

New principals enthusiastically chart their schools' futures

By TAMI A. QUIGLEY
Staff writer

The 2009-10 school year has brought new principals to seven schools in the Diocese of Allentown, and each is eager to help chart the course of the schools with faith, energy and optimism.

The new principals and their schools are Joanne Heintz, Reading Central Catholic High School (RCCHS); Lori Rutkiewicz, Seton Academy, Bethlehem; Sr. Teresa Ballisty, I.H.M., St. Catharine of Siena School, Reading; Melissa Cuzzola, St. Joseph Regional Academy, Jim Thorpe; Stephen Mickulik, St. Michael the Archangel, Colesville-Limeport; Karen Rogers, St. Nicholas Byzantine Ukrainian Catholic School, Minersville; and Sr. Anna Musi, I.H.M., St. Peter School, Reading.

Heintz is no stranger to RCCHS, having been on the faculty for 26 years, 12 of which have been in administration. She was on the administrative team from September 2008 to March 2009, when she was named acting principal; she was appointed principal June 6, 2009.

"Although I have been at Central Catholic since 1984, as a teacher and then as the studies director, the position as principal is new," Heintz said.

"I have a lot of history with Central since I am also an alumni. Central is very proud of the traditions and history the school carries through the motto of 'Excellor,'" she shared. "My hope as principal is to re-energize these traditions and standards that have been held so high."

"Working with dedicated faculty and staff to help our students build a strong foundation for life and to practice our Christian values is a primary goal. Promoting Central Catholic to the community with the mothers' club, boosters and loyal alumni and friends will help develop and retain what we have worked hard for in the past and will carry us into the future," Heintz said. "Our school motto for this school year is, 'Rooted in Tradition, Committed to the Future!'"

Joseph Murphy has been a social studies teacher at RCCHS for 41 years. "As a member of the search committee for new principal, we had outlined a number of qualities we were looking for in the future candidate," he said. "We interviewed many people and did not realize that the type of person we were looking for was a member of the same committee."

Joanne Heintz has a strong background in all areas of education, especially Catholic schools. She shows rapport in working with faculty and staff, and dedicating and addressing the needs of the students and the Central Catholic community," Murphy said.

"Her extensive experience and knowledge of business and finance is extremely important today with the economic issues that face our Catholic schools. Her personality, her experience and her visions for RCCHS have energized many areas of RCCHS, and the future looks bright under her leadership."

Rutkiewicz speaks warmly of the growing Seton Academy and is more than happy to be leading the school.

"I'm really overwhelmed with the dedicated faculty and commitment of parents and hardworking students," said Rutkiewicz, a 1991 graduate of Moravian College, Bethlehem. Previously, she taught high school in the Pennridge School District and was on the faculty of St. Michael the Archangel, Colesville-Limeport.

"From the time I started in late August, everyone has been so welcoming. The teachers are often here till 5 p.m., and the parents can't do enough for the school."

Rutkiewicz also voiced appreciation for a "very helpful" group of pastors: the Rev. Msgr. William T. Baker, pastor of Incarna-



Philip J. Fromuth, M.Ed., diocesan secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic Education, back right, greets new principals, from left: front, Lori Rutkiewicz, Seton Academy, Bethlehem; Sr. Anna Musi, I.H.M., St. Peter School, Reading; and Melissa Cuzzola, St. Joseph Regional Academy, Jim Thorpe; back, Stephen Mickulik, St. Michael the Archangel, Colesville-Limeport; Sr. Teresa Ballisty, I.H.M., St. Catharine of Siena School, Reading; and Joanne Heintz, Reading Central Catholic High School. Not pictured is Karen Rogers, St. Nicholas Byzantine Ukrainian Catholic School, Minersville. (Photo by John F. Simitz)

tion of Our Lord, Bethlehem; the Rev. Msgr. William F. Bayer, pastor of SS. Simon and Jude, Bethlehem and diocesan director of cemeteries; the Rev. Wayne E. Killian, pastor of Holy Ghost, Bethlehem, and Catholic chaplain at Moravian College and Lehigh University, Bethlehem; and the Rev. Robert J. Potts, pastor of St. Ursula, Fountain Hill.

"My No. 1 goal is to bring to the public's attention all that Seton Academy has to offer," through the media and the school's marketing committee, called the Advancement Group, Rutkiewicz said.

She highlighted Seton's new technology — which the school will continue to build on — and the Aquinas Program, the only Lehigh Valley diocesan elementary school where Aquinas is offered. Visits to preschools in the spring to invite preschoolers to Seton are also on the agenda.

Rutkiewicz has overseen "a bit of a facelift" for the school, as its front has been redecorated inside and out; there was also an increase in enrollment in the first three months.

"I feel so blessed to be here," Rutkiewicz shared. "The teachers, parents and students make it a joy to do the work I do, and I have a very good working relationship with the pastors."

Kindergarten teacher Kathy Hein is also Seton's head teacher and spearheaded the search for a new principal after Joan West's retirement at the end of June 2009.

Hein has taught at Seton for four years and has been teaching in the diocese for almost 18 years, having taught at the former SS. Cyril and Methodius School, Bethlehem.

As the summer progressed, Hein approached Sr. Anita Gallagher, I.H.M., assistant superintendent, diocesan Secretariat for Catholic Education, and the Board of Pastors about the urgent need to hire a principal.

Sr. Anita produced Rutkiewicz's name, and it didn't take long for her to be interviewed by Hein, Fr. Killian and Lisa Bauman, who heads the Aquinas Program at Seton.

"Everything seemed to fall into place for a reason. We felt it was meant to be. We had three weeks at the most before school started, and the minute Lori walked in we

knew she was meant to be at Seton," said Hein.

"It was more than her demeanor and the way she answered questions... we felt this peace."

"Being a school in need of a principal, she really fit the bill for what Seton needed at that point in its journey."

Hein recalled Rutkiewicz felt it, too, as she told parents at the school's open house she knew when she walked in she was meant to be at Seton.

"Lori firmly believes family comes first, and that's the value of Catholic schools — in your personal family and school family," Hein said.

She noted the staff and students' families greatly value Rutkiewicz, who they find compassionate, caring and careful in making decisions that are best for everyone, especially each individual student.

"Lori's brought a new, fresh approach to Seton Academy," said Hein, who firmly believes God put her in the position to interview the new principal, who knows how to bring the staff together and build the school.

"Her attitude is amazing — it's infectious. Everyone has come on board with this new adventure we're going on with Lori."

First grade teacher Mary Ann Brown echoed Hein's sentiments, sharing that Rutkiewicz "has made Seton Academy a very warm and welcoming place. She has a very positive attitude, which generates new energy throughout the school."

"She's open to new ideas and always had time to discuss any problem or situation that arises. Lori takes time to acknowledge the children's accomplishments, whether they be academic or in other areas, such as the school sports teams," Brown said.

"The students, teachers and parents are very happy and appreciative to have someone like Lori as principal. She makes coming to school a real pleasure," Brown said. "She's the best — we're lucky to have her."

Sr. Teresa recalled arriving at St. Catharine of Siena School in early August, where she was warmly welcomed by the school office staff and the IHM sisters at St. Catharine's Convent. Even though the faculty members were not scheduled to return until orientation day at the end of August, many teachers stopped by to meet

and greet.

Sr. Teresa noted she also had the pleasure of meeting the Rev. Msgr. Edward R. Domin, pastor of St. Catharine of Siena.

"The beginning days were busy ones, but I had the peaceful assurance that this was God's work and he was truly present here."

Sr. Teresa said as the days passed she met the students and their parents, and welcomed the newest members, kindergartners and pre-kindergartners, whose classroom was relocated from the church to the school.

"What a wonderful community comprises St. Catharine of Siena School!" Sr. Teresa said.

"Our faculty and staff demonstrate commitment to the ideals of Catholic education, and provide excellence in academic instruction. The students are friendly, studious and generous in all our service projects throughout the year," Sr. Teresa said.

"The early meetings with the School Advisory Board and the Home and School Association sparked positive energy with ideas for marketing, fund raising and friend-raising. Our school is a holy place where Christ is the ever-present Teacher and the 'precious pearl' of Mount Penn that generations have treasured."

Some of the goals Sr. Teresa has for the school are: to build on the religious traditions and service projects that are so much a part of the school; to work with the School Advisory Board, Home and School Association, marketing and finance committees so more students will be able to benefit from the Catholic education offered at the school; to assess and upgrade the technology components in the school; and to expand the Spanish program in the school.

Sr. Teresa has been classroom teacher for 17 years in grades one to eight. She has taught at St. Stephen, Port Carbon; Good Shepherd, Philadelphia Archdiocese; Sacred Heart, Havertown, Philadelphia Archdiocese; St. Augustine-Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Bridgeport, Philadelphia Archdiocese; St. Gregory the Great, Virginia Beach, Va., Richmond Diocese; and St. Peter, Reading.

Please see PRINCIPALS page 18

Principals

Continued from page 17

Sr. Teresa was principal for 19 years, having served Star of the Sea, Virginia Beach, Va.; St. Joseph, Athens, Ga.; Atlanta Diocese; and St. James, Falls Church, Va., Arlington Diocese.

"Sr. Teresa is making a positive impact on our school," shared St. Catharine's fourth grade teacher Ellie Albright.

"Her gentle presence, previous experience and keen insight help us to work as a team to continue to ensure the success of our students. She has an open mind and is always willing to help," Albright said.

"Sr. Teresa has brightened the school with her positive presence in the classrooms and throughout the school," offered first grade teacher Gretchen Ward. "The children are happy to see her and pray with her each morning before the school day starts. She has been kind and caring, and listens to the concerns that faculty, parents and students may have."

"Sister is working with all of the committees and boards to promote and market our school in the community. Her spiritual presence and leadership skills are evident every day in the school," Ward said.

"I feel very fortunate to have Sr. Teresa with us!"

Administrative Assistant Maryann Weiser commented, "Sr. Teresa brings with her many bright new ideas, as all new principals do." She also feels that Sr. Teresa handles her administrative duties very professionally in running the school.

Cuzzola said she is "honored" to be principal of St. Joseph Regional Academy, where she taught second grade 2007-09.

Previously Cuzzola taught in the Diocese of Erie. She developed the all-day kindergarten program in 2003 and taught kindergarten for three years. In 2006 she was moved to the fourth grade. During that time Cuzzola completed her master's degree in education at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh.

Reflecting on being named principal of St. Joseph, Cuzzola said, "Having been a part of the school prior to my appointment of administrator helped for a smooth transition. The school is a huge part of my life."

"My goal for the upcoming year is to continue to provide the best education for all of our students. My goal is to also recruit and retain students. Our enrollment is up for the 2009-10 school year," Cuzzola said.

"I will also continue to work on providing educational opportunities for my teachers. Without my teachers, none of my goals are possible. I will continue to lead

my faculty and students in the spirit of Jesus and his teachings."

"I am very blessed to be principal of St. Joseph," Cuzzola said. "I will continue to do my very best for the school and the Diocese of Allentown."

"My first impressions of having recently become a new principal center on a new sense of perspective," said Mickulik on taking the reins of St. Michael the Archangel School.

"The scale of what I do in a day and am called to do now is tremendously different than what I have ever done before in my vocation to educate and is, at the very least, a humbling experience."

"My experience is that I left one truly awesome high school family and have been welcomed by an utterly excellent elementary one. I have never felt this responsible for a group of people before now, but at the same time, for as nervous as I may become that I might miss some important detail, I often feel as equally proud of great things the students accomplish. Truly, great education cannot occur without an excellent faculty, staff and parent support, and luckily the school I am at has all of the above," Mickulik said.

"I have learned that there is a short window of time to reach out to students before the teachable moment has passed; however if one simply will put in the effort, the impact will be tremendous."

"Although it is a skill I struggle to master, learning first names is important. Our work in Catholic education is about forwarding Christ's word and mission. Calling our students by name, like Christ would call his followers, seems to be one of the first necessary steps," Mickulik said.

"In part, from being a parent with a child in Catholic school myself and from having seen some excellent principals operate in our diocese, I have learned that communication with parents is a crucial component to having a successful school. In short, whether it is the students, the pastor, the faculty, the parents or local community members, the less adversarial and more cooperative the relationship, the more our work can be done efficiently and to the Glory of God's revelation here on earth for us to exist in peace."

Mickulik said some plans for St. Michael the Archangel School are to continue to try to not only to keep it a great school but to grow the school as a place of educational and spiritual excellence.

"Immediately, my plan is to continue to learn about the school and its history to become, myself, part of the recipe for success," he said. "As our world changes our goals are to change and adapt as well, in terms of staying up and ahead with technology in our classrooms while continuing to provide a rigorous and relevant education to our students."

"Another goal is to continue to help our faculty, as well as myself, to create a faculty culture of both scholarship and camaraderie that will be felt and appreciated by our students. Plans in place to move our school forward already for this year are the launch of our most recently redesigned diocesan eChalk Web site, integrating a new grade management system (MMS) that will afford parents online access to student grades within the next school year, and an improved parent notification system utilizing a one-call provider, all in an effort to increase intercommunication among family and school," Mickulik said.

In college, Mickulik studied at Scranton University and St. Pius X Seminary for the priesthood for the Scranton Diocese. In 2001 he began teaching in the theology department of Holy Name High School, Reading. He earned a master of education degree in school counseling from Kutztown University, and holds certifications in both elementary and secondary school counseling.

Since 2005 he worked as the campus minister and then director of school counseling and campus ministry. In summer 2009 Mickulik completed work for a principal's certificate at Alvernia University, Reading.

He lives in Reading with wife Kelly and sons William and Benjamin.

"Stephen has been a breath of fresh air at St. Michael's," said preschool director and head teacher Carol Barron. "He displays a deep spirituality, unending enthusiasm, openness, willingness to listen, and a genuine concern for the faculty and students."

"To watch a principal stop a student and ask how they are because he has noticed they are not themselves, clearly shows his awareness of each individual student."

"His inclusive attitude with the preschool has produced a positive effect on myself and the preschool staff," Barron said. "I am looking forward to many rewarding years working with him."

Before taking the helm of St. Nicholas School, Rogers was principal of the former Academy BVM, Mahanoy City.

"I was very impressed when I first visited St. Nicholas School over the summer," Rogers said. "There was a summer program taking place and all the students were actively involved, even in the heat of the summer."

"Father held a 'Meet the Teachers' day for me and I felt like I was at home. All the teachers gave me a warm welcome and I truly felt a part of the faculty from day one," Rogers said. "I was also very impressed by the support of the pastor, parents and the church community. They all welcomed me and again I felt at home."

"I have learned so much just from my few months here at St. Nicholas School.

The support from the pastor, teachers, church and community is tremendous. The children have welcomed me as their leader, and I am honored to be a part of St. Nicholas School," Rogers said.

"My plan for the school is to make it the best that it can be, to instill the values of our Catholic faith and guide the faculty in their mission to educate students."

"Teaching in the Diocese of Allentown for the past 25 years has helped prepare me for this new role," Rogers shared. "I taught at the Academy of the Blessed Virgin Mary for the past 25 years as the fourth grade teacher. Last year, I accepted the position as principal along with teaching. After the school's declining enrollment, I was very saddened to see it close."

"As they say, 'as one door closes another one opens,'" Rogers reflected. "I was truly honored to be considered as the principal and leader of St. Nicholas School. My first few months here already have been rewarding, and I am looking forward to many more."

"The faculty has been very supportive here as I take on the role as their leader," Rogers said.

Kindergarten teacher Julia Drey said, "I have never met a principal who is so eager to do what is necessary to help everyone in the best way possible. Mrs. Rogers is so pleasant and proactive here at St. Nicholas School."

"Mrs. Rogers is a wonderful support system leader. She strives to do everything in her power to ensure our school runs smoothly and efficiently," offered seventh grade teacher Renee Kanaskie.

"Under her leadership our faculty, staff, parents and students truly work as a team," Kanaskie said.

Sr. Anna taught eighth grade at St. Peter School 1993-2001. She then went to South America for six years and served in a very poor village in Peru. She returned to the United States in 2007 and taught eighth grade for two years at Mary, Mother of Peace School in Southwest Philadelphia.

"It is a privilege for me to return to St. Peter's to serve as principal," Sr. Anna said.

"The school has grown and flourished due to such dedicated teachers and generous benefactors who believe in a quality Catholic education."

Sr. Anna's plans for the school are to continue to nurture and foster a peaceful learning environment where "we can help bring out the best in each other," she said.

Sr. Anna would also like to foster more parental involvement in school activities.

Faculty member Theresa Jackson said, "Sr. Anna is very energetic and has initiated many new activities for the students."

"Sr. Anna is supportive of the faculty and students, and open to new ideas," said faculty member Cassie Reber. "She's positive in her dealings with all."

Next issue: February 18

Advertising deadline: February 8

News deadline: February 11

St. John the Baptist Church
Ruffenach Social Hall
3024 S. Rich Street • Whitehall (Stiles)

Tricky Trays

Saturday, February 13th
9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday, February 14th
9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Locally Owned Fourth Generation Family Business Celebrating Our 54th Year!

Sympathy Flowers

Paper Mache Basket from \$45
Casket Spray from \$175
Fireside Baskets from \$89
Standing Spray from \$60
Satin Pillows from \$39

Ph 610-437-5588
OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK

www.RichMarFlorist.com

More than just the average florist...stop and see for yourself!