

ASPIRING BEYOND



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The name Santa Fe Christian Schools derives from its location, just 20 miles north of downtown San Diego. An original developer from Mexico designated that region “Santa Fe,” and it has taken on greater significance over the years. Translated as “*holy faith*,” the name not only reflects the nature of the school but aptly describes the wonder of Santa Fe Christian Schools’ recent capital campaign.

Originally built as a hotel in the 1940s, (legend has it that Elizabeth Taylor honeymooned there), the campus building later was used as a military academy with barracks added in the 1960s.

The school was founded in 1978 as part of the Christian Unified School District. In 1985 it became an independent, nondenominational and nonprofit Christian school. Throughout most of the 1980s the greatest challenge was simply to keep the lights on and the teachers paid. But in the late 1990s, the school turned a corner. Sparked by the leadership of John Couch, organizational vice president with Apple computers, a new level of good business and management practices gave the school renewed vision. They brought in an excellent headmaster. They defined their mission. They stepped up the educational standards and, as a result of this cumulative effort, raised their sights for what the campus could become.

Virtually all support for the school had come from student families, relatives and grandparents of children attending Santa Fe or from local foundations and businesses. Santa Fe’s campaign committee, staff, board and volunteers managed to begin with this very strong, fairly unified donor base and do wonders.

Before the campaign, Chuck Leslie became the school’s director of development. He immediately began meeting donors and asking them questions about their perceptions of the school: what they liked and what they did not.



“I had only been here for six or seven months when I recognized that the donors were of a single mind,” Leslie said. “There was a general, prevailing attitude, a perceived need that seemed obvious and imminent to everyone. If ever things were lined up for launching a campaign, this was it. The buildings on campus had been there since the 1940s. They were aging and rickety. When I talked about an upcoming campaign, no one needed an explanation. No one said, ‘Why are we doing this?’ The climate was right to initiate a major campaign.

“I was hired because the capital requirements were huge. They knew they needed help. I understood the scope of what had to be done – which means I had experience enough to know this project was over our heads. In order to achieve success in a timely manner, I felt we needed to bring in professional fundraising counsel.”

Santa Fe’s campaign start was a bit unorthodox. They were confident an assessment was unnecessary because of Leslie’s extensive discussions with a very centralized pool of donors. The money was there. The support was there. They were ready to do big things. They were ready to begin *Aspiring Beyond...*

Before retaining counsel, the school had initiated a smaller campaign using donor letters and fundraising dinners. They had raised \$300,000 for a sports field that changed the look of the campus and created a buzz. Rather than wearing out the donor base, the undertaking served to energize and motivate donors to envision what the campus could become and aspire beyond what they previously had known.

After enlisting the counsel of Hartsook Companies, the original goal for the capital campaign was set at \$7.5 million. During the very early silent phase, it became apparent costs would run closer to \$9 million. Also, without something in the campaign earmarked for teachers, the campaign did not

Santa Fe Christian School Plan for the Future

1. Existing Upper School Gym
2. Library/Technology Center
3. Science Center
4. Upper School Classrooms
5. Administration/Classrooms
6. Chapel/Performing Arts Ctr.
7. Music Bldg.
8. Cafeteria
9. Middle School Classrooms
10. Middle School Gym
11. Art Bldg.
12. Maintenance Bldg.
13. Lower School Art & Science
14. Lower School Administration/Nurse
15. Lower School Classrooms
16. Baseball Field
17. Football/Soccer Field
18. Playground
19. Softball Field



seem entirely fitting. Therefore, they established a teacher endowment fund for an additional \$1 million (a 10 percent tithe of the campaign goal), bringing the total to \$10 million.

They received 19 gifts of \$100,000 and above, two gifts of \$250,000, one gift of \$300,000, three gifts of \$500,000, and two very unexpected gifts of \$1 million each – plus many other generous gifts of varying sizes.

Said Leslie: "The million-dollar gift was a complete surprise. We had a meeting to challenge someone about a gift. This individual ended up not giving, but they brought a friend along. The mom of the friend (a grandmother with three grandchildren at the school) had already placed us in her will. As the information about the need got back to this

woman, she decided to give her gift early. In the past, she had regularly sent \$100 gifts to the school always accompanied with a kind note. We knew from these gifts that she was supportive of the school, but we had no idea just how supportive she was willing to be. 'Well,' she said when she made the million-dollar gift, 'You need this money now, not after I die.'"

Another meaningful gift came from a volunteer who at one time had a grandchild in the school. The volunteer ended up giving a \$100,000 gift, but he gave an even greater gift of association. He brought a friend to the campus who heard about the campaign. The friend offered an in-kind gift of a state-of-the-art phone system. In his line of work he was able to broker a deal whereby the company would donate a large portion of the cost. Then, to top things off, he paid the difference.

Another in-kind gift came through an architect associated with the school. His architectural firm did 10 percent of all the area public schools. Leslie explained: "We asked him to sit on our committee to make sure we were doing things right when it came to the construction of new facilities. He agreed to serve on the committee and subsequently we requested a bid from his firm. He said he'd talk to some civil engineers at his company and see what the firm could do. As we read through the proposal we were pleased that they agreed to provide their services for \$190,000. The closest bid was \$220,000. Then we got to the end of the proposal. On the last page they said that of the remaining portion, they would take care of half. This represented a major gift to the campaign."

In addition to good counsel and hard work, a great deal of prayer was foundational to this campaign. A biweekly prayer



meeting of school board and building committee members, as well as others, kept the lines of communication open, as they continually prayed for God’s will, provision and protection over every aspect of the campaign.

So it was not surprising when unexpected gifts became more the norm than the exception. Two years before the campaign even began, the director of admissions gave a 15-minute tour to a man visiting the campus. Later she received a note saying, “Thanks for the tour. Noticed you are in a campaign. Hope this helps.” Included with the short note of appreciation was a check for \$20,000. A year later, the man sent another \$20,000. Leslie met the donor for breakfast about four or five months later and received another gift for \$300,000.

“My solicitations were never marked by pressure or manipulation of any kind, Leslie said. “No ill will. I would challenge someone with the school’s mission, and leave it there. I always gave a specific challenge amount and then sat back and let them make a decision. I have found that the key to fundraising is follow-up. Until someone tells me no, I assume they still intend to give. Unless you are willing to ardently follow up, you are potentially leaving money on the table.”

Added Eric Staley, counsel for Hartsook Companies: “Chuck Leslie assembled an exceptionally visionary and committed campaign committee that, through prayer and faith, accomplished the theme of the campaign through one extraordinary gift after another. He also said “Santa Fe Christian Schools not only ‘aspired beyond,’ but also achieved their aspirations.” “And I would say,” Leslie added, “that the direction we received from our fundraising counsel was an extraordinary investment.”

The mission of Santa Fe Christian Schools is “to create an academic, intellectual, and social environment that enables outstanding education in the context of the Biblical truth of Jesus Christ. We are an independent, college preparatory school that believes by learning and applying the academic and spiritual disciplines, students will achieve beyond their perceived potential and will become the Christian leaders of tomorrow.” With virtually 100 percent of their graduates moving on to college, and 90 percent of those graduates heading to four-year schools, Santa Fe Christian Schools has proven its capacity to follow through on its mission.

With the exception of the Student Activity Center completed in 1997 and the sports field in 1999, virtually every facility on campus will be rebuilt. The new Library and Technology Center already has opened, followed by the construction of a Science Center and additional classrooms.

“Our Library and Technology Center rivals anything around,” Leslie said. We were told by one college that students graduating from Santa Fe would find the college’s tech program a step backward. The Library is housed on the Center’s second floor. The first floor holds all the video and broadcasting equipment and an editing room, all with state-of-the-art technology. We were holding back on some purchases to check cash flow with donations, but as the end of the year approached I wanted to



put in the order and take advantage of some time-sensitive discounts. Through the course of events I came in contact with a man who was very high-tech oriented. He gave an initial gift of \$10,000 and, later, an additional gift of \$200,000. Subsequently, he gave a quarter of a million-dollar gift that wrapped up phase one and gave us a lead into phase two.

“We now have a wonderful Library that serves our students’ academic needs and a Technology Training and Media Center that is unparalleled. It’s a statement of the seriousness that this school has regarding its commitment to excellence, without ever veering from its central Christian mission.”

Just recently, the school received an additional \$1 million gift. The gift came as a surprise and was given by the family of a new Santa Fe student. What makes this gift even more remarkable is that, just eight years ago, the father had been out of work. In giving the gift, the father explained that he recognized the caliber of students attending Santa Fe. “Even before he was asked for a gift, the example of Santa Fe students had served to prep his generosity,” Leslie said.

More than 900 students each year, pre-K through 12th grade, will be the very fortunate beneficiaries of this very successful campaign. These are students who are being trained with the highest of standards for the noblest of goals: to live lives worthy of the great gifts they have received at Santa Fe, especially the gift of a *holy faith*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR – Denise Rhoades is a free-lance writer living in Newton, Kan. Denise has worked on several projects for Hartsook Companies, Inc. and regularly writes campaign case statements and articles for Hartsook clients.

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