

Remembering two beloved sisters on feast day

BY Johnnie Bachusky, MVP Staff

INNISFAIL – The sky was grey and a bit of rain fell on Jan. 10 but spirits were high at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School as hundreds of students were outside in the early afternoon for 90 minutes of fun and exercise.

It was a special feast day; an annual commemoration held in January for the saint the institution was named after.

Marguerite Bourgeoys, who was born in Troyes, France, lived from 1620 to 1700.

In 1653, she was asked by the governor of Montreal to travel from France to Canada to set up a convent.

Five years later she was given a vacant stone stable to use as a schoolhouse in Ville Marie, now Montreal.

The initiative considered the beginning of public schooling in the Quebec city, and expanding to all regions of the province.

She was canonized in 1982 as Canada's first female saint.

"I think in Catholic education it's always nice to have a saint or a person of significance other than Christ to help guide us in all of our actions," said school principal Stefan Labrecque. "St. Marguerite's life in education really fits with our four pillars of being a bear; I'm a blessing, I'm empathetic, I'm an ambassador, and I'm a reliable.

"She worked so hard to help those who were less fortunate or impoverished or vulnerable, and those are the virtues and the values we want to live by at St. Marguerite."

St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Feast Day at the Innisfail school began with a morning mass at Our Lady of Peace Parish Catholic Church.

For lunch, the 320-student body and staff were treated with a spaghetti lunch.

And then at 1 p.m. they all headed outside where different activity stations – all planned out by Grade 6 leadership classes – were carefully set up.

"We have what are called Bear Buddies where all of the older kids are paired up with the younger kids, and they are out there doing different stations together," said Jennifer Salahub, a Grade 6 and 7 teacher and lead organizer of the afternoon activities. "We've got a kickball going on, we've got snowball targets and we've got snow soccer.

"We've got seven different stations where the older kids are mentoring the younger kids," she added. "It's all about community and being a community together as a school."

However, the excitement and joyful commemoration was touched with a bit of sadness by last year's retirement of sisters Paula Maher and Marie Clarkin of Montreal's Congregation of Notre Dame; a religious order established in the 17th century by the beloved saint.

Sister Marie resided in Innisfail for 19 years while Sister Paula was in town



Corry Buyks, a local member of the Catholic Women's League, and Jason Heistad prepare a pasta and spaghetti lunch for the St. Marguerite Feast Day Celebration on Jan. 10.

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for 13. Both were revered in the community, especially at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys, for their spiritual support to all citizens.

"When they moved away from here it was a huge loss for us. They were very important to us and very much a part of us today. We're thinking of them," said Salahub. "We said a prayer for

them today. We talked about them in mass this morning.

"They would come to the classes and teach about St. Marguerite all the time," she added. "And this is just about teaching kids about community and about being together."

Labrecque called the loss of the two sisters as "heartbreaking" but added the

significance for this year's feast day was also to celebrate them as they brought the same virtues to the school as the cherished saint did in her lifetime.

"It's sad to not celebrate with them (sisters) but at the same time it's important for us to continue this tradition as we move forward," said Labrecque.w



St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School student Maher Hamad is ready to kick a ball during a snow soccer activity that was part of the annual St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Feast Day on Jan. 10.

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