

# IMPACT



SAINT JOHN FISHER PARISH A Catholic Community for All • *Love God. Love all people. Make disciples* • Spring 2018



## SJF School Blends Faith, Integrity, Scholarship, Service





# Motivated by Our Mission *By Monsignor David A. Sork*



St. John Fisher Parish School was founded in 1962, just one year after the founding of the parish itself. The first pastor, Monsignor Thomas McCarthy, saw the school as an integral part of the parish, for it serves to prepare our future leaders. Since his time that has not changed. For most of the history of the school, it was led by religious Sisters, first the Daughters of Mary and Joseph, and later the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The principal who was here the longest was Sister Edward Francis, IHM, who led the school for 30 years (1970-2000). Second in length is our present principal, Mrs. Anne-Marie Hudani, who has led the school for the past 16 years (2002-present). Our parish has been blessed by her leadership.

The central mission of the school is to provide Catholic education and formation in all aspects of school life. This influences all that the school does. The children attend the 8:00 am Mass each week; different classes are there on different days. You will often see the children aiding the cantor in leading the singing. In addition a Mass is planned by a different grade each month.

One of my joys as pastor is to teach Scripture to the Eighth Grade each week. This gives me the opportunity to get to know them well before they graduate and stretch their knowledge of Scripture in a way that prepares them

for high school. Ordinarily, because of administrative responsibilities and the need to evaluate the teachers, the Principal does not teach. However, Mrs. Hudani, a native of the United Kingdom, chooses to teach Shakespeare to the Eighth Grade each year.

Besides its mission as a Catholic school, St. John Fisher School strives to provide an education that is second to none. Several years ago it received the Blue Ribbon Medal of Excellence from the United States Department of Education. Both principals of our local public high schools, Peninsula and Palos Verdes, have told me how outstanding our students are.

Recently, when we had an Open House for the school, a prospective parent came and was so impressed that she registered her child for the school for the following year. However, what surprised me was that she said that even though she had been going to Mass here a long time, she did not know that the parish had a school. That told me that we need to do a lot more marketing to make people aware of what an outstanding school we have.

Enjoy this issue of IMPACT. Learn more about our school. I am hoping that those who read this will become ambassadors for our school and spread the word.



*CHINESE EXCHANGE STUDENTS* were hosted this Spring for a two-week international camp. Their participation in campus academic and social life was beneficial and inspiring for both visitors and hosts, in what is hoped will be an annual program to foster understanding and cooperation.

**W**alk into a classroom at St. John Fisher School and you'll see iPads, MacBooks, document cameras, projectors, Apple TVs, and interactive whiteboards. Unseen is an upgraded Wi-Fi internet. These are all essential tools in 21st century education and SJF is right up there in maintaining the latest technology to teach students and prepare them for the world that they will face.

In fact, a visitor will see students as young as first grade creating Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, and older students working in Microsoft Word, Excel and Pages. They're also taught simple HTML coding! To keep up to date in the rapidly evolving world of technology, the school leases its computers, which is more cost-effective than purchasing.

The 170 students enrolled in the 2017-18 year are the latest in a history that goes back to 1961 when the Daughters of Mary and Joseph joined with parish priest Monsignor Thomas J. McCarthy and held the first classes in temporary quarters on the Mary and Joseph Novitiate grounds, as St. Peter of Alcantara School. A year later, the first permanent building was completed for the 422 students. By then the name of the Parish and the School had been changed to St. John Fisher and had moved to its present location at the top of the hill at Crest and Crenshaw.

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# SJF School Pillars for Success:

# BELIEVE

# LEARN

# CARE

Over the years, enrollment rose and fell with the area's demographics. The peak was 1965, when 654 were enrolled. The year before, the Sisters of Rolling Hills joined the faculty and were part of the staff until 1977. In 1970, the Daughters of Mary and Joseph had to withdraw due to a shortage of sisters. They were replaced by the sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who administered the school until 2000 when the first lay principal, Karen Lloyd, was appointed. Two years later in 2002, the current principal, Mrs. Anne-Marie Hudani, was selected to lead the school. Born, raised, and educated in England, she immigrated to California with her husband in 1997 and initially settled in San Diego. She feels so grateful to be part of this wonderful community and blessed by the support of Msgr. Sork and the outstanding faculty and staff. Sixteen years later, she still feels, "so happy and thrilled to come to school every day!"

At the start of this school year, the school opened a Transitional Kindergarten for four-year olds that has been a huge success. Space for the next school year in TK is filling up fast! The school is proactively working on marketing and promotion. A recently formed marketing team is run by

parents. It is tasked with marketing the benefits the school offers for prospective students and their parents. The goal is to build enrollment and a reputation for high quality education and character formation. The recent standardized test scores in reading and math proficiency scores achieved are higher than both the Palos Verdes Unified and Manhattan Beach school districts K-8 schools.

A classroom was converted to a Science Laboratory three years ago and equipped with new microscopes, an incubator and other equipment needed for the many experiments that are conducted there. All students in grades 6-8 participate in the school's annual Science Fair. The experiments are judged by a number of individuals in the science field. Last year, thirteen students were selected to represent SJF School at the Los Angeles County competition, and the top six went on to the California State competition.

Over the past five years, 20 percent of the graduates have gone on to attend Catholic high schools. The cost of a Catholic high school education can be prohibitive for some Parish school families, especially with several school age children in the family.

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# What's in the Secret Sauce?

A parent once referred to all the things that made St. John Fisher School (SJF) special as a “secret sauce.” No one really knows what's in it but everyone knows it's special. That being said, there are some clearly identifiable elements that contribute to the effectiveness of the school.

St. John Fisher School checks all the boxes on the most fundamental level. The academic curriculum is rigorous, and the athletic and enrichment programs are comparable with the other schools in the area. On the occasion of the school's recognition as a Blue Ribbon School of Excellence, Maureen Dowling, Director of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement wrote, “By performing in the top ten percent of the nation's schools in reading and math, St. John Fisher School has clearly evidenced a commitment to educational excellence and high academic achievement for all students.”

The physical environment of the school is also a key factor in provid-

ing a top-notch education. It provides a safe and organized setting where the students feel a sense of security to learn and explore within the campus. Students enjoy a newly renovated playground, lunch courtyard, grassy play area, fully-equipped science laboratory, in-classroom libraries and an athletic gymnasium, all of which create a positive learning environment.

The staff plays a major role in the educational quality at SJF — the office staff, teachers, and the principal. Dr. Grace Kymn, whose two sons attended the school explains, “Teachers at SJF are the gems of the school. They are truly dedicated to student learning and they take personal interest in each of the students. It is also the small classroom and warm, caring, family-like atmosphere where students feel comfortable and can focus on learning and get challenged to grow their minds. And in the center of their daily lives at school, there is always God.”

Parent involvement enhances the climate at SJF. From day-to-day classroom activities to sporting events to

major fundraisers, SJF parents are more than willing to give and be a part of the community. With the numerous hours spent together, countless parents have developed friendships that have weathered time and distance. Tami Wick's sentiment is shared by many parents, “This school has been one of the most amazing parts of my life as I have raised my three children.”

One of the most distinguishing aspects of the school is fostering the children's faith journey. Students participate in daily prayer and weekly and monthly Mass as part of the school's curriculum. They begin each day with community worship at morning assembly and end each day with classroom prayer. The students are taught Christian values and are expected to live those values throughout the school day. “I got in touch with my spiritual connection with God and that inspired me to discover my faith,” Miranda Moore (2011) said.

Since 1962, St. John Fisher School has produced outstanding young men and women of faith, integrity, and



Every year students in transitional kindergarten through third grade salute different countries on International Day. Above: Parent volunteers Mrs. Valerie Guerrero and Mrs. Kathy Choi serve the second graders bulgogi and other popular foods from Korea.



At the Back-to-School BBQ, volunteer dads make up the Grill Team: Dr. Jim Flores, Mr. Lee Katnich, and Mr. Brad Schultz



Mrs. Wendi Zapanta (parent) and Mrs. Angelica Suarez (grandparent) work together at one of the auction tables at the school's annual spring fundraiser.



Fourth graders with volunteer dad Mr. Mike Croke proudly display the replica of a California mission they built together.

scholarship in a community rich in service to others. Just read some of the comments from the Principals from renowned high schools in the area:

*"Almost without exception, the St. John Fisher students have no trouble transitioning socially from a small private school to a large public school. They are high achievers academically and have success in the classroom and transition seamlessly into the rigors of the collegiate track. Finally, the SJF students emerge as leaders here at Peninsula."*

Mitzi Cress, Palos Verdes Peninsula High School



*"...applicants from St. John Fisher... are young men and women who are not only prepared academically for the rigors of a demanding high school curriculum as indicated by their excellent high school placement test scores; they are also young men and women of character."*

Rosemary Libbon, Bishop Montgomery High School



*"I have found the graduates of St. John Fisher who matriculate to Loyola High School to be outstanding young men from supportive families, academically prepared especially in math and English, involved in their school, church and community, and motivated to succeed."*

Mr. Frank Kozakowski, Loyola High School of Los Angeles



*"The graduates from SJF come into high school prepared to find their passion, excited to try new experiences, and gain perspective on their strengths. SJF's program gives the students the right balance of academic, personal and social skills to be successful at the next level in high school and beyond."*

Dr. Charles Park, Palos Verdes High School



Perhaps there is not one thing that sets St. John Fisher School apart from the rest. Perhaps the collective sum of all the different aspects becomes a much larger force — a culture of care, kindness, compassion, and acceptance rooted in Christ; a culture where the focus is on the total development of the children in order for them to harness their God-given gifts and reach their full potential. Perhaps that's the "secret sauce."



# SJF School Through the Years...

# Then & Now



## SCHOOL PILLARS

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Recognizing the economic realities, a few years ago SJF School established the Monsignor Eugene Gilb Fund to receive tax-deductible donations which can provide scholarship help for the parents of St. John Fisher Parish School children.

Mrs. Hudani stated that the school is a “community of common beliefs and principles, faith and moral aspirations,” and that the sense of partnership is part of the equation. “We have a real community, a real team here,” she adds.

One of the school’s guiding principles is nurturing mind, body and spirit in an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust in God. The school builds well-rounded young people

through classroom and outside activities, which include a drama program, attending Mass, visiting the Skirball Center and the Chapman University Holocaust Center, and many other activities. Athletics also plays an important role in the students’ development through Physical Education classes and CYO sports teams, including flag football, golf, basketball, volleyball and soccer.

The school honors the memory of Saint John Fisher, who died for his belief in the Church, through the School-wide Learning Expectations, which are clustered around the three pillars of Believe, Learn and Care. Words for all students of all ages.



### 2017-2018 SJF School Faculty

*Standing left to right:*  
Joan Christovale, Lisa Counts,  
Joanne Selvaggio, Alison Graff,  
Alex Soto, Colleen Guenther,  
Kristy Gradoville, Tracey Martin,  
Grant Hungerford, Mary-Clare  
McQuade and Susan Noerper

*Seated left to right:*  
Areena Sadeghi, Kristin Kroeger,  
Principal Anne-Marie Hudani,  
Megan Margeson and  
Blanca Magaña.





# SJF Students Through the Years...

## Liam FitzGerald

Recently Liam FitzGerald, after a 9:00 A.M. Sunday Mass at Saint John Fisher (SJF), reflected on his days at SJF School.

Liam is now 17 years old and a junior in high school, however, before that he attended SJF School from the first through eighth grades. Liam took the entrance examination for both Loyola High School and the California Academy of Mathematics and Science and was accepted by both. He chose Loyola. He always thought that he had received a good education while growing up but had nothing to compare it to. Once he found himself in an academically competitive college prep high school, taking honors and advanced placement courses like theology, Latin, algebra, geometry, calculus, and English literature he realized he

could compete favorably with students from throughout the Los Angeles metropolitan area. He credits that to the rigorous standards he faced in gram-



mar school from teachers who taught him reading, writing, mathematics, science, computer and religion classes, who constantly tested his intellect. He felt honored to represent his parish school for three consecutive years at the Los Angeles County Science Fair, where he won awards that qualified him to compete on the state level. Two classes that especially stood out were in the eighth grade, a religion class on scripture taught by Monsignor David Sork and a Shakespearean literature class that the school Principal Anne-Marie Hudani taught.

Liam pointed out that the class sizes at SJF were small, allowing him to know all of his classmates and develop friendships he plans to maintain the rest of his life. There were athlet-

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## Anna Benedict

Anna Benedict is a 19-year-old freshman at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. However, only five years ago this affable, accomplished, self-assured young lady was a student at Saint John Fisher (SJF) School.

Anna went to SJF School from kindergarten through the eighth grade, graduating in 2013. Her class had 34 students, all of whom she knew well, and many who will be lifelong friends.

The teachers were caring, yet always challenged their students to excel. Anna was a member of the school Academic Decathlon team during sixth and eighth grades. She placed first in individual geometry during the Los Angeles Archdiocese

competition in the eighth grade. The SJF team placed eleventh among 116 schools that competed in individual and group subjects. While in seventh grade Anna was one of 300 students in the United States chosen as a semi-finalist in the prestigious Broadcom MASTERS (Math, Applied Science, Technology, & Engineering for Rising Stars) competition. Anna's project was "Wave Hello to 'Blue-Green' Energy: The Effect of Blowhole Cavern Depth on Water Ejection from a Simulated Oceanic Blowhole." To qualify Anna had won the county science fair and placed in statewide competition. Anna was a member of the student council, an altar server, a Girl Scout, acted in the school plays and was editor of *The*



*Archangel Bugle*, the school's monthly publication.

After SJF Anna attended Palos Verdes Peninsula High School. During her junior and senior years she designed and developed a low cost, solar powered, water recovery system

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# Tim Norcross



Doctor Timothy Norcross has been a lifelong resident of the Palos Verdes Peninsula, except for the years he spent in college and obtaining the further education needed to prepare him for his medical practice.

Tim went to Saint John Fisher School (SJF) from first to eighth grades graduating in 1988. The school at that time was administered by the nuns and they ran a “tight ship.” He fondly recalled the friendships he developed there, which continue to this day. He believes one reason for this is that the small SJF classes were not only together in an academic setting, but went to Mass and received their reli-

gious education together. There were also other activities most of his friends took part in, like being altar servers, which created this lifelong bond. All of his teachers were good, but he especially recalls Sister Rachael Marie who was the science teacher then and made the course fun and interesting. Her classes piqued his curiosity in that field, which has stood him in good stead throughout his higher education and into his professional life. Sister Edward Francis was the principal and also taught history. He remembers well how in each of his last three years of grammar school she would show the boys her favorite movie, *Patton*. Tim thinks she did this to show these young males how to develop discipline and mature into being men. Everyone in the class loved it and at least one of his classmates later joined the U. S. Army and went on to serve multiple tours in Iraq. The last Tim heard, this former classmate was attending the Army War College.

On graduation from SJF Tim took entrance examinations at both Bishop Montgomery and Loyola High Schools. He chose Bishop Montgomery and once there found he competed well academically with all the other students who came from various Catholic and public grammar schools throughout the South Bay. This was

especially true in mathematics and the sciences, and he took several of these classes since he had decided to become a medical doctor.

From Bishop Montgomery he matriculated to California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California, primarily for the science program there. He enrolled in their pre-med program and after four years graduated and enrolled at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California. There he earned his Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine degree and then went on to do his residency at Saint Joseph’s Medical Center and Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, which is affiliated with the University of Arizona.

In 2007 Tim and his wife Doctor Gwenne Norcross opened their Norcross Family Medicine office in the Peninsula Center. They have three children who are currently enrolled in the pre-kindergarten, second grade and sixth grade at SJF School. Tim noted that the school has undergone some changes over the years, like the departure of the Sisters, but he and his wife feel it continues to be an excellent place to educate their children. They both volunteer in various capacities on campus, with Tim coaching his daughter’s basketball team. In that capacity he has noticed that the new gym in the parish activity center is the envy of many of the parish schools who come to compete at SJF. He feels that Anne-Marie Hudani is an excellent principal who provides leadership in maintaining the strong academic, religious and social standards that SJF has strived for over the years.

In closing Tim expressed that he and his wife are thrilled with the school and that their children are very happy being there.

## ANNA BENEDICT

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for home use that made polluted or brackish water consumable. This project won at the county and state competitions, qualifying her to enter the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair, the world’s largest pre-college science competition. Anna was editor of *The Pen*, the school’s monthly publication, when it won a

prestigious gold crown award from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association for excellence in design, photography, concept, coverage and writing. She was president of the Science Olympiad Team, which won the county Anatomy-Physiology event her senior year; played on the lacrosse team; was active in drama productions; and entered writing and speech competitions.

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# History 101: Catholic Schools in the United States

**D**id you know that the Catholic school system is the world's largest non-governmental school system? Catholic schools serve as one of the most important factors in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

"Knowing and serving God" has been the foundation of Catholic education in America for more than 400 years. From their very beginning, Catholic schools have focused on teaching poor and ethnic minority groups. They hold a rich tradition of educating students from all social and economic backgrounds.

Many Catholic schools boast of being the oldest in the United States, but the distinction depends on whether one is speaking of grade schools, secondary schools, parochial schools, or universities. The first enduring Christian community in the United States was the Spanish Parish of St. Augustine, settled by the Franciscans. They opened a small school there in 1606, teaching native children, both boys and girls, to read and write. This was most likely the beginning of Catholic education in the United States. In the latter 1600s, English colonists who were heavily Protestant and blatantly anti-Catholic, had set up public schools. Catholics, who were a minority even in Catholic-founded Maryland, recognized a need for Catholic education and foundation for youth. The earliest recorded Catholic school in the region, and possibly the oldest Catholic school in the English-speaking colonies, was St. Mary's, founded by the Jesuits about 1640 in New-town, in what is now the state of Maryland. In 1677 the Jesuits established a preparatory school there.

In the south, the Franciscans opened a school for boys in New Orleans in 1718, and in 1727 they were joined by the Ursuline sisters from France who opened the Ursuline Academy, a school for young women. The Sisters of the Order of Saint Ursula were "Convinced that the education of women was essential to the development of a civilized, spiritual and just society." The school offered the first classes for female African-American slaves, free women of color and Native Americans. St. Ursuline Academy continues to operate today, maintaining its dedication to the moral, spiritual and intellectual growth of all its students. The Academy enjoys the distinction of being the oldest, continuously-operating school for girls.

Often credited for forming the cradle of Catholic education in the United States, Elizabeth Ann Seton is considered the patron of Catholic schools. She founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, set up a school for poor children in Emmitsburg, Maryland, in 1809, and made the creation of parochial schools her lifetime cause. Because of her com-

mitment to values-based education, Mother Seton felt it was important to welcome all students, regardless of their ability to pay. Mother Seton originally educated only the needy girls of the area. But the school eventually accepted girls from wealthy families who paid tuition, thus enabling the Sisters of Charity to continue their charitable mission.

This distinctive characteristic of the Seton Legacy continues in Catholic schools today. On September 14, 1975, during the International Year of the Woman, Pope Paul VI canonized Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton. You can see the image of Saint Elizabeth Seton in St. John Fisher Church's center stained glass window, gazing down at the mother and child as they look toward the Holy Eucharist in preparation for the child's First Holy Communion.

The middle of the 19th Century saw increasing Catholic interest in education along with increasing Catholic immigration. To serve their growing communities, American Catholics continued to open their own schools, aided by religious orders such as the Sisters of Mercy, who arrived from Ireland in 1843, and the Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, organized in 1845 to teach in Michigan. The late 19th Century saw the continued development of religious orders, including the founding of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament by heiress Katharine Drexel to meet the educational needs of blacks and Native Americans.

## Catholic Universities

Not long after the American Revolution, John Carroll, cousin of Declaration of Indepen-





dence signer Charles Carroll, established the Catholic college of Georgetown. Established in 1789, Georgetown University is the nation's oldest Catholic and Jesuit university. Other Catholic universities followed. Fordham University was founded in New York City in 1841. The University of Notre Dame was founded in Indiana in 1842 by the Congregation of the Holy Cross. The Catholic University of America was founded in Washington in 1887.

In 1900, an estimated 3,500 parochial schools existed in the United States. There are approximately 8,000 Catholic schools across the United States today.

## John Henry Newman

One of the leading figures of nineteenth century England, John Henry Newman was born on February 21, 1801 in London, England to an Anglican family. At the age of 44, he became a Roman Catholic, and was eventually ordained a priest. Newman dedicated his life to educational endeavors and pastoral work. He spent much of his later years as an advocate for the Catholic student. Blessed John Henry Newman wrote, "Religious truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge." In 1883 the "Newman

Movement" in the United States began at the University of Wisconsin with the purpose of helping Catholics live their faith on campus amid perceived anti-Catholicism of the times. On September 19, 2010, Pope Benedict XVI, proclaimed Cardinal John Henry Newman as one of the "blessed in Heaven."



Today there are hundreds of Newman Centers committed to the continued promotion of campus ministry around the United States on secular college and university campuses, providing Catholics a place to meet other Catholic students, study, socialize, and strengthen their faith.

*Credits to: cardinaljohnhenrynewman.com, uscatholic.org, usccb.org, safriary.org, staugustine.com, and Wikipedia.*

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## LIAM FITZGERALD

*continues from page 8*

ic teams, student government and other extracurricular activities that all students were encouraged to participate in, including Boy Scouts. He joined a SJF Cub Scout den in the second grade and soon after his graduation from SJF attained the highest honor in scouting when he became an Eagle Scout. He began as an altar server in the fifth grade and is now the head acolyte, training and acting as a mentor to younger boys and girls.

As he races through high school Liam has his eyes set on further academic and life challenges. He has already visited Thomas Aquinas College in Ojai, California, and plans to see several others, including USC, UCLA, Loyola Marymount University and Santa Clara University before making a choice as to where he will matriculate. He is not sure of a career path yet, but finds courses in psychology and film making especially interesting.

Liam emphasized that he would encourage any parent to consider sending their child to a school like SJF, which provides an excellent academic foundation in a unique personal way within a religious and caring atmosphere.

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## ANNA BENEDICT

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Following high school graduation, Anna was accepted at several colleges, electing to attend Notre Dame. There she was identified as an exceptional student who has demonstrated outstanding achievement in academics with an intention to pursue the sciences, engineering or mathematics and was awarded a Trustey Family Scholarship worth \$100,000. Anna also qualified to take part in the Glynn Family Honors Program, which prepares select students for elite doctoral programs, top medical and law schools, prestigious service programs and careers in business and industry. Anna is majoring in both neuroscience and English, with plans to attend medical school or a graduate school in neurology or neuroscience, since she is fascinated with the study of the human brain. However, she is not ruling out eventually becoming a novelist.

Anna feels her strong academic, moral and social foundations were established and honed by her family and the outstanding personnel at SJF School and parish. These individuals projected a love and compassion, along with encouragement for her to always maximize her abilities and broaden her horizons.

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Do you like sharing stories and photos on social media? Why not share interesting and inspiring stories of SJF parishioners and parish events on IMPACT? It's a great way to get to know SJF, many parishioners, the ministries, etc., and will make you feel "more connected."

The IMPACT team is seeking new members who want to help with editorial content or design and production. For editorial content, professional writing and photography experience are great but not necessary — all you need is the passion to tell stories in "living room language" and an eye for good photos. For design and production, you should have knowledge of page layout for print and the software/hardware to put it together.

If you are interested in making an IMPACT, email [gplecha@sjf.org](mailto:gplecha@sjf.org).