

August 2024



SAINT CATHERINE CENTER FOR
Special Needs

Saint Catherine Academy Welcomes New Director of Education



Mrs. Lisa Lanni joins us as the new Director of Education at Saint Catherine Academy. With an impressive academic background and extensive leadership experience, Mrs. Lanni is a stellar addition to our team, and we are excited to see the positive impact she will have on our school community.

Mrs. Lanni holds a bachelor's degree in Mathematics and Special Education from Manhattan College, a master's in Special Education from Fordham University, and a second master's in Religious Studies from the Archdiocesan Catechetical Institute. She is a doctoral candidate at Fordham University in Administration, demonstrating her commitment to academic excellence and lifelong learning.

With over 29 years of experience as a principal in Catholic schools, Mrs. Lanni has a proven track record of embracing innovation and technology and cultivating a student-centered culture. Before joining the Academy, she served as head of school/principal of Holy Trinity Catholic Academy in Shelton. She was also the principal of Saint Joseph in Danbury and Saint Ann School in Yonkers, NY.

Born and raised in New York, Mrs. Lanni attended Catholic schools from first grade through postgraduate studies. "I embrace the vocation of being a Catholic School educator and am thrilled to be a part of the Saint Catherine Academy family," said Mrs. Lanni. "Working with students with special needs has been a passion of mine since my days in high school volunteering at the Special Olympics. Saint Catherine's allows me to fulfill my dreams of being a Catholic educator for students with special needs. I couldn't be happier and more excited to serve as the Director of Education."

"We are happy to welcome Lisa to our Saint Catherine family," said Laura Grozier, Executive Director. "Her extensive experience and dedication to student success align with our mission and we look forward to her leadership and the many ways she will enhance our programs." Mrs. Lanni is an active parishioner of St. Lawrence Church in Shelton, where she serves as a Reader and Eucharistic Minister. She enjoys spending time with her siblings and their families and is an avid reader.

Please join us in welcoming Mrs. Lisa Lanni as our new Director of Education for the Academy. We are confident that her leadership will bring fresh perspectives and continued success to our school. We hope many of you will have a chance to meet her in the coming months.

Celebrating 25 Years of Saint Catherine Academy

In 1999 Saint Catherine Academy opened with

just five students in a modest location on the grounds of the Catholic Center in Bridgeport. The story began on January 4, 1999, when Terry McClinch, the father of 12-year-old Catherine, a child with Down Syndrome, called Sister Eleace and offered his support in creating a diocesan special education school. Only 75 days later, Bishop Egan approved the plan and authorized the use of a former retreat house as the school's first home which opened in the fall of 1999.



As enrollment grew, so did the Academy's need for expanded and more accommodating space. This led to the move to our current location in 2007. In the new facilities, the Academy flourished with the inclusion of essential facilities such as a life skills apartment and therapy room. These enhancements were crucial in meeting the ever-changing needs of our students.



In 2015, Saint Catherine opened the Adult Day Program and expanded to a comprehensive center serving young adults and students. "Our evolution into incorporating an Adult Program has been a natural and necessary progression. It allowed us to offer continued support to individuals who aged out of the Academy or other traditional school settings," said Laura Grozier, Executive Director.



Designed before the inception of the Adult Program, Saint Catherine Center quickly started to outgrow the original building. In 2023, the Center embarked on another expansion to double the square footage of the facilities. This addition allowed possibilities to reimagine programming adding a fully equipped, commercial-grade kitchen and an indoor hydroponic garden that broadened the scope of practical skills acquisition.



The growth and changes we have experienced are profound and reflect our community's support. We have expanded our programs and facilities, increased our enrollment, and continuously adapted to the ever-changing needs of those we serve. However, one constant has remained the same: our unwavering mission and dedication to giving the gift of purpose to young people with disabilities. This commitment has been the foundation of our success and the driving force behind each decision over the past quarter-century.

We invite you to celebrate this milestone at our 25th Anniversary Mass, celebrated by Most Reverend Frank J. Caggiano, on Sunday, September 22, at 2 p.m. at Holy Cross Church in Fairfield. This special occasion will be a time of reflection, gratitude, and joyful anticipation for the future. We look forward to sharing this achievement with our community and honoring the legacy and bright future of Saint Catherine Academy.



Making a Difference, One Toothbrush at a Time



The Adult Program embarked on a heartwarming journey that highlighted the power of community, compassion, and collaboration. The journey began with a generous donation of toothbrushes from Dental Associates of Connecticut and William Fessler Family Dentistry. Inspired by their generosity, the Center paid it forward by making self-care bags for those in need.



With the goal of assembling 100 bags, the young adults transformed this task into a seamless assembly line, where each person had an important role.

What might seem like a simple task was made possible with teamwork and patience. The experience was more than vocational training, it was a lesson in helping others. As the bags quickly filled and were passed down the line, there was a sense of accomplishment and unity. "I love helping other people," said Abby, a participant in the Adult Program. This statement truly demonstrates the spirit of Saint Catherine Center.

The next day, a group of young adults took to the kitchen. Following directions, they baked cookies to thank Dental Associates of Connecticut for their generous donation. The kitchen was filled with laughter and the aroma of freshly baked treats, as the individuals once again used their abilities to spread kindness. "Our young adults were so



excited to deliver the cookies. Their smiles were a beautiful reflection of the pride and joy they felt in their work,” said Ms. Carolynn, an Adult Team lead.

This service project reinforced the fundamental lesson we hold dear; in everything we do, we strive to help others in any way we can. The self-care bags will be donated to Merton House in Bridgeport and Spooner House in Shelton. As each bag is distributed to those in need, the ripples of kindness are felt far beyond the Center.



*Please join us in celebrating
25 years of Saint Catherine Academy*

CELEBRATING

25
YEARS

Saint Catherine Academy
Anniversary Mass

Sunday, September 22, 2024

2 PM

HOLY CROSS CHURCH
750 Tahmore Drive
Fairfield, CT 06825

Most Rev. Frank Caggiano, Celebrant

Reception to follow

RSVP: ahite@stcatherineacademy.org



Invitations will be in the mail soon! Be on the lookout



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