

An introduction to Mr. Pat Thueson, Chairman of the Board of Directors, St. Croix Catholic School

1) *What is your background? (Where are you from, how did you grow up, where did you go to school and what do you do for a living?)*

I grew up in Stillwater, my parents were St. Michael's parishioners, my siblings and I all attended SCCS. I met my wife Luba at the University of St. Thomas. Though she's not from here, it was Luba who first recognized Stillwater as a great place to have a family and really drove our decision to move back. As always seems to be the case, Luba was right and we've been here 15 years.



I am the Sr. Director of Finance & Operations for LSS, a company headquartered in St. Paul. I'm very fortunate – I have a job I enjoy immensely. Throughout my career I've been lucky to work with many talented people in areas that I find interesting: finance, operations, and marketing. Every day is some new project or new set of circumstances to address.

I've been Chair for a few months now – since November.

2) *How has SCCS changed since you were a child? How is it the same?*

It'll sound odd but, despite the passage of time, I think about the "kids" I graduated SCCS with as much as I do high school friends or college friends – perhaps more. As children - going from K through 8 - we see so many changes together, and so many good times. We watch each other grow, and get our bearings in the world, we get a solid footing in our faith, we help each other, we develop shared interests, etc. It creates a special bond. So now whenever I cross paths with one of the 'kids' I went to SCCS with, I'm anxious to hear what's happening in their lives, and perhaps mentally tie that back to what we learned at SCCS, and what they were like then.

Maybe it is SCCS's smaller class sizes, or the teachers, or the spiritual center of our curriculum, but as Luba and I watch our children go through SCCS, we see that same bond develop between our children and their friends. Experience tells me those can be lasting friendships with really good kids. So that part's the same today.

What's different now? Probably how SCCS teachers and students are embracing technology. One example is the teachers integrating SMART technologies in their curriculum. It's one of the things that enable teachers to meet students where they are, and then more fully-engage the students so they eventually excel at subjects they might not have otherwise. Another example is SCCS's upcoming *Project Lead Their Way* (PLTW) - STEM curriculum. It's amazing, cutting-edge stuff that positions our graduates very well as they go on to ninth grade and beyond. Test results indicate that SCCS has outstanding teachers and programs now. But these PLTW tools and resources take it to a new level. SCCS students will be receiving science, technology, engineering, and math coursework that is at a stunningly advanced level yet appropriate for a variety of learning styles. And the group project work our students will be doing will be presented in such a fun, interactive way that, in addition to getting a huge leg-up in math and science, they'll be given the greatest gift – seeing the fun of learning.

Back when I was at SCCS we also had great teachers, but I can only imagine the blank expressions they would have encountered had they come into the classroom and announced, "OK, today we're going to be

using 3D computer modeling to minimize the friction drag coefficient on your racing boat prototypes.” Out of that sentence, I would have understood the word “Boat”. Maybe.

But that’s what is exciting about today’s SCCS students. The role of technology, and the value of having those related skills are likely to continue to increase in our children’s generation. Our students will get a fun, positive, exposure to these important skills.

3) Previously, Fr. Miller led the Board. Why the change?

Actually, the SCCS by-laws call for the Canonical Administrator (Father) to Chair the SCCS Board; or, he can assign someone in his place. When Father arrived at our Parish, Camille Kiolbasa was serving as Chair. Camille’s service to this school was amazing. But when Camille’s term ended, Father took that opportunity to be more directly involved. Father Miller has a great interest in Catholic education. It also made sense in light of the transition to Dominican leadership and Father’s desire to have a firsthand knowledge of the school’s readiness.

4) What is the primary role of the Board?

In the by-laws, the Board is called upon to act to ensure the school’s well-being “in perpetuity”. So we are to take the long view and ensure the school’s long term health. To that end, the school is most healthy when it is providing the best, faith-centered, educational experience for our children, and the most value for the parent’s tuition paid. Quality and value drive enrollment, and solid enrollment helps keep individual tuition affordable.

SCCS’s years of excellence built a foundation and now Sister continues that by sharing the Dominican focus on providing fun, faith-centered learning, instilling character and virtue, and a vision of excellence in all things. The Board’s role is to help them realize that vision now – for the long-term good of the school.

5) Has the Board changed in any other ways recently?

Definitely. To sustain true excellence and ensure a thriving, dynamic school, it makes sense for the Board to enlist all the talents and skill-sets in our community, whether that’s parents, teachers, or administration. Our community has an amazing network of talent, knowledge, and contacts. To better utilize this network of skills, the Board is broadening its use of committees, getting more people directly involved, pursuing new ideas, as well as getting some things done that have been on the drawing board for a while but not executed. These five Committees include: “Marketing/Development”, “Finance”, “Technology”, “Buildings & Grounds”, and “Policy & Planning” and are staffed by Board members, other parents, and sometimes staff and Administration. If people have talents in these areas that they are willing to share, they should contact Sister or me.

Increasingly, what we’re finding is, when an opportunity to improve our students’ experience and outcomes is identified, the committees or subcommittees tap into the community’s network and pretty soon we’re on our way to better service to our students, teachers, and parents. The solution to each problem is nearly always somewhere within our community.

6) What is your management/leadership style and how will that reflect in the way you lead the Board?

I’d like to think I’m capable of adjusting my management style to what a given situation requires, and I try to interact with people in whatever way gives us the best chance to reach our goal as a team. In regard to the SCCS Chair position - to the degree it is a leadership role - I think it is a “servant leadership” role. The Chair serves the Board, the Board serves the school, parents, and teachers - and together we all serve the

students. The children are on top. It's all about the students and serving them. More specifically, serving each child's highest potential starting wherever they are right now.

So way back down the ladder, the Chair tries to serve, and sometimes leads - whatever it takes to get the desired results, as timely as possible. The Chair listens, helps set priorities, and helps build teams of people with more specialized knowledge than the Chair has. It's important for the Chair to remember that he or she is surrounded by extremely talented people who share the same passion for instilling faith, character, excellence, and the joy of learning in the students. And the Chair's service starts by listening. Like the old saying, "You have two ears and one mouth. You should use them proportionately". I try to remind myself of that, even if it doesn't always come easily to me.

7) *What are the current priorities for the Board?*

Helping our parents, teachers, and administration drive SCCS enrollment higher right now. We all have a role in driving enrollment. We have a unique and wonderful school and we need to share it with more parents and children.

In addition to sharing with others the anecdotal stories of SCCS's passion for quality and caring, we can also show that the school is a great value. Even in a very good public school district with some fantastic options, SCCS can be seen as a great value. Our teachers can educate the whole child – Mind, Body, and Spirit in a way that many other schools cannot. That has a value now and throughout the life of our children.

8) *What are you most excited about?*

I think Sister and her staff have a vision for the school and it is creating an energy across our community that is indeed increasing enrollment in recent months. Word is getting out, and people are relating to that vision and wanting their children to be part of it.

And I'm excited by this community's commitment and energy. I'm thinking of the fantastic work of groups like Home & School, Booster Club, Creative Kids Club, Parent Ambassadors, all the great things happening at Ark of Angels, and SCCS teachers working within various focus-groups, etc. I don't mean to imply that everyone has to be a volunteer on a task force or group. Simply making the commitment to send a child to SCCS is an outstanding, exciting act of faith in and of itself. That's a lot - it's huge. And we all have varying time commitments we need to honor. My only point is, if one chooses to be involved beyond that, there are opportunities and needs to accommodate that desire.

9) *What is the biggest challenge(s) for the current Board?*

Demographically, I'm told that there are fewer children coming up in our school district, so growing enrollment is a challenge for all schools. Specific to growing SCCS enrollment, one opportunity we have is better-communicating the quality of the education at SCCS. For example, we can get some cool facts out. We know that the percentage of SCCS graduates who go straight from SCCS to their new school's ninth grade honor roll and special honor roll is exceptionally high, but we need to update that number and share it more broadly. And there's an amazing catalog of stories of SCCS graduates going on to become leaders in academics, athletics, the arts, etc. Given the comparatively smaller size of our graduating classes, we have an inordinately large share of the high school honorees, valedictorians, major college scholarship winners, etc. We need to do a better job of getting those facts and stories of accomplishment out. Those are accomplishments that our whole community can feel good about and celebrate.

10) Do you see any big changes for the school in the future?

I foresee continual improvement in the experience SCCS gives our students, continued integration of technology in the classroom, and a general quickening of our pace in moving forward. But I wouldn't characterize that as a new direction. To characterize excellence as something new would be a great disservice to the hard work of a lot of teachers, parents, and administration over the years.

11) Sr. Mary Juliana claims to be your biggest fan. Are you a fan of hers?

That's very nice of you to say, but I think Sister is 'the biggest fan' of so many of our parents and staff we need to put that in a little bit of context. She's just a very positive, high energy person who brings her joy into our school meetings - whoever is there. (Even if she's stuck meeting with her Board Chair again!) More importantly, she shares that positive energy with our children and in our classrooms - and I mean with every child. She takes an interest in every child. By the way, if you've ever been walking down a hall with her between classes, and the children see her, you know she's got a school full of 'biggest fans' of her own.

12) How do you intend to communicate with parents, teachers and staff the accomplishments and priorities of the Board?

That's a great question. I think we need new ideas and new suggestions for increased two-way communications. Becky Thomson and the Marketing/Development Committee are implementing initiatives to get people more familiar with the Board members, and to have more opportunities to give us their input, and more opportunities for us to share what we're working on. I know that every member of the Board tries to be accessible, and wants to hear what parents, teachers, and staff are thinking. We need that to do a good job. And as the new committees continue to involve more people, and their work expands, we'll have more opportunities to share what's going on. But your point is well-taken. Historically we've probably been better at setting priorities and accomplishing goals than adequately communicating them let alone sharing the nuances and long-term reasoning behind them. So we're working on it and we're open to suggestions. I'm at thuesonp@gmail.com or let Sister know your ideas in that regard.

This is an exciting time around here, there's always a lot to do, many ways to be a part of that if one chooses, and your input – whether teacher or parent - is important to driving the school forward. More than anything, now is an outstanding time to be a student at SCCS and an excellent time for us to welcome more children and parents into our SCCS community.