

Largest Estate Gift in Gehlen Catholic History Leads to Campaign Planning Study

An estate gift worth \$3.8 million has led Gehlen Catholic leaders to research and prioritize plans to prosper the school for future generations.

In 2023, Paul Brauch left over 250 acres to Gehlen Catholic School and All Saints Parish in his estate.

Brauch was known as a quiet man, who was deeply rooted in his Catholic faith. He loved God and his country, and was said to talk about how important it was for this generation to help the next.

“A gift of this magnitude provides a real legacy on behalf of the donor to assure the ability of the parish and school continue to provide for the practice of and growth in the faith,” said Fr. Doug Klein, Priest President of Gehlen Catholic School. “It is a challenge to us to be good stewards of the gift to assure it enhances our mission towards greater growth in faith.”

Although Brauch did not like the spotlight, his generous gift has led him to be the largest estate donor in Gehlen Catholic history which prompted leaders to create plans for the future.

“This gift was God’s timing as our school is thriving with increased enrollment which has led to make-shift classrooms, and lack of office and storage space. Paul’s generosity has allowed us to begin plans on how to improve our current facilities and prepare for the next generations of Jays by using a portion of his gift,” explained Amy Jungers, Gehlen Catholic Development Director.

Since the estate gift, Gehlen Catholic has conducted a feasibility study and master plan with the help of FEH Design from Sioux City.

“The feasibility study showed us improvements needed inside the building, while the master plan gave a roadmap for future projects which include upgrades and expansions to classrooms, fine arts space, and athletic facilities. This plan serves as a guide for projects in the short term and for decades to come,” shared Bryan Paulson, 7-12 Principal.

After deliberation of the feasibility study and master plan, the school chose to partner with the Steier Group out of Omaha to conduct a campaign planning study.

The campaign planning study allows the community to get involved by giving feedback to school leaders on five potential projects.

“The responses will allow school leaders to take the next right steps for the school, and in addition, will give us an estimate on how much we could raise in a capital campaign effort,” explained Andrea Loutsch, PreK-6 Principal.

The five projects that are under study for the school include: Building & Campus Upgrades and Improvements; Renovation & Expansion of Classrooms; Fine Arts Wing; Football Field & Track; and a Pick up & Drop-off Roadway.

Each of these projects has been prioritized as high importance, but the school recognizes it may not be realistic to complete all five major projects in a single capital campaign.

Loutsch added, “By asking for input on these five projects, we’ll get a better sense for what our community feels we should address first.”

The campaign planning study will kick off in the middle of February and last for six weeks. Members of the Gehlen community will be asked to complete surveys with the final results compiled and communicated in April.

The futuristic plan set forth by the school aligns with the current plans happening throughout the city of Le Mars. The Le Mars Community Development Plan – Vision 2045 cast the vision for the community's growth for the next twenty years. The plan sets the goal of growing the Le Mars population to 20,000 citizens by 2045.

"In order to accomplish that goal, it is critical that our school systems ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place to accommodate the surge in school age children within the community," explained Community Development Director, Mark Gaul. "We applaud their forward thinking and strongly encourage the Gehlen Community to pursue the goals that are so well laid out in the plan."

Even with potential changes in the future to the interior and exterior of the Gehlen Catholic school building and campus, faith, values, and service will continue to be the main focus.

"When our students graduate, we want them to be models of faith and responsible citizens," said Jungers. "We think this is a great way to honor Paul and his incredible act of generosity. We want to take his gift and not only invest it into some transformational changes for our students and staff, but also inspire others to give."