Conditioning
Gregory Napolitan

First Days of School at Catholic Schools of Greater Kalamazoo

The first few weeks of the 2025/2026 school year are in the books! It's been a great start for CSGK—students are settling in, classrooms are buzzing, and our community is back together.

Hackett Catholic Prep

What an incredible way to kick off the 2025-26 school year!

We started the morning with Freshman Mass and orientation and ended the day with a sweet surprise — ice cream for everyone, courtesy of our Dean of Students, Mr. White and Principal, Mr. Scoles.

Our seniors kicked off the year by painting their parking spaces, each one as unique as God made them.

Check out their artwork as you are passing by.



Class of 2026 Senior Sunrise Breakfast

A new day, a new year, and God's light guiding the Class of 2026. May this sunrise mark the beginning of a year filled with faith, friendship, and grace.



Members of the middle school and high school cross country teams, with coach Tylina Zimmerman, spent part of their Labor Day break working on campus beautification at Hackett Catholic Prep.



Shamrock Generosity Funds Strength and Conditioning Position

Hackett Catholic Prep has announced the addition of Greg Napolitan as Hackett's new Strength and Conditioning Coach.



Greg Napolitan

Napolitan brings a decade of experience training youth and high school athletes, following a career in the United States Marine Corps. He and his wife have two children and are parishioners at St. Catherine of Siena in Portage.

Funding for this position was made possible by donor contributions received at the annual Shamrock celebration held in April.

In Memory

Eternal rest grant unto her, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon her.

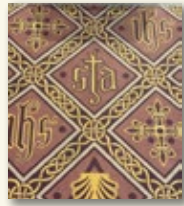


Gracie Kavanaugh
9/26/07 – 8/17/25

The Kavanaugh family remains in Hackett's prayers.

St. Augustine Cathedral School

As St. Augustine Cathedral School debuts its new logo, Principal Dr. Andra Zommers explains its God-inspired origin: "We were in the ideation phase of generating ideas and committee chair and parent Sarah Morgan looked up during Mass one Sunday to see the "St. A" monogram on the Cathedral's wallpaper (pictured). She described it as a moment of divine intervention. The top of the "T" in the St. A's monogram represents a Christian cross while a shepherd's staff (also a bishop's crozier) emerges out of the basis of the cross."



Welcome Back!

If our first morning together is indicative of the next 179.5 days, then it will be a joy-filled 25-26 school year



Driving Community Spirit at St. Augustine's Legacy Golf Outing

St. Augustine Cathedral School kicked off the summer with its annual Legacy Golf Outing, bringing together families, alumni, and friends for a day of fellowship and fun.

Thanks to our generous supporters, the event was a wonderful success in celebrating community and supporting Catholic education for future generations.



Students Return to New Playground at St. Monica

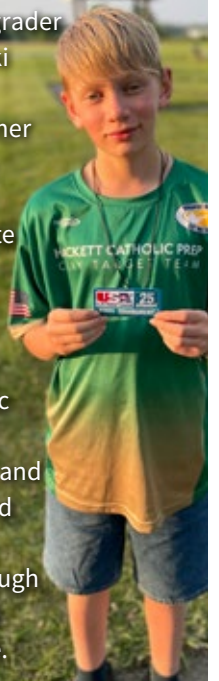
Through the teamwork of faithful donors and more than two dozen volunteers, new playground equipment grew over the summer at St. Monica. Donors contributed over \$30,000 in funds through the annual

Shamrock Shuffle in the spring. Special thanks go to the Shamrock Shuffle committee, St. Monica's army of additional volunteers, and to the project's corporate suppliers, Big C Lumber, Peterman Concrete, KLS Landscape Supplies, and Mulder's Landscape Supplies.



St. Monica 8th grader Ricky Ziolkowski shot a perfect 25/25 this summer at the Michigan Trapshooting Association state tournament.

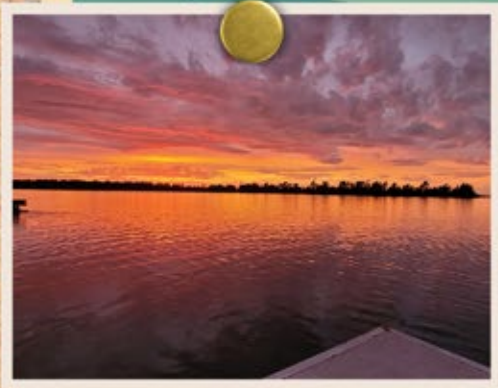
Ricky has been a member of Hackett Catholic Prep trap team since 6th grade and he looks forward to continuing competing through high school and possibly college.



Greetings from our

IRISH

FAMILY





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SUN**



*Living my
summer life*

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Point**

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Teachers Receive Back-to-School Checks from Faculty Endowment

Since 2019, back-to-school has meant the annual distribution of checks to teachers, courtesy of the growing Faculty Endowment. Established by a group of individuals with a special love for our teachers, this targeted fund has grown past the three-quarter million-dollar mark, enabling all returning CSGK teachers to receive \$500.

FUND WAS CREATED TO HONOR AND SUPPORT OUR FACULTY

"This fund was created to honor and support our faculty, who give so much to serve and guide our students academically and spiritually," said Andrew Riker, a fund founder. "The response from our community of donors has been nothing short of inspiring, and we appreciate their continued generosity. It's a small but sincere token of appreciation for our teachers and we pray for ongoing generosity from donors so that this fund, and the support it provides, can continue to grow in the years ahead."



HELP MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR OUR TEACHERS!

Fund donations can be made via:

- 1 the **QR CODE** (to the right)
- 2 **GO TO** csgk.org/endowedfunds or
- 3 with a **CHECK** to (Indicate 'Faculty' in the memo):
CSGK, 1000 W. Kilgore Rd., Kalamazoo, MI 49008



For more information on the broader vision for the Faculty Endowment Fund, contact Keith Crowell at kcrowell@csgk.org or 269.381.2646 x109



Teachers commit summers for stretching the limits for physical and spiritual pursuits

"My trek on the Camino Trail in Spain was really everything I hoped it would be—beautiful scenery, exercise, culture, food, history, a challenge and a focus on my Catholicism. I didn't realize how nice it would be to have a time out from my daily life and be able to concentrate on a specific task. That is the essence of a pilgrimage. My life was simplified tremendously, and that was wonderful. I hope that I can bring that focus back as I continue to create more videos of each day of the journey."

Mark Voege, Spanish Teacher
Hackett Catholic Prep



Chelsey Cekola,
Kindergarten Teacher
St. Augustine Cathedral School

Chelsey, enjoying a post-race cooldown with her niece and nephew, competed in the Michigan Titanium Triathlon, completing the Half Ironman distances of 1.2 miles swimming, 56 miles biking, and a 13.1 mile run. Chelsey is motivated by the discipline of training, the shared camaraderie with her husband, and the physical and emotional wellbeing that comes with redefining personal limits.



Ted Pavelec ('37): Athlete, Marine, Boxer, and Actor

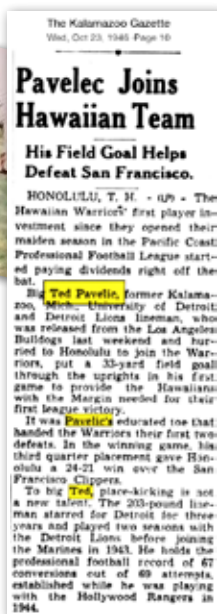
Submitted by Mike Janssen, '72

Irish Hall of Fame great Ted Pavelec was a man of many talents. After a brilliant sports career at St. Augustine High School, Pavelec went on to gridiron stardom with both the University of Detroit and the Detroit Lions, who drafted him in 1941. He played three years with the Lions as both a starting offensive lineman and their placekicker.

His football career was interrupted by his enlistment in the Marine Corps during World War II. Pavelec was also an accomplished boxer, a skill that helped him transition into another career—as a Hollywood actor, often cast as a tough guy in movies and on television.

Over the years, he appeared in films with the Bowery Boys and alongside stars such as Charles Bronson, Humphrey Bogart, Rita Hayworth, Angie Dickinson, Rod Steiger, and Frank Sinatra.

In 1998, Pavelec was inducted into the Greater Kalamazoo Area Catholic Schools Athletic Hall of Fame. He passed away in 2005.



Wheeler Family marks more than 175 years in Kalamazoo and over 100 years at St. Joseph Church

The Wheeler Family assembled this summer with 92 family members gathering to reminisce about their significant role in founding the St. Joseph Parish. Marc Wheeler shared this history as he led the homily on June 28, 2025:

The Wheeler family has been part of St. Joseph Church and attending Mass in this very building for over 100 years. Our family began arriving in the Kalamazoo area in the 1850s and helped raise funds for the bricks that built these walls, the murals that adorned the ceilings, the stained-glass windows that still shine brightly today.

We were altar boys, members of the Knights of Columbus, and my mother was a member of the Altar Society and the Gab and Gobble Club. My brother Dick continues to help at the church and our sister Pat is often seen attending mass Sunday mornings. Our paternal grandparents, John and Mary (Hastings) Wheeler, and our



maternal grandparents, Jerry and Esther (Sullivan) Linihan were all buried from this very church.

Times have changed. The faces walking through the doors of this church have changed. The languages spoken by parishioners attending Mass have changed—Italian, Gaelic, Polish, German, English, Spanish—but what has not changed is our faith and commitment. While some of us may not make it to church every Sunday, or only on special occasions, our devotion to God, to family, to doing what's right and to the community remains strong—even if it wavers now and then.

Thank you, Father Leo, for being so gracious with today's Mass. Thank you, Father Mike, for your continued engagement with the Wheeler family.

Let's hope and pray that the descendants of Dick and Virginia Wheeler—and the spirit of this church—remain strong and faithful for the next hundred years.

Thank you.

Olympian Heath Baldwin Shines in Decathlon



USA Olympian (and HCP '19 grad) Heath Baldwin earned the silver medal in the decathlon at the USATF Outdoor National Championships in August, securing a spot at the World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, September 13-21. Baldwin represented USA at the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, finishing 10th, highlighted by a first-place finish in the high jump. Baldwin is currently an assistant coach at the University of Illinois inampaign, IL, while continuing to focus on his own development.

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION AND SERVICE AWARDS WINNERS

2025 Hall of Fame Honorees

Heath Baldwin (2019)
Tom Drake (1974)
Mo-El Mohammed (1995)
Mikey Olson
2006 Women's Soccer
2018 Men's Track

Service Awards

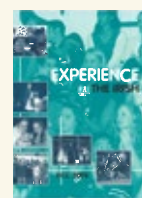
Joseph Cekola (1980)
Distinguished Alumni Award
Monsignor Michael Hazard
Bishop's Award

HCP Alumni Reunion Set for June 2026

If your 18-year-old self appears in one of the Hackett Catholic Prep yearbooks from 2005 or 2006, you have a combined reunion on the horizon!

Mark your calendar for the evening of **Saturday, June 13, 2026**, at the **Kalamazoo Country Club**. Tentative times are 5:00–8:00 p.m., with more details to come.

For more information, contact Chelsey Cekola at Chelsey.m.jones@gmail.com.



THE IRISH CONNECTION

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CSGK.org



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