

ST. MARK KICKS OFF CELEBRATION OF 35 YEARS

Plano representatives inspire St. Mark students



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St. Mark Catholic School kicked off its year-long anniversary celebration Friday morning with songs, speakers and fanfare. Senator Van Taylor, state representative Jeff Leech and a representative from Congressman Sam Johnson's office



Jeff Leech

helped celebrate along with the St. Mark family.

St. Mark was founded in 1981 as a "Catholic school helping to prepare our students to be-

come good, American citizens" with a heart for community service, said St. Mark principal Patricia Opon.

To a crowd of more than 600 students and family, the kick-off featured words of encouragement and celebrations of patriotism.

"We're going to do some fun things over the year, but today is about just getting it started," she said.

Congressman Sam Johnson couldn't attend the celebration, but his representative Gabriella Pate read a statement from Johnson, describing the importance of the American flag.

In his letter, Johnson describes his seven years as a POW, or prisoner of war, during the Vietnam War. Among his years of abuse, starvation and

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KELSEY SAMUELS / STAFF PHOTO

The students of St. Mark Catholic School sing "Our God is an Awesome God," at their 35th anniversary kick off, Friday morning.



Above: Productions like *Les Miserables* take place at the Shops at Willow Bend Texas Performing Arts.

Home, Plano Children to relocate to Willow Bend

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After receiving the ATHENA Award at the Best of Plano dinner, Sara Akers, founder and executive director of the Plano Children's Theatre announced the upcoming collaboration between North Texas Performing Arts and the Shops at Willow Bend.

As part of the Shops at Willow Bend's \$100 million renovation, the Plano Children's Theater will soon call Willow Bend home.

The NTPA headquarters will move from its location on 15th and Custer Road to the Shops at Willow Bend on Park Boule-

St. Mark:

Sen. Taylor and rep. Leech among guests at event

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constant fear of death, he remembers fellow POW Mike Christian and his patriotism.

"Armed with a bamboo needle and scraps of fabric, over time, Mike managed to forge an American flag on the inside of his prison issued, blue pajama shirt," Pate said.

Each afternoon, Christian would turn his shirt inside out, so the captives could recite the Pledge of Allegiance together.

"This small, but forbidden gesture became a way of life in our camp, and a reminder of all we were fighting to protect back home," Pate read.

The Vietnamese captors beat Christian for his patriotism, but even still, he came back to his cell to begin sewing the American flag anew. Pate presented the school with an American flag that had been flown over the U.S. Capitol building.

Senator Taylor read the resolution recognizing the year-long celebration of St. Mark. The resolutions states: "Three and a half decades ago, the parishioners of St. Mark...recognized the need for a school to promote the spiritual, moral, physical, cultural and intellectual development of their children within the Catholic faith."

In the inaugural class of St. Mark Catholic school, there were 113 students, kindergarten through third



KELSEY SAMUELS / STAFF PHOTO

Fourth grader Sarah Humphries sings "God Bless America" at the 35th anniversary kick-off at St. Mark Catholic School.

grade, and 8 instructors. Today, 60 instructors serve 600 St Mark students K-eighth grade, in a facility double its previous size.

"It's very exciting what you guys do here," Taylor said. "We work on big issues, and try to make good things for this state, but only good things happen when people are involved. And I'm very happy to hear your principal talk about the importance in you participating in the election and caring about your future and the direction of the state."

"If you want to know that leadership matters, take a look at the school. It started small, and it's now something big. And I think its future is even bigger," Taylor said.

Representative Leech spent time encouraging the students that their futures are bright, and they are the ones who will make the state and the country a better place.

"I hope you know that the future of

this great country and this great state depends – not on politicians – but on you, the people. Does anyone know the first three words of the U.S. Constitution?...We the people. It doesn't say, 'we the politicians.' It doesn't say, 'we the pastors, or we the priests.' It says We the People," he said.

"I want you to know that the future of this country depends on you. You don't have to wait until you're 18 [years old] to be a leader, and to impact our culture, impact our country, impact where we are today in our community," Leech said.

He left the student with a challenge: "What can I do now?" and thanked them for their attentiveness.

The celebration ended with fourth grader Sarah Humphries' solo of "God Bless America," and a group St Mark student singing of "Our God is an Awesome God."