

Marian gets national honor

Institution named to honor roll for second straight year.

October 6, 2005

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MISHAWAKA -- Marian High School students think they know why their school made the list of the top 50 Catholic high schools in the nation for the second year in a row.

"The community here is so close," senior Sarah Rompola said. "You feel like you're a part of something."

Rompola, 18, is a part of a few things at Marian, including the school's Right to Life Club and the National Honor Society.

Senior Michael Chartier is involved in clubs, too. Chartier even started his own chapter of the Junior Statesmen of America at the school, and a group of Marian students attended a convention in Indianapolis to discuss and debate politics and policy.

The experiences of a few Marian students benefit the entire student body, Chartier said.

"In classes, we will have discussions about things that are going on in the world around us," he said. "We would take things we discussed (at the convention) and throw in our thought and feelings."

Chartier said he likes to compare his opinions with classmates. The process has taught the 18-year-old a thing or two.

"I'm not always right," Chartier said. "It's just that ability to pick people's brains (that) really helped me grow as a person."



Marian High School students listen Friday to teacher Caroline Schulz's drug abuse awareness class. Marian was recently named one of the top 50 Catholic High Schools in the nation for the second year.

Tribune Photo/BARBARA ALLISON

One of two in state

Marian scored in the top 25 of 250 applicants in the area of civic education, Anthony Pienta of the Catholic High School Honor Roll told The Tribune in an e-mail from the organization's office in Grand Rapids. The group does not assign a specific rank to the top 50 schools. Bishop Luers High School in Fort Wayne was the only other Indiana school to make the list.

Student involvement in organizations promoting civic awareness is just one of the areas the Catholic National Honor Roll committee considered, Marian Principal Carl Loesch said.

Loesch completed a survey this spring asking about the school's academics and religious identity as well. About 85 percent of Marian's 816 students are Catholic, and the school requires students to attend monthly Mass and asks that each class begin with a prayer.

Emphasis on academics

The school's relationship with the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration, whose convent is near the high school campus, also contributes to the ongoing religious atmosphere at the school, Loesch said.

But academics is the area where administrators believe the school shines the most. Two seniors will present their research papers, completed for the Advanced Research in Science course, at the Indiana Academy of Science Talent Search later this month. Only 12 students statewide were selected for the program, and the top two student researchers will advance to a national competition.

Most of the school's students choose to become involved in honors and college preparatory classes, English Department Chairman Robert VanGoey said.

"People who come to Marian overextend themselves to achieve," VanGoey said. "I never turn a kid down who wants to challenge themselves."

This year's senior class has four sections of honors English. More than half of the 67 students who took the Advanced Placement English Exam last spring passed, earning at least three out of five possible points, and 95 percent of the school's students passed standardized English tests on their first attempt last year.



Chartier



Loesch



Rompola

About 97 percent of Marian High School graduates go on to study at a college or university.

Ideal combination

Cindy Rahrig, the parent of one Marian High School graduate, one senior and one future student, said the combination of academic excellence, Catholic identity and welcoming atmosphere appealed to her four years ago when she was looking for a school for her three sons.

The Rahrig family moved to the area from St. Louis during the summer of 2001, and Rahrig's oldest son soon made friends at the school through the football team, even before he attended his first class.

Football coach Reggie Glon helped her son ease into his new environment, Rahrig said.

"The transition was very easy for him," she said. "It could have been hard, but it was not for him."

For Rompola, the senior in the National Honor Society and Right to Life, knowing that Marian won the distinction of being one of the top Catholic schools in the country is encouraging as she thinks about her postsecondary education plans.

"It just gives me confidence that what I take from here will help me," said Rompola, who is applying for admission at the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University, Boston College, Xavier University and Loyola University. "It gives me confidence that I know I can succeed in the future."

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