

Businessman, White House Fellow starts new school

By Rich Logis
The Patent Trader

KATONAH — A new school is like a bicycle wheel: All the spokes must be secure for the wheel to revolve smoothly.

So said Richard Greco, as he drew a wheel and spokes on a chalkboard. The spokes comprise, among others, teachers, administrators, benefactors, and family. When the wheel revolves, children evolve, he said.

In other words, the spokes work together toward one goal — developing each child's educational potential.

Greco, 33, is the founder of the Montfort Academy, a new independent Catholic high school for boys in Katonah. Montfort is not associated with the Archdiocese of New York, though the Catholic studies courses had to be approved by the archdiocese.

Since 1994 Greco's dream has been to open a private school with a curriculum based on the classic "great works" and the basics: mathematics, history and English.

The motto of the school, when translated from the Latin, "In-stavrare Omnia in Christo," means Jesus the Christ is at the center of everything.

The Montfort Academy takes its name from St. Louis de Montfort, who was a priest in France. The word "montfort" is French for "strong mountain."

Summer classes have been held over the summer at the school, with topics including debate and architecture. This fall, the school will begin its first full-time class — which will be the ninth grade — for the 2002-2003 academic year. Tuition is \$8,500. Six boys are enrolled; the school will be signing up new students until mid-September. Within five years, Greco said, he wants the Montfort Academy to be a four-year high school with 60 students enrolled.

Students who live within a 15-

mile radius can receive busing from their local school district. They do not have to pay for the buses because the cost is covered in their families' school taxes.

Greco said he received no state or federal funding. Because the school is not associated with the archdiocese, it received no money from the Vatican. He and his wife, Marla, invested \$32,000 of their own money and received donations of money and computers totalling \$150,000. Of that amount, \$75,000 has been earmarked for salaries, insurance and benefits for the six teachers and administration, and other day-to-day costs.

To raise awareness about the academy, Greco, the president of the school's board of trustees, printed brochures and did some radio advertising.

In September, he plans to embark on a campaign to raise \$250,000. "The biggest cost after the insurance will be the advertising," Greco said.

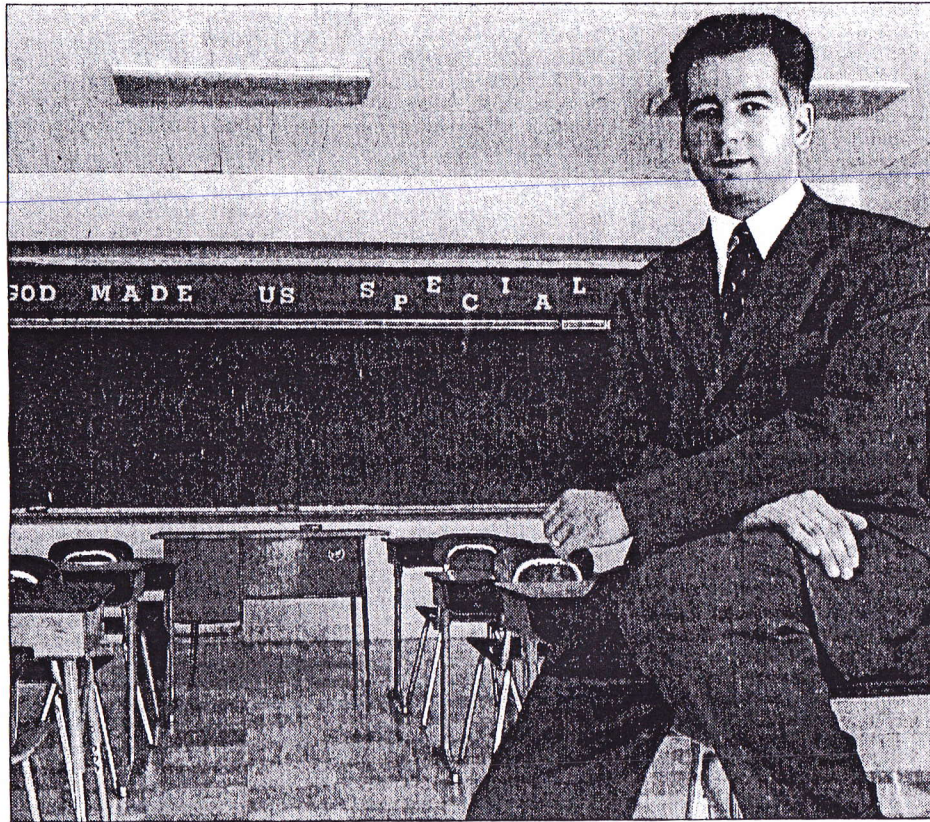
The school is in the St. Mary's building on Valley Road. Greco said the Bedford Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals were supportive of the idea. He said he looked in Peekskill, Croton-on-Hudson, Yonkers and Manhattan before deciding on Katonah.

The curriculum

The lay teachers are poets and lawyers; two are state-certified. The school has no guidelines but its own to follow, Greco said. The curriculum in the fall will comprise Latin, world literature, Catholic studies, astrology, grammar and geography.

Thaddeus Kozinski, assistant headmaster, said students will read directly from the authors' works. "We're interested in a classical approach to education," Kozinski said. "We want a student and a teacher to be engaged one-on-one, in a tutorial fashion."

Though the school is not an archdiocesan school, it needed to



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Richard Greco in one of the classrooms at the Montfort Academy in Katonah.

show Edward Cardinal Egan what the Catholic studies curriculum would include. "We created syllabi for the cardinal," Greco said.

"We didn't register with the archdiocese because we wanted to be autonomous. We get to teach how and what we want," Greco said.

"Catholic schools want to be known as Catholic schools," Greco said. "We want to be known as a classical school that teaches Catholicism."

Why Catholicism? "So much science, literature, art ... has been

driven by Catholics in search of the truth," Greco said.

Students will take trips to museums locally, in Yonkers and in New York City. For their astrology classes, students will utilize telescopes on the roof of the school. They'll also take trips to colleges to get a feel for university life. "It's in our interests to develop the school's reputation. We want colleges to recognize the school," Greco said.

Potential for success

Patrick Bassett, president of the

nonprofit National Association of Independent Schools, based in Washington, D.C., said it's a good time to open an independent school.

Independent schools are attractive because they provide a quality education that will prepare graduates for college, Bassett said. "They (founders of independent schools) tend to be (successful) because its founders are visionaries and impassioned."

Bassett said the Montfort Academy is following a proven formula.

"They're doing it they way most independent schools would: one class at a time."

The Montfort Academy's tuition is more expensive than the average for an independent school but less than a Catholic school associated with an archdiocese, Bassett said. There's no financial benefit for the school's board of trustees, Bassett said. Benefactors are crucial to keeping the school running smoothly, he said. "It will cost them a great deal of money to operate the school."

Katonah and its neighboring communities are affluent areas, which bodes well for the school, he said.

President's appointee

Greco will oversee the school from his house in Virginia. Selected as a White House Fellow by President George Bush, Greco, his wife and two children, Mary, 2, and Richard, 1, will be moving from Yonkers to Virginia next month. Twelve people out of thousands were selected to be a fellow. Greco will spend a year as a Fellow briefing and writing speeches for Donald Rumsfeld, secretary for the Department of Defense. Secretary of State Colin Powell is an alum of the Fellow program.

"This year will be a very important year for the war on terror," Greco said.

A graduate of the University of Chicago's business school with a master's degree in business administration, Greco has worked as a financial investment consultant for American corporations and helped former President George Bush write his book, "A World Transformed."

"Education has been the key to so much that's come my way," Greco said. I wanted somehow to put together in one school everything that's been important to me."