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EDITOR'S PICK FEATURED

Acacia Academy marks 10 years

School offers only classical Christian education in North Central Indiana

By Mark Saluke Kokomo Tribune Feb 7, 2019



Acacia Academy 1st graders Olivia Morgan, Zoey Golladay, Shawn Tiggs, and Gabriel Forestal working with money on Jan. 23, 2019. Tim Bath | Kokomo Tribune

Tim Bath



Ten years ago, Rob Hoshaw saw a need to fill.

His daughter, a second-grader at the time, wasn't thriving in school. He and his wife stumbled across something called classical education. They did research. They read about it, prayed about it. They went to conferences and visited some schools before stumbling across a Howard County cottage school, Walnut Grove, where Jan Cotner taught around eight students.

"We transferred our daughter over there and within a few days we saw a total transformation," Hoshaw said. "There was a love of learning, a twinkle in her eye. And so we really wanted to propagate this to other families."

That seed in 2008 has since grown strong roots. The tree that has sprouted from those roots, the Acacia Academy, is celebrating a decade of service this school year since first opening its doors. The school is a classical and Christian school for grades K-8 and its symbol, an Acacia tree, is known for its strong and deep roots and resistance to decay and insects.

"The mission has stayed the same. The people have changed," said Hoshaw, head of school at the academy since its opening. "We are kind of at that place where the first set of families, the pioneer families, they have flown through the pipeline here. My youngest daughter now is in eighth grade. She was in preschool when we started this and now she's gone all the way through."

Hoshaw, a 1986 Northwestern High School grad who went on to study engineering at Purdue, took a leave of absence from Delphi, where he'd been for 20 years, to turn the vision of Acacia into a reality. Today, the school offers the only classical Christian education in North Central Indiana. The concept of a classical education focuses on the trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric.

The school's mission through that classical education model is to cultivate character, faith and knowledge. A list of 12 character habits can be found in every classroom. The faith aspect is evident in the Christian world view. And knowledge is developed through curriculum not based on state standards.



Acacia Academy 2nd graders Nadia Rockey and Laveiah Tiggs play a numbers game at the end of a lesson on Jan. 23, 2019. Tim Bath | Kokomo Tribune
Tim Bath

"It's a little different in mission and purpose, a little different in pedagogy, some of the way we teach subjects and what subjects we teach," Hoshaw said. "The phases of learning, the integration of subject, it's pretty special to watch these children grown in wisdom, not just knowledge so to speak, but to grow in wisdom as they develop."

A board of directors was formed in August 2008 and the school was incorporated with the state of Indiana the following month. Hoshaw then began searching for a home, landing at Main Street United Methodist Church in 2009, where the school has been ever since.

While Acacia is a Christian school, it isn't associated with the Methodist or any other particular denomination.

"They have been a great host family," Hoshaw said of the church. "Ten years ago we went from strangers to a sharing agreement in about a three-week period of time which is pretty amazing. It's kind of neat being in cooperation together."

On Aug. 17, 2009, the school opened its doors for its first official day. In its first year, there were 24 students in grades K-8. Cotner came over as one of the school's first teachers, and she taught grades 4-8 in one classroom during the first year.

For the 2018-19 school year, there are 86 students representing 27 different denominations at Acacia. There are currently 15 teachers and administrators on staff. Each grade from K-6 has a standalone classroom, while grades 7-8 have a shared classroom. Classes are small in size, averaging 10-12 students per class, which is big enough to feel like a community but small enough to get individual attention, according to Hoshaw.

Fifth-grade teacher Dr. Nathan Greeley said he was attracted to the school's well-defined purpose and the strong sense of mission that he saw driving Hoshaw.

"It is a school that understands that education should reflect the fact that each person has been called to love God with all of his or her heart, soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as oneself," Greeley said.

Third-grade teacher Elizabeth Huffman, who also has two students enrolled in the school, calls Acacia "a blessing."

"There is no other place I would rather work or have my children educated," Huffman said. "Faith is a part of everything we do here. Children are nurtured and instructed in what is true, good, and beautiful. The habits and themes that we focus on in school help us in our Christian walk and they become a part of how we live our lives in our homes, other relationships, and organizations of which we take part."

Acacia receives no state or federal funds. It is 100 percent tuition and donor funded, and over 70 percent of the enrollment relies on some level of scholarship or financial assistance.

"I think there can be a bit of sensitivity in the state that private schools take money from the public schools," Hoshaw said. "We intentionally don't. We don't even receive vouchers. We are strictly private, so we raise our funds through tuition and private donations.

"You kind of have to forget the stereotype of what a private school is all about," Hoshaw added. "There's all sorts of socioeconomic situations represented here and so the scholarship money is a big deal to us. We have to raise almost \$200,000 a year."

The school counts on around \$75,000 of that coming from its annual Art in Bloom event each March, which is a fundraising auction for scholarship dollars. Special art projects produced and presented by students are showcased during the event as a way of putting classical education on display.

The impact of service work also plays a large ongoing role in the development of students at Acacia as they give back to the community. The school performs several thousand hours of community service each year, including many during summer vacations for organizations including the United Way, Kokomo-Howard County Public Library, the City of Kokomo, and numerous churches and charities.



Acacia Academy 5th grade with Nathan Greeley teaching on Jan. 23, 2019. Tim Bath | Kokomo Tribune

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Acacia Academy founder Rob Hoshaw on Jan. 23, 2019. Tim Bath | Kokomo Tribune

Tim Bath

know how to think. And that's what we're trying to do."

"That's just part of our heartbeat, the community service," Hoshaw said.

Hoshaw said that feedback is generally good as to how students getting the type of classical education offered at Acacia transition academically into high school.

"We have seen students being very well prepared academically, and we have students who are pretty positive influencers," Hoshaw said.

While Acacia doesn't take ISTEP, they do take a national standardized test as a learning experience. Hoshaw said that several students have taken a high school placement test and the scores, when averaged together, land in the 95th percentile.

"So that speaks pretty well of what this education is capable of delivering from purely a test-ability standpoint, but I think it's the character elements that matter much more," Hoshaw said. "The highest compliment we get is from local science teachers that tell us our kids don't know all the standard answers, but they always know a student from Acacia. Because they give attention, they give respect, and they

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