

Maranatha Enrollment Climbs Under Crane

By **CHRISTINA HAMLETT**
The Outlook

Chet Crane, head of school at Maranatha High School for the past five years, prefaces his interview with a chuckle and the disclosure that what he's about to share will shine a much welcomed spotlight on one of the best kept secrets in the San Gabriel Valley. Specifically, Crane says, not that many people know where to find Maranatha because the school has literally spent so much time on the move.

"The irony is that although Maranatha has been around for over four decades, it has had somewhat of a Bedouin-like existence having been shuttled amongst four different addresses in the area during the course of its lifetime. That much mobility, of course, has contributed to its anonymity and — because it didn't have a permanent home until three years ago — it also meant that parents were spending a lot of time behind the wheel driving their offspring to programs and sporting events held on 'borrowed' campuses in San Marino, Temple City, Glendale, Elliott Middle School and Azusa Pacific University."

He compares the school's nomadic qualities to the Israelites of old. "They spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness until they finally found the Promised Land. At Maranatha, we celebrated our 40th anniversary of wandering all over the valley by taking up serendipitous residence in what used to be the Ambassador College Campus in the heart of Pasadena."

A state-of-the-art athletic field and gymnasium, student center with computer café, beautiful classrooms, and a serene, park-like setting with its own koi pond and outdoor study areas give this prep school for grades nine through 12 the upscale feel of a college campus. Relates Crane, "It's an exciting

transitional time for us because each year our freshman class has gotten larger and larger. Just prior to the move to Ambassador, we had 460 students enrolled. Today, that number is nearly 700. Our average grade size is approximately 180, and the diversity of our demographics and religious orientations makes this an excellent place for students to interact and to learn from one another as much as they learn from our exceptional faculty."

Crane's own passion for wanting to make a difference in the lives of young people can be traced back to his ninth grade Latin and literature teacher. "I'll never forget her as I was struggling through 'Les Miserables' and all the paradigms of Latin. This was a woman who inspired me toward excellence and truly never gave up on me. She saw the potential in me and invested her time in a way that my other teachers really hadn't." It is her legacy, he says, that he sees reflected on a day to day basis in the classrooms of Maranatha.

"At Maranatha, we're not just giving our young people the academic tools they need to succeed in college but we're also helping them develop character for an eternity. As teachers, we never know where our influence ends. My personal faith in Christ gives me an opportunity here to integrate a Biblical world view into a classroom where we challenge kids to question and to explore topical issues. One of the misconceptions about a private Christian school is that some people think that all we teach is Creationism. Definitely not! I want students to think about things like stem cell research, abortion, eugenics, the significance of euthanasia. Who's going to think about ethical issues if you don't? We tell them not to blindly accept answers just because they come



Chet Crane, who is in his fifth year as Head of School, has seen enrollment climb 50% since Maranatha moved to the former Ambassador College campus.

from teachers or their parents or off a page on the Internet. You'd be surprised by how many people think that Wikipedia is the repository of all truth! If we don't develop critical thinkers in our educational systems, we're setting them up to believe anything that comes down the road."

The film "Dead Poets Society" is one that Crane says continues to inspire him insofar as its message about igniting young minds and teaching them how to make informed decisions that will shape and influence the world they're going to live in. "Our job here at Maranatha is about fostering

healthy and effective relationships on all levels. We currently have about 60 different mentoring groups on campus with students and faculty coming together, and the common denominator is that the kids just want someone to pay attention to what they have to say."

He recalls an incident where he said 'hello' three mornings in a row to a quiet young girl who was just starting the semester. To his surprise, she confronted him on the third day with the response, 'Mr. Crane, you don't even know my name, do you?' I told her it was only the third day of the semester and I was trying hard to learn names as

fast as I could. She told me her name was Meghan and challenged me to remember it. Well, the next day I said 'Good morning' and she said 'Good morning who, Mr. Crane?' She was amazed I actually kept my promise when I replied, 'Meghan'.

Being a school administrator in the 21st century is not without its share of challenges, especially when getting into the college of one's choice is becoming increasingly competitive. "One of the biggest ones we have is in establishing and maintaining a true lifeline between the school and the home. All of that hinges on communication, appreciation and respect for the partnership roles that educators and parents play in ensuring that a student will get the most out of his or her experience at Maranatha, and ultimately leave Maranatha prepared for college and life as adults. We have an incredible cross-section of socioeconomic conditions represented at our school, and we are committed to working with each individual family. The Maranatha experience also keeps a lot of our former alumni coming back to visit us and catch up with teachers who remain dear friends."

He concludes the interview with unabashed praise of his young charges. "What a generation we've got here and one whose potentiality we as educators haven't fully tapped yet. It's what I call the 'random acts of love' that capture their attention. Whether it takes the form of remembering their names, participating in mentoring groups, or sitting and chatting with them after an event, it's all about validating that they're unique and special and a remarkable gift to us from God. It's critical not to get so busy that we lose sight of that and forget how to stop, look and listen to what they have to say."

For more information about Maranatha, visit www.maranathahs.org.



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