

Head to the Hill



Sebastian Mercado



Elgin Academy preschoolers cross the campus to attend class.

Elgin Academy Celebrates 180 Years of Education Excellence

THIS YEAR, ON FEBRUARY 22, Elgin Academy celebrates 180 years of bringing together students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and trustees to achieve its recently revised mission of “Inspiring students to become our creative, courageous, and compassionate future.” The 18-acre campus is located 35 miles northwest of Chicago in downtown Elgin, offering a comprehensive program and college preparation for students from preschool to grade 12.

Head of School Seth Hanford, an Ivy League educated school executive, believes that the intentional range of ages, from preschool and kindergarten to high school, is a plus. “Our campus population allows students to be cognizant of those who are younger and older than themselves,” he said. “Younger students here learn what good behavior is while observing an older child, and the older children learn to lift up the little ones. Our model works and creates a system that demands the creation of this positive culture.”

Teachers and staff also model kindness and the students respond with a personal sense of pride and ownership in their school. “You can’t hide here—

there are no dark corners,” Hanford says. Prior to becoming the Head of School, Hanford was the Academy’s Director of the Upper School, where the teens are educated. Hanford can pop into any classroom at any time to participate without as much as a fluster. Students welcome him and there is a palpable sense of comfort and ease in every part of the school between students, teachers, and staff.

The Elgin Academy Advantage

The Academy takes a different approach than most public schools, a result of low student to teacher ratios, with an average class size of 15. This allows for deep learning, complete subject knowledge, and individualized, student-focused support from teachers. “Students learn differently,” says Bonita Goist. “The kids benefit from the teachers both academically and emotionally. The student body is cohesive.” Goist, a Barrington resident until recently, is the parent of an Elgin Academy graduate. Her daughter, Amelia Deering, attended the school from 6th to 12th grade. “My daughter never felt like a number here. And what is great is that anyone can attend the school, this is not an

story by LISA STAMOS | photography by PAOLO CASCIO



Staff member Madame Ceci teaches kindergarteners French and Spanish.

elite institution.” Goist is responsible for the school’s community outreach.

Elgin Academy is an independent, co-educational and non-denominational school that prepares students for college—and for life. “We value relationships here,” Hanford says. “Our size fosters teaching that allows for students to learn how to deal with failure, how to ask for help, and how to express themselves. And students feel valued here.” Communication skills are an expectation of an Elgin Academy education. Students develop the ability to write, tell a story, and succeed at public speaking. The culture also fosters the children’s ability to advocate for themselves.

Robust Opportunities

Elgin Academy offers students a wide variety of options for the arts, music, sports, clubs, and community involvement. Known as ‘Hilltoppers’, Elgin Academy students can pursue theater, art classes, choir, and work with audio/visual media. Athletics include baseball, basketball, cross country, field hockey, golf, soccer, tennis, and many more. Team and club activities help contribute to well-rounded individuals. Hilltoppers enjoy academic competitions, volunteer experiences on campus and in the community, and a variety of student clubs. Students are often seen playing chess after class or studying together in the student lounge areas.

Process School Insights

Currently, there are 19 students from Barrington who attend Elgin Academy. Families who are willing to invest in their child’s education know that an Elgin Academy education develops the whole child. As a “process school” the focus is on the whole student and his or her interests, not just on academics. A process school’s curriculum is well-rounded and includes equal emphasis



on the arts, as well as academics. Students are encouraged to explore interests outside of school including volunteering and activism, which helps them find their voice. Students are encouraged to think outside the box and to take responsibility for their education; they even participate in traditional parent-teacher conferences.

Elgin Academy is the only process school in the Northwest Suburbs. Process schools in the Chicago area include Latin, North Shore Country Day School, and Woodlands. These schools all offer a transformational experiences that have life-long implications: a love of learning, evolving into confident leaders, fostering critical thinking skills, and learning in a diverse community.

Head of School Seth Hanford helps sum it all up. “Our students learn what moves them, who they are, and this helps set them up for life.”

To learn more about Elgin Academy, visit www.ElginAcademy.org, or call 847-695-0303. U



Donna Bolz teaches fourth grade at Elgin Academy. Her students are eager learners and were excited to talk about their Angel Tree project. A tradition in her classroom, students raised money for the charity and talked about how important it is to help others in need.



Left: Gianna Hughes is eager to contribute in a classroom discussion. Far left: Students in the fourth grade demonstrate good manners, and high levels of interest and engagement.

Eighth graders participate in a cross-curriculum crime scene forensics project.

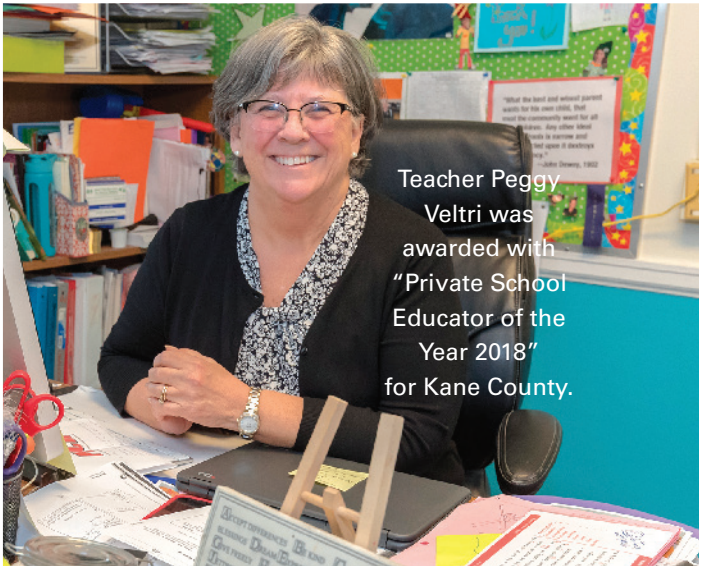




Elgin Academy students in a high school art class.



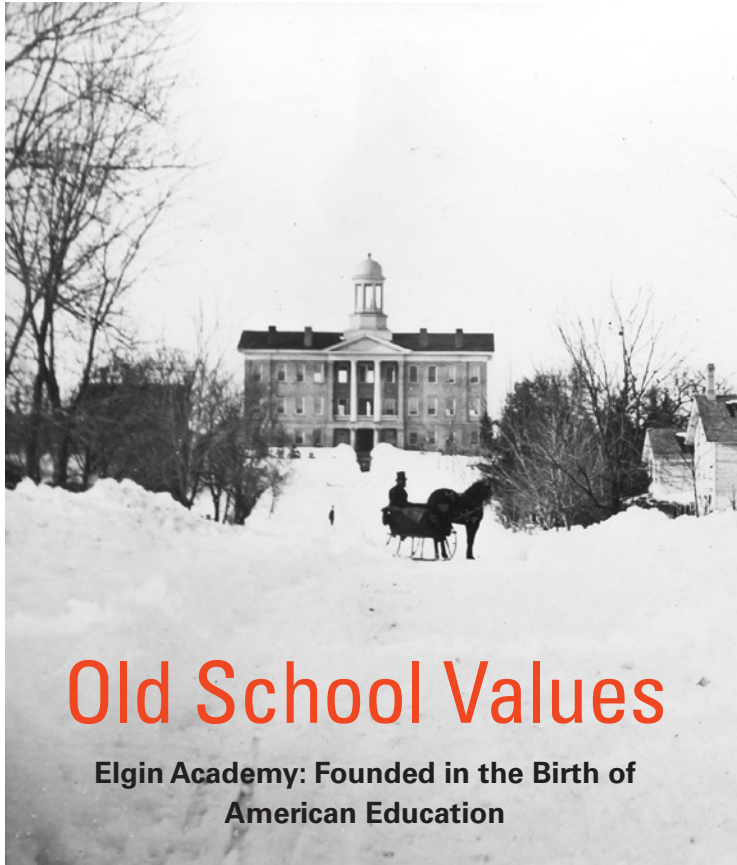
Seth Hanford visits a high school classroom.



Teacher Peggy Veltri was awarded with "Private School Educator of the Year 2018" for Kane County.

Elgin Academy's Director of Strategic Marketing and Communications, Lynn Martin (on left) and Bonita Goist, Outreach, sit by a window that shows the lawn where graduations are held. Each student has a special moment of recognition in the annual graduation ceremony.





ELGIN ACADEMY WAS GRANTED its charter by the State of Illinois in 1839, just four years after the City of Elgin was founded. The school's first building, "Old Main", was opened in 1856 atop a hill. The school's first diploma was earned by Laura Davidson, the granddaughter of Elgin's founder.

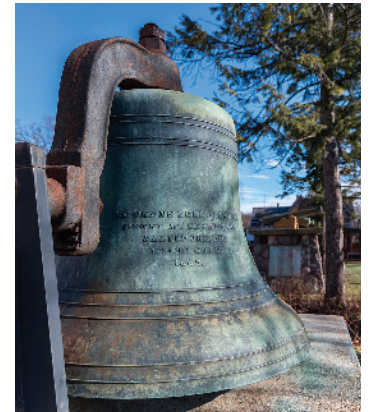
Education in America began a major transformation in the mid-1800s—from scattered, local experiments into a coherent system of centers for learning. Uniformity was a goal for the courses being offered, the training that teachers needed, and access by the general public.

There were powerful forces at play during the mid-19th century, and education was deemed a necessary solution by its reformers for projecting the moral values that were considered essential to American society and maintaining its social equilibrium.

The nation was experiencing mass immigration, industrialization, and embracing the value of educating a fast-growing and diversifying public. Small victories were won as African Americans used the law to fight for a public education. Previously, private schools limited education only to the wealthy.

Today, Old Main stands as a reminder of a time and place, and the morals and values that American education stood for. The Greek Revival style building is now a home for the Elgin Area Historical Society, with one classroom that is still used by the Academy.

From its beginning 180 years ago—to today—Elgin Academy carries forward the inspiring and courageous culture of the transformative period it was founded in.

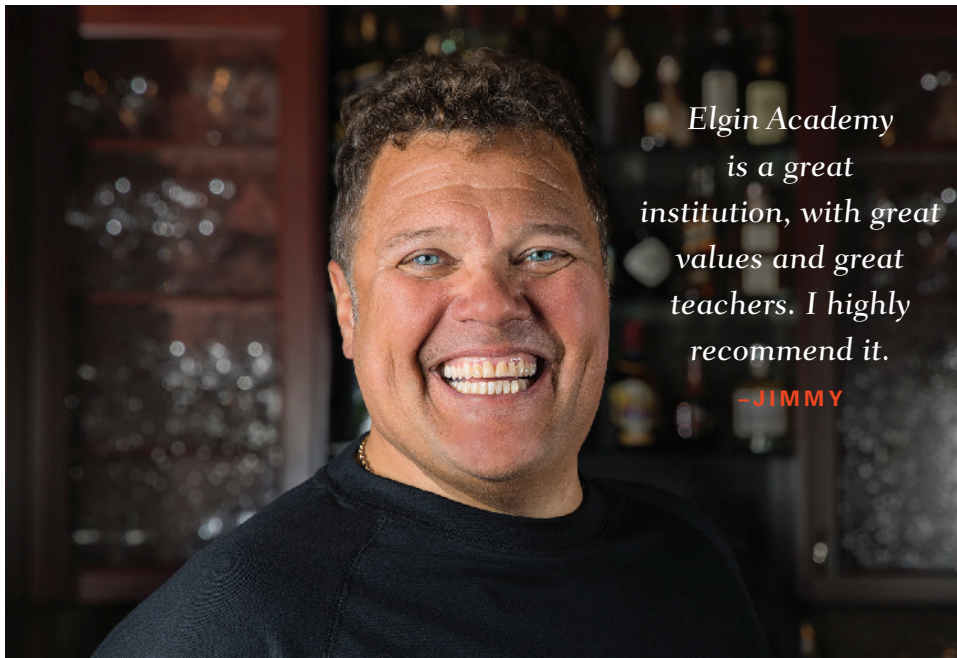


ON CAMPUS STAND TWO AUTHENTIC Union cannons as a memorial to Elgin Academy personnel who served in the Civil War. There were seven commissioned officers, six non-commissioned officers, and 21 privates who served from Elgin Academy. A total of 153 Civil War veterans, whose names are inscribed on the cannons base, were associated with the Academy.

The bell that is located near Park and College Streets adjacent to Elgin Academy was once the factory bell that rang out for the Elgin National Watch Company. The massive bell rang to tell time both for the community and to signal factory worker's breaks. The Elgin watchmaker began operations making pocket watches in 1867. By 1920, the city's anchor business was the largest watch making complex in the world. The bell ceased ringing in 1931 when a steam whistle replaced it. The factory closed in 1966, with the bell its only remaining landmark.



Some of the Barrington area alumni of Elgin Academy gathered at Barrington's White House recently for a photo. In front from left: Susan Rider (1962); Colleen Konicek (1984); Joyce Fermanis Younger (1983). Center row, from left: Rob Berry (1986); Lara Berry (1986); and Chad Arthur (1985). In back, from left: Sam Rider (1989); Dawn Allcroft (1986); and Tom Herb (1986).



*Elgin Academy
is a great
institution, with great
values and great
teachers. I highly
recommend it.*

—JIMMY

Excellent Teachers, Astonishing Results

A Visit with Elgin Academy Alumnus Jimmy John Liataud

“Quintessential Barrington” spoke with Jimmy John Liataud, founder of Jimmy John’s, an American franchised sandwich restaurant business. From his first sub shop in Illinois in 1983 to more than 2,800 franchised locations today, Liataud gives credit to his teachers whose uncompromising values are inherent in the culture of the franchise founder and how he does business.

QB: What do you recall about your experience at Elgin Academy?

JJL: My freshman year at Elgin Academy my teachers thought that I was a generally bright individual, but also thought I was lazy, not making the effort. They thought I was undisciplined, when in fact, I was an undiagnosed dyslexic. They would get angry with me, then I disrespected them. It was a conflictual relationship. Teachers got together and said I was not paying attention. Thought I was a smart-ass. They got together to make a plan to kick me out of the school.

QB: Then, you said the school board was going to vote on removing you from the school.

JJL: Yes, but Jim Lyons, the disciplinary dean at the school, stepped in and told the board that if they kicked me out, he’d leave to. He put his job on the line for me. He told them, ‘If you do this, I’m leaving. He told them he was committed to working with me.’ And the board said OK. If you

will manage Jimmy and take responsibility for his behavior, he can stay.

QB: What did Mr. Lyons see in you?

JJL: I think he saw that I was a good kid with a bunch of problems. He put his arm around me and took the time to get to know me. Put his reputation on the line. He coached me. He helped to teach me. I could understand material that was read to me; but what I tried to read, I could not understand. Mike DeHaven also stepped up. Jim gave me love and attention, and Mike, a history teacher, helped me as well. He would explain to me the daily lesson using words I could understand.

QB: Did you find any successes after the staff embraced you and your unique needs?

JJL: I got “B” in Chemistry! They helped me get through school. This could only have happened at Elgin Academy. The school hires teachers with character. They wanted to teach me. I was a tough-

er kid to teach, but these teachers wanted to make the effort. I was so lucky to be there.

QB: What difference did these teachers make in your life?

JJL: Even though I graduated second from the bottom of my class, I gained a sense of self. Those teachers kept me there. I gained self-esteem and self-confidence. They concentrated on me. They had my back. They helped me win.

QB: Any funny stories that you recall?

JJL: Yes. I was playing backgammon with the headmaster’s son David and won \$30 in a game. The headmaster’s wife said, “Jimmy’s gambling”, but she made her son pay the loss anyway while also telling me to shut down my gambling ring. Lesson learned. This would not have happened this way at a public school.

QB: What are your most memorable thoughts from attending Elgin Academy?

JJL: I was a difficult dude. Tough to coach. But the school gave me what I needed. During my junior and senior years, I was on the work program. I had my classes up until noon, and then worked from 1 to 6 p.m. for my dad. Due to this schedule, the only English class available was with Jerry Zank. It was an Advanced English class. He had us write a letter every week, and it had to be five paragraphs. First, an opening paragraph, then supported by three paragraphs, and finished with a conclusive fifth paragraph. To this day, I write all of my letters using this format. That’s pretty cool.

