

LaSalle School

August 2012

Strength in numbers

Sen. Roy McDonald says it's all about people

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McDonald met with board members and staff to discuss the broad spectrum of disabilities, program sustainability, rate



setting, and the need to broaden the spectrum of services in order to meet the shortage of funds available for such programs.

Representing Rensselaer County's 43 District, Senator McDonald currently chairs the New York State Senate Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Committee. He is the grandfather of two autistic children and has a personal interest in issues affecting the disease and those who suffer from it. In addition to sponsoring legislation, McDonald is a leader in raising the awareness of autism in our society and is responsible for creating the Saratoga County Autism Council, an organization that strives to provide knowledge and understanding of Autism and related disabilities.

"There's a lot of frivolous spending going on out there with the more attractive and the wealthier causes receiving much of the attention," McDonald said expressing frustration with the focus of the Senate's debate on health care and funding issues. "Disabilities like autism, Asperger's Syndrome - they aren't what people want to hear about." He pointed out that to make positive change in the Senate was a challenge and oftentimes discouraging.

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LaSalle Student: My Heart Will Go On

"It was kind of surreal, like I really was not doing it." This from Brandon, a graduate of LaSalle School, who traveled to New York City to try out for *The Voice*, an American singing competition reality talent show that will air for its second season on NBC in September.



The Voice premiered in February 2012 and immediately became the number one new series of the season. The program's format is comprised of teams of contestants who are aspiring singers drawn from public auditions. Once a contestant is chosen to appear on *The Voice*, he / she goes through three stages of competition. After these phases have been completed, the top contestants from each team compete against each other during a live broadcast.

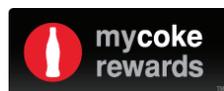
A nationwide call for open auditions began in July. Brandon's friend and LaSalle Student Senate president, Robert, encouraged Brandon to apply.

Once chosen, LaSalle History Teacher Jerald Hensler escorted Brandon down to East Rutherford, New Jersey where he joined 1,200 teenagers over 15 years old to enter the Izod Center and perform before the show's producers. Once it was his turn to try out, Brandon sang My Heart Will Go On by Celine Dion. While he was not chosen to advance to the next audition phase, he was encouraged by the positive feedback he received.

"Before I competed I was excited and nervous," Brandon said. "Afterwards, I had so much fun I want to do it again next year."

It's Back to School Time!!

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James Blendell, chairman of LaSalle's Board of Trustees, said "Agencies are much better off working collectively through associations like COFCCA and the 853 Schools to prioritize and get more attention when dealing with these issues." McDonald acknowledged the broad spectrum of nonprofits like LaSalle in the Capital District, the difficulties facing each one, and LaSalle's role as a leading provider of programs and services for the mentally handicapped. "Alone LaSalle and facilities like it cannot compete for funding," Senator McDonald said. "They have to be allies . . . There is strength in numbers."

McDonald's meeting at LaSalle followed visits by Senator John J. Flanagan, chairman of the Senate's Standing Committee on Education and New York State Regent James O. Jackson. While they were on campus, each one spent considerable time talking with students. Two members of LaSalle's Student Senate attended the meeting with Senator McDonald listening closely to his observations about the serious nature of the problems facing the place they call home.

After the meeting, LaSalle Board Members Bob Conway and Jeff Weidman (both former LaSalle students) commented on McDonald's visit. "When I was here [LaSalle] over 50 years ago, I was primarily concerned about being away from home, not how the Agency was funded," Conway said. "Today, our kids have those same worries but with two students talking with Senator McDonald today, you can tell that has changed." Weidman was impressed that in the last 60 to 90 days, LaSalle students, staff, board members were very fortunate to be able to have a dialogue with such high profile officials.

"It speaks volumes about the severity of the issues and the critical need for creative funding solutions."