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By

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Morning Star School Dedicates New Building



Bishop Felipe Estevez of the Diocese of St. Augustine dedicated the building at Morning Star School in Arlington on August 18th, 2017 (Photo by Woody Huband)

Arlington's Morning Star School unveiled its newest building in time for the first day of school on Aug. 9. The Mickler Road school is the only special education school in the Diocese of St. Augustine.

Principal Jean Barnes said the school serves students with learning differences, attention deficit disorders, autism spectrum disorders and mild intellectual disabilities.

She added that the school previously went up to eighth grade and the new building now allows the Catholic school to extend its curriculum through 12th grade.

"In the Catholic Diocese, there were no programs for kids with special needs at the high school level," Barnes said. "A few kids could have gone to other schools, but a majority of them weren't able to and needed an individualized program."

Barnes said the \$1.5 million project includes eight classrooms, four for middle school and four for high school, as well as a media technology center.

"We previously rented space from Christ the King for sixth through eighth grades, so to have all the kids on one campus is great," she said. "It's such a blessing to have this school."

To raise funds for the new school building, the Morning Star Circle of Friends was formed to help the philanthropic community learn more about the school.

Honorary chair Bob Shircliff said he was grateful to be asked to join the capital campaign.

“Once I saw what they were doing and how much it meant to the young people and their families, it wasn’t something someone could easily turn their back on,” he said. “We identified those we thought would be interested in hearing our story and were fortunate to have a large number of donors.”

On Aug. 18, Bishop Felipe Estévez of the Diocese of St. Augustine dedicated the new building at the Morning Star School.

Shircliff said the dedication ceremony was a beautiful celebration.

“It was a very happy occasion and I’ve never seen happier parents and kids than I saw on Friday,” he said. “The students are being offered something that isn’t available elsewhere and they’ll be able to get a good education with other kids they enjoy being with.”

Bishop Estévez said it was an amazing feeling to see the love at the school at the Aug. 18 ceremony.

“What an act of love by the benefactors, and they don’t have students in the school and are willing to invest in the good of the students,” he said. “It also means the world to the parents that their sons and daughters can continue at the school.”

Jackie Rodriguez, whose son is a freshman at the Morning Star School, said her son started there in fifth grade.

“Our behavioral therapist told me about Morning Star and when he was in fourth grade I went for a visit,” she said. “When I walked in I felt this immense peace and it felt like I was home.”

Rodriguez said her son has never been happier.

“He’s able to learn, have fun and make friends,” she said. “It’s joyous to know he has a place where he is loved, accepted and understood.”

In the future, Rodriguez hopes the school continues to grow.

“There are a lot of people who still don’t know about the school and there’s such a need in the special needs community for a school like this,” she said. “I’m so thankful we have Morning Star.”