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Gaelebration! Saint Mary's Knows How to Throw a Party

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Ohlen Alexander

It was a perfect day to take a tour on a Ferris wheel. Temperature in the '70s, blue sky dotted with white clouds, a gentle wind carrying the earthy smell of autumn over the beautiful campus of Saint Mary's College of California. The spirit of Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle could be felt at the College last Saturday as it showed itself at its best during its 150th anniversary Gaelebration.

In his introduction at the day of celebration, Saint Mary's Brother President Ron Gallagher reminded attendees that Saint Mary's is a liberal arts college with a purpose, and that it is one of the top 10 colleges for community service. Academically, Saint Mary's was ranked the 12th best college in the West by U.S. News & World Report in 2011 and among the top 20 master's colleges by Forbes.

In every hall, in every plaza, all day long, thousands of visitors got to experience what a college of liberal arts really means. Lectures were numerous with each department featuring specific topics for discussion, such as "Thinking with the Brain in Mind" from the School of Education, "The Expressive World of Art Therapy" from the Graduate Counseling program, "New Venture Entrepreneurship" from the School of Business. Participants gazed at the sun through the safe lenses of the Astronomy Department's telescope.

The day was filled with classical music and ballet in the Chapel, Rock and Roll in the quad, readings in the plazas, a presidential debate, and a quantum physics round table, as well as a Celtic Village near the college entrance, with an Iron Age Celtic re-enactment. It is reported that four of the original Christian Brothers were Irish, thus the 'Gael' mascot and the Celtic roots of the institution.

And there was free food everywhere! Ethnic foods in the School of Education, wine tasting with cheeses and fruits in the courtyard of the Museum, and a full buffet of international foods in the School of Business.

A whole side of the campus was dedicated to children, with countless bouncing rides, a climbing wall, a petting zoo, pony rides, and 'Dunk a Gael,' among many other activities. To the right of the campus, lines formed starting at 11 a.m. to ride the Ferris wheel - all courtesy of the College.

The Catholic University was founded in San Francisco by the Catholic Church in 1853. The vision was that of Archbishop Alemany who had been sent on a mission to the Wild West. He saw the need for affordable Christian higher education. It is said that back then the tuition was \$150 a year, a fraction of what other colleges were charging. Soon, Alemany called on the Christian Brothers to develop the institution.

The Institute of the Brothers of the Christian School is a male religious order founded by Saint Jean-Baptiste de La Salle in the 17th century. De La Salle was a pioneer in educating poor children and was the creator of the first school to train lay teachers. His philosophy was based on the Christian duty to educate the poor, to touch the hearts of the students and inspire them with the Christian spirit. In San Francisco, the Christian Brothers rapidly developed Saint Mary's. The campus was moved to Oakland in 1880, then to its present location in 1928, after it outgrew its 'brickpile' campus, on 420 acres in the Moraga Valley.

By then, Saint Mary's College was already accredited by the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, with baseball and football teams that rose to national levels. In Moraga it continued to grow. The College became co-ed in 1970, with women representing 62 percent of the 4,140 students (undergraduate and graduate) today.

The series of interesting lectures and presentations will continue throughout the year. For information about upcoming events, visit yearofthegael.com.

2012-13 Upcoming Events

- The Catholic Intellectual Tradition October 24 from 7 to 9 p.m.
- The Liberal Arts and the Common Good: Educating Citizens in the 21st Century October 20 at 7 p.m.
- The Sesquicentennial Gala, Saturday November 3 from 6:30 to 11:30 p.m. (at Treasure Island)

- Global Economy Forum: Corporate Social Responsibility in a Global Context, November 14 from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. (Commonwealth Club San Francisco)
- The Liberal Arts and the Common Good: Justice and Citizenship, February 25 from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.
- Day of Service for Bay Area Schools March 16
- Lasallian Education in the 21st Century April 23-24

For more information, visit yearofthegael.com.



Photos Ohlen Alexander



Brother Michael Avila



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