

THE MONITOR

DIOCESE OF TRENTON

All Saints Regional Catholic School ushers in new era

By Barbara O'Reilly
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MANAHAWKIN -- School begins Sept. 2, and with it, a whole new era in Catholic education in the Diocese of Trenton: the age of regionalization.

All Saints Regional Elementary School will open its doors for 40 kindergarten and first grade pupils -- the brand new beginning of a brand new school.

All Saints is unique for several reasons. It is the first regional Catholic elementary school in the diocese, according to Sister of St. Joseph Jeannette Daily, principal of All Saints -- that is, the school is a collaborative effort of several parishes, including planning and funding.

All Saints is also the first Catholic school in southern Ocean County. And it, literally, is being built "from the ground up" -- adding the next highest grade level each subsequent year.

The school is the result of at least five years of study and planning, including diocesan surveys, and of a strong desire by local Catholics for parochial education. "We're celebrating the birth of a new Catholic school in southern Ocean County," Sister Daily said. "It's been needed for such a long time."

Even the name -- All Saints -- is new, yet is a clever 'amalgam', representing the five Ocean County

The five are: St. Mary, Barnegat; St. Pius X, Forked River; St. Francis, Brant Beach; St. Theresa, Tuckerton, and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Whiting.

For the time being -- perhaps two or three years -- All Saints will use facilities built for it at St. Mary's Parish Center, Manahawkin. The ground breaking was May 15, later than anticipated but still in time to open school this year, explained Sister Daily. "It was important to show people this school was finally going to happen," she said.

In the future, All Saints will construct its own school building on 20 acres of diocese-owned property off Route 72 in Stafford Township. It will house grades K-8 and include a gym and cafeteria in addition to academic space. Studies are on-going to see if development should include a high school, according to Sister Daily.

St. Mary's parish Center will then be used for the

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parish religious education program, Sister Daily said, since the parish now uses three local public school buildings for religious education.

All Saints is also a natural consequence of the local population boom, or "the baby boomlet" in the Jersey Pine Barrens, from Monmouth County south. That population growth spurt includes a burgeoning year-round, instead of seasonal population, and a corresponding increase in the number of Catholic families.

Additionally, the other six Catholic elementary schools in the northern parts of Ocean County are filled to capacity and have student waiting lists, said Sister of St. Joseph Mary Helen Beirne, diocesan associate superintendent for elementary schools.

In the early 1990s, said Sister Beirne, there were 13,445 children in parish religious education programs in Ocean County. They were from 65,974 Catholic families. The projected population in Ocean County in the year 2010 -- just 12.5 years away -- is 567,000, including Catholics, of course. That's up from the Ocean County population in 1990 of 433,000, Sister Beirne explained.

"If families in Tuckerton wanted to send their children to Catholic school before now, the children had to travel to Pomona in Camden county, or up to Toms River. There just weren't any other Catholic schools," she said.

All Saints is also unique because

many other Catholic schools have consolidated or closed in recent years. According to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), as of September 1996, Sister Beirne noted, only 134 new Catholic Schools opened across the country in the past 11 years.

The vision for the school and the future of its students are other unique aspects, and in line with educational trends across the country, Sister Daily explained. That is, to look at each child as a whole person, with spiritual, intellectual, physical and social needs. Also, it includes integration of academic disciplines from computers, math and science to literature, art and music -- so things aren't learned in isolation.

"We have to envision that child as an adult Christian in a broader community," said Sister Daily.

Part of All Saints' "broader community" are the essential elements of parents, students and teachers, Sister Daily explained. Another aspect is integrating senior citizens who live in these parishes into the school experience of the children.

"We need to involve seniors in education because they have the experience of life," she said. "Seniors can play a key role in the life of a young child who may not have grandparents close by."

To celebrate the birth of All Saints school, a "birthday party," complete with cake, was held Aug. 14. Everyone in the community -- from prospective students to seniors, Catholic or not -- was welcome to attend, tour the building, and share the

vision and excitement.

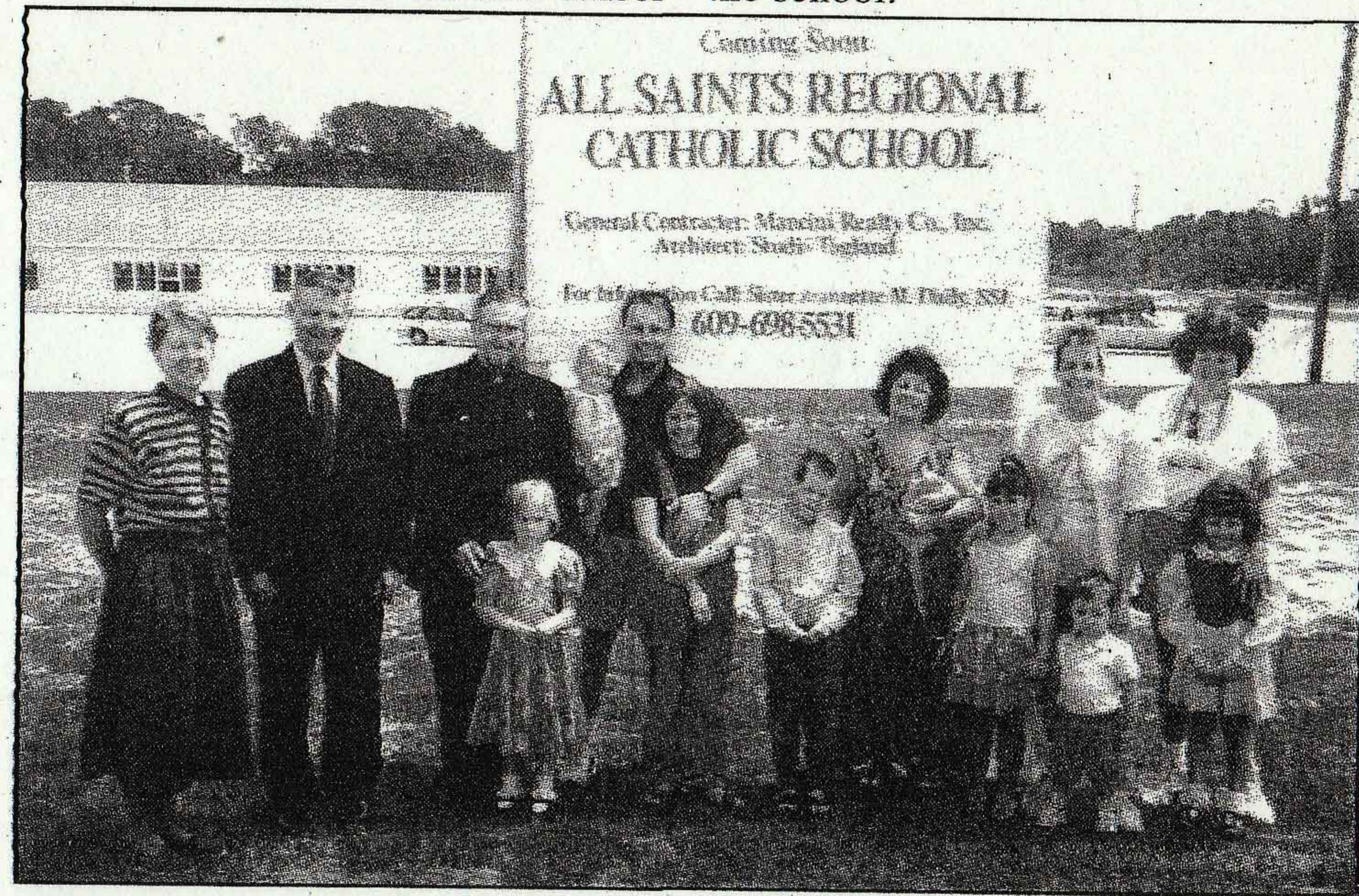
One little girl, who was measured recently for her school uniform was so excited about starting school at All Saints, said Sister Daily, that the child got up at 5 a.m. to be ready for her afternoon appointment!

Staffing has been no problem. Without even advertising for the two teaching positions, more than 70 applications from qualified teachers were received after the May ground-breaking.

Plans call for before- and after-school

programs, explained Sister Daily. One program from 4-H and Rutgers University Extension Programs is designed to work with children after school, "extending the day" with activities, a snack, a time to do homework.

The school must be self-supporting, despite the sharing of the financial burden by the five parishes. Tuition is \$2,500 a year per child. Discounts will be given to families with more than one child enrolled in the school.



Welcome -- Sister Jeannette Daily, Larry Thompson, diocesan superintendent of Catholic Education and Father George Deutsch, pastor of St. Pius X Church, Forked River, greet students who will be attending All Saints Regional School and their families.