

The Legacy

A newsletter for the **ALUMNI & FRIENDS** of
Infant Jesus of Prague School, Flossmoor, IL

Volume 2

Merry Christmas!

Dec. 2025



Welcome IJP Alumni and Friends,
Welcome to the second edition of our
ALUMNI & FRIENDS Newsletter! This
is a place to reconnect, share
memories, and stay updated on what's
happening at our beloved school.
Whether it's been a few years or many,
we're thrilled to have you as part of our
community.

Stay tuned for exciting news, alumni
spotlights, and ways to get involved!



[Get Involved](#)

School News & Updates:

Direct from the pastor's office:

Dear Friends of IJP School,

As we come to the close of this year, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your continued support, partnership, and trust in our school community. Your involvement - whether through encouragement at home, participation in school events, or the countless unseen ways you help your children grow - makes all the difference. I am truly blessed to walk alongside such dedicated families.

As Christmas approaches, I pray that your homes may be filled with peace, joy, and the gentle light of Christ. May this season bring you rest, renewed hope, and precious moments with the people you love.

Thank you for being an essential part of our school family. Wishing you a blessed and joyful Christmas, and a New Year filled with God's grace.

With gratitude and prayer,

Fr. Kris Paluch, Pastor



Catching up with our principal:

Hello IJP Community,

It is hard to believe we have already arrived at the Advent season. Advent invites us into a time of reflection and joyful anticipation for the coming of Jesus. Here at IJP, our incredible students, faculty, and staff embody that spirit each day through their commitment to sharing the Good News of the Gospel. I count my blessings daily as I walk through our halls and witness the joy of Christ radiating in every corner of our school—just as it has for so many years, and as I know it will continue to for years to come.

I would also like to take a moment to share an update on our Giving Campaign, "Filling the Shoes of Saint Nicholas." My sincerest thanks goes out to every one of you who contributed your hard-earned dollars to support our school. As many of you know, tuition covers only a portion of the wonderful programs and opportunities we offer. These initiatives are possible because of the generosity of families and friends like you who give so selflessly. You are living out the mission of IJP in a beautiful way, and I know I speak for our entire community when I say that your commitment inspires us all.

This year, donors had the opportunity to give within three specific "buckets." The first supports our students: financial aid is essential for many families, and your donations help open the doors of Catholic education to even more children. The second bucket supports teacher stipends, allowing our dedicated teachers to offer additional extracurricular activities, take on leadership roles, and continue enriching our school community. The final bucket is the funding of our new Spanish program, which allows our students to achieve an even higher level of academic rigor and excellence. This program strengthens their cultural awareness, builds foundational language skills, and prepares them for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

Once again, thank you for your continued support throughout the years. We are deeply grateful to all of our alumni families—once a Kingsman, always a Kingsman! Please don't be strangers; we love welcoming alumni back and sharing all the incredible things happening at IJP. If you ever have questions or simply want to reconnect, do not hesitate to reach out.

Wishing you and your loved ones a joyful and blessed Christmas season.

With gratitude,

Joseph Francis

School News & Updates:

Staff Spotlight: Maura O'Donnell '01

Hired in 2019 as our art teacher, Mrs. O'Donnell has found herself wearing many hats these days. In addition to teaching art to PreK3-8th grade students, Maura also teaches health topics to our junior high students and monitors Spanish classes that are online for the students. She also supervises our students at lunch and plans and implements our House Program utilizing project-based learning pedagogy to enhance our students' education as well as help develop our school community and culture. Maura also helps run our social media presence to be sure that our stakeholders are kept abreast of all the wonderful happenings here at IJP.

From Maura, "As an IJP alum, it's been really special to come back and teach here for the past six years. I'm a true product of this school and the values it instills, and it means a lot to now be part of that for our students. One of my favorite things about Catholic education is how personal it is you really get to know the kids, their families, and the staff. It feels like being part of one big community, and I'm grateful to be here!"



Student Spotlights: Thomas '30, Louis '33, & Iris '35 LaMear



The LaMear/Mantoan family's connection to Infant Jesus of Prague School spans generations. Today, three LaMear children—Tommy, Louie, and Iris—are proud IJP students, continuing a family tradition rooted in faith and community. Paul '37 and Leo '40 are waiting their turn at home to walk these hallowed halls. Their mother, Kathryn (Mantoan) LaMear '98, and grandmother, Karen (Pierandozzi) Mantoan '64 are both IJP alumni, as are aunts and several cousins. For more than sixty years, the school has been a meaningful part of their family's story, shaping values, friendships, and a strong sense of belonging. Karen and Kathryn continue to serve the school and parish communities in many ways. Kathryn is a cantor at Sunday Masses, funerals, weddings, and private events.

As the next generation grows at IJP, the LaMear/Mantoan family represents the lasting impact of a Catholic education that extends far beyond the classroom and into the heart of a family's legacy. We appreciate their ongoing support and look forward to many more years of educating LaMears here!



Need prayers?

Let us know your prayer needs
by filling out this form!

Alumni Alerts:

Alumni Spotlight: Bridget (Hill) Wachtel '89

**Living a Life of Service: A Reflection from Bridget Wachtel
Flossmoor Village Manager and IJP Alum Shares Her Journey**

I've always been drawn to a life of service. As a young adult, I imagined a career in Environmental Science—rare at the time—but my college didn't offer the degree. After switching majors from Biology to Chemistry, I eventually found my way to Geography. A few choices later, I entered Northern Illinois University's Master of Public Administration program, one of the top two MPA programs in the country at the time.

I became focused on urban planning—zoning, density, economic development, and overall, quality of life. Fate intervened when I took an internship in a northern Illinois suburb's City Manager's Office. That experience opened my eyes to the broader impact of city management—emergency response, public safety, flood mitigation, infrastructure, community engagement and more. After six years in assistant roles, I became the Village Manager of Flossmoor at age 29. On December 13, 2025, I'll mark 21 years in this role—five times the average tenure of a city manager.

I grew up here which brings both insight and complexity. I am a trained, professional city manager and follow a code of ethics that ensures I remain non-partisan. I place the greater good above any personal gain with the intent to leave this city greater than how I found it. My role is to keep politics out of daily operations and advise elected officials with integrity—even in difficult moments.

Flossmoor is home. My husband, Kevin, and I have raised our four children here, educating them in the Catholic faith at IJP / St. Veronica. Together, we've instilled the value of service in our children, each now pursuing their own passions with that foundation. My roots at IJP run deep. My mother, Barbara Hill, taught here for 43 years, shaping generations of students. As a "teacher's kid," I saw her joy, frustration, and unwavering dedication to the IJP community throughout her career. Now, as a fellow public servant, I understand her journey more fully.

To my fellow alumni:

What talents are you sharing to reflect a life of service and to leave your community greater than how you found it?



Class News:

Class of 2020: Tommy Mick

My name is Tommy Mick, and I graduated from IJP in 2020. I attended the school for five years before graduating from Marian Catholic High School in 2024.

Following high school, I attended Prairie State College for one year, where I studied Fire Science and successfully completed both the Fire Academy and EMT programs. During this time, I worked as an intern with the Flossmoor Fire Department and will soon be promoted to a part-time firefighter position. This role has been an extremely rewarding opportunity, offering valuable professional experience and numerous benefits. I have developed a strong sense of belonging within the department and greatly enjoy the excitement of the profession, as well as the opportunity to give back to my community.

In addition to my work as a firefighter, I am a baseball coach for Flossmoor's travel team, the Firebirds. I am entering my second year of coaching and find the experience highly fulfilling. Coaching allows me to support the development of young athletes while also helping them grow as individuals.



Alumni Alerts:

Class News:

Class of 2015: McCoy Cummings

Hello, my name is McCoy Cummings, and I am a proud member of the Class of 2015. After graduating, I attended Marian Catholic High School and later Howard University in Washington, D.C., where I earned my Bachelor of Science in Biology with a minor in Chemistry, graduating Summa Cum Laude with a 3.97 GPA. I currently work as a Medical Assistant at a dermatology office, and next fall, I will begin my journey in Physician Assistant school at Charles R. Drew University in Los Angeles, California.

I am excited to announce that I am starting a Girl Scout group in South Holland this year. Please reach out to girlscouts65879@gmail.com if you know of any 2nd or 3rd graders that would be interested!



Class of 2017: Tommy Klupchak

Hello, my name is Tom Klupchak Jr., an alumnus of Infant Jesus of Prague ('17), Marian Catholic High School ('21), and DePauw University ('25). Today, I'm proud to serve as a Financial Advisor with Equitable Advisors in Oak Brook, IL.

IJP gave me unforgettable memories of laughter and camaraderie, and more importantly, a foundation built on hard work, integrity, and service—values that continue to guide me. My passion for helping others, especially those who have walked the same halls as I have, drives everything I do.

Joining Equitable allows me to live these principles by helping others achieve financial security, one of life's most important goals. Our approach starts with understanding what matters most to you, and through holistic planning tailored to your needs, we help you gain confidence and long-term success so you can live the life most meaningful to you.

Helping clients grow and achieve their goals is incredibly rewarding. I'm grateful for the teachers and experiences that shaped me, and I look forward to supporting fellow alumni and future Kingsmen.

If you would like to sit down to learn more about how we can help, please call or email me at (630) 242-2346 or tom.klupchak@equitable.com. Go Kingsmen!



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Alumni: Submit your SCOOP here!

Alumni Alerts:

Class of 2020: Lydia Casillas

Lydia Casillas, an alumna of IJP School and Marian Catholic High School (Class of 2024), is currently a sophomore at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. On Saturday, September 6, 2025, Lydia completed her second half marathon at Flossmoor's Hidden Gem, finishing with a personal best time of 1:43:23. Her outstanding performance earned her first place in the Women Under 20 age division.

Lydia is pursuing a degree in Speech and Hearing Sciences and has set her sights on completing her first full marathon this spring, depending on her academic schedule and workload.

We are extremely proud of Lydia's accomplishments both on and off the course. If you see her training in the neighborhood, please join us in offering a cheer or a honk of encouragement, and keep her in your thoughts and prayers for continued health and success as she works toward achieving her goals.

Congratulations, Lydia!



Sponsor Spotlight: Van Sipma Jewelers

Van Sipma Jewelers Celebrates 125 Years in Business and 55 Years in Homewood

After graduating from IJP in 2001, Ashley Van Sipma went to Culver Academies in Culver, Indiana for high school and later studied Political Science at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California. She pursued her dream of becoming a journalist, working as a writer in L.A. for several years and later starting her own media company.

In 2016, ready for a new career path and wanting to be closer to family, Ashley found her way back home to Homewood and spent the summer quietly observing the day-to-day rhythm of her family's jewelry store, Van Sipma Jewelers. With a renewed appreciation for her parents' hard work and the legacy they helped build, she decided to join the family business. Following in her father's and grandfather's footsteps, she attended the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) in Carlsbad, CA where she studied gemology and jewelry repair. Ashley, alongside her sister Sarah Van Sipma (class of 1998), returned to Homewood in 2017 and together became the fifth generation to carry forward their family legacy.

This year, Van Sipma Jewelers is celebrating 125 years in business and 55 years in Homewood. What began in 1900 as a humble jewelry and watch repair shop located on 111th and Michigan Ave in Roseland, is now one of the oldest family-owned and operated jewelry stores in the country. To celebrate their 125-year milestone, Van Sipma Jewelers curated a special Vintage & Estate Jewelry Collection featuring diamond engagement rings, pocket watches, cocktail rings and antique brooches dating back to the 1800s. The showcase was such a success, they're extending it through the holiday season.

You can visit them at 2011 Ridge Road in Downtown Homewood where they offer jewelry repair, watch repair, engraving and appraisal services all in house. Stop by this holiday season to explore their one-of-a-kind vintage collection alongside their contemporary jewelry—most of which are original designs by Van Sipma Jewelers that you won't find anywhere else.



Check out our Community Partners:

[CLICK HERE](#)

FILL THE SHOES OF ST. NICHOLAS

Together, we can give the gift of Catholic education at IJP School!



Thank you!

We at Infant Jesus of Prague School, along with our **Alumni & Friends Partners**, are inspired by the example of **St. Nicholas**, the patron saint of children and a model of selfless generosity. In his spirit, we thank the following sponsors of our Annual Fund campaign by helping us plant the seeds of hope and opportunity for our students through our Giving Tuesday Campaign: "Fill the Shoes of St. Nicholas."

St. Nicholas Circle 2025-2026

St. Nicholas Circle (\$5000+ donation)

Jane & Terry Peabody

Gold Star Partner (\$2500-\$4999 donation)

Silver Star Partner (\$1000-\$2499 donation)

Sean & Charlotte Kelly

Richard & Karen Mantoan

Friend of IJP (up to \$999 donation)

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Thomas Dudik Greg Underwood Flossmoor's Future (Hidden Gem)



DONATE



Young Alumni Reunion info!

Calling IJP School Alumni

Classes of 2015-2025

Our super fun event is planned for Tuesday, Dec 23 from
6-8pm in our school cafeteria and gym!

Come enjoy friends, food, and fun!

Contact Charlotte Kelly @ckelly@ijpschool.org for more info!



*IJP School
Alumni & Friends*

YOUNG ALUMNI REUNION

*CLASSES OF
2015-2025*



JOIN US!

- ✓ Tuesday, Dec. 23, 2025
- ✓ 6-8pm
- ✓ IJP Gym & Cafeteria
- ✓ Friends, Food, & Fun!

CONTACT US

📞 708-799-5200 x 143

✉ ckelly@ijpschool.org

Picture Gallery:



Grandparents
visit classrooms
and attend Mass
on Grandparents Day '25!



Muffins with Moms
on the Feast
of the Immaculate
Conception of Mary
December 8, 2025!



Check us
out!

Picture Gallery:



Matty ('12) and Katie Mulhearn were married in Washington, MO, on October 4, 2025. Congratulations!



The Cummings Family moving Harmon ('21) to college!



Lydia ('20) Gem post-race with sister, Lucia ('23)



Tommy ('20) and the Flossmoor Fire Department with our 4th graders!

McCoy cheering at Howard!



The Van Sipmas still thriving in Homewood!



Marian '25 seniors celebrating Senior Sunrise!



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