



Durham Catholic District School Board



St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School

Motto: "Where Futures Begin"



In the Beginning

During the early 1990s, the area of Pickering bounded by Finch Rd. and Sheppard Ave. underwent much growth. That growth came with a large group of young parents and an increasing population of young children needing to be schooled. Initially, Durham Catholic District School Board filled this need by busing these students to neighbouring schools, St. Monica and Our Lady of the Bay Catholic Schools.

However, there was a clamouring for a neighbourhood school to which local children could easily walk, and so the idea of a school within the Altona Forest was born. This was not without controversy, as the building of the school meant that a large part of pristine old-growth Altona Forest had to be cut down.

After much debate, the school was finally approved. It was to be named St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School after the American saint who dedicated her life to the education of children. The design of the school was awarded to Saccoccio, Wepler Architects Inc.; construction, which commenced in early 1995, was undertaken by Tasis Contracting Ltd.



Under construction

By the spring of that year, walls were finally up. However, a spring storm dashed all hopes of an early completion when one of the main walls fell over. That wall had to be rebuilt, so the completion date was pushed to much later in the summer. In the meantime, the school board appointed Nancy Drynan as Principal. Since the school was to be part of St. Isaac Jogues Parish, her office was housed in the church basement. Thus began the long and arduous task of building a school community from scratch. Teachers initially came from the two feeder schools so that students would have familiar faces among the teaching staff. The task at hand was to purchase learning materials and to gather a group of learners and teachers who were to transform a concrete building, albeit modern and beautiful, into a living community devoted to their faith and to learning.

Excitement turned to anxiety during the last few weeks of the summer of 1995 as the work crawled and teachers, eager to get into their classrooms, were not allowed into the school. Finally, on Labour Day weekend, teachers were able to go into the school to get ready for their new charges. They worked alongside construction workers, all rushing to get the school ready. Even the librarian helped to lay down tiles in the Grade 1 classroom. Everyone worked late on Sunday and then took Labour Day off. When all 615 students arrived on Tuesday, St. Elizabeth Seton C.S., the school in the forest, was ready, as if the teachers had been there all summer.

The school community was abuzz with excitement. Much had to be done to build St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. from a mere modern building to a community with a

presence and an identity. Parents, delighted at the prospect of their children belonging to a new neighbourhood school, eagerly joined with teachers to create a dynamic learning environment that was also a community. Thus it became a school with great participation in parent volunteerism within sports teams, literacy, technology and the arts. With that teamwork came many awards within the above-mentioned areas.



Mural on the wall of the school

On May 27, 1996, after a week of celebrations, St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. was formally opened with much fanfare. It was a large school with modern facilities, including an art room, science room, technology room, a separate auditorium, and an elevator. It therefore was a source of much pride. The ceremony was attended by the entire school population along with a number of dignitaries,

including Bishop John S. Knight; Earl J. Lagroix, Director of Durham Catholic District Board; Grant Andrews; and Father John Henry, parish priest of St. Isaac Jogues. A stone mural of St. Elizabeth Seton, designed by teacher Brenda Wessley and created by A. Belluz, was also formally dedicated. This mural, which continues to grace the foyer of the school, depicts the school's patron saint with students, with the forest in the background. St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. was finally ready to make a difference in the world of education.

The building boom in Pickering continued during the latter part of the 1990s, and by 2000, St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. had grown to a population of 902 students. The school spilled out into portables that took up much of the playing field. So, in 2001, a new addition was created along the western side of the school, adding space for another 10 classrooms. This meant a year of construction. But again, another buzz of excitement enveloped the entire school as students and teachers experienced a new beginning at St. Elizabeth Seton C.S.

The St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School community has never forgotten that the school had been built out of the Altona Forest. Beginning with the guidance of principal Nancy Drynan and followed by the involvement of principals Tom Haslam, Kim Walsh and Jill Jacobson, the school community continues to care for the forest, supporting the community group Stewards of the Forest through funding and maintenance of their website. The students know that the forest is part of their larger community and take great pride in its welfare. Initially, the focus of the school was on beautifying the grounds with the planting of trees within the perimeter of the schoolyard and creating flower beds to beautify the front of the yard. However, over the years, the community has continued to embrace environmentalism and maintains its Gold certification as a leading EcoSchool. Students are actively engaged in environmental protection practice and numerous trees have been planted on the grounds of the school. The newest addition is an outdoor classroom where students can sit and learn in a circle under the shade of trees. Students are also consistent award winners within Tree Bee, where they learn about trees in their environment. Seton continues to work diligently at waste management and energy conservation.



Earth Day mural

Mrs. Drynan left St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. in 2003. Her eight years of leadership had established a large school with a fully involved community that excelled in the areas of education, the arts and sports. Tom Haslam became principal in September 2003; Seton's population had increased to 904 students. School administration and the Parent Council worked with the local police to set up a Kiss and Ride program to ensure the safety of all students in the parking area. Mr. Haslam also undertook a leadership role in the revamping of the library at Seton. With his blessing and support, the library was transformed into a fully functional resource system with an automated system for cataloguing and circulation. The parent community once again became very involved and, with their support, the library expanded to become one that continues to service the learning needs of students and teachers. Seton is very proud of this common area, as it is a warm, inviting space for the entire community.



Annual St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. Cake Walk to support EcoSchool Gold certification



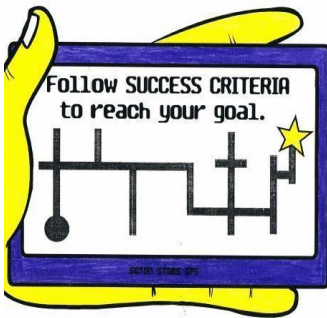
Annual St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. Cake Walk to support EcoSchool Gold certification



In the classroom

In 2006, Kim Walsh replaced Tom Haslam as principal of St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. The population of Seton had fallen slightly, to 813. Mrs. Walsh was very interested in St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. becoming an EcoSchool. She therefore supported the plan to bring the Earth Angels to the school. As a result of this visit, more trees were planted in the back of the school and students spruced up the front gardens with beautiful spring and summer flowering plants that still bloom today. It was also during her time that the system of Winits was introduced

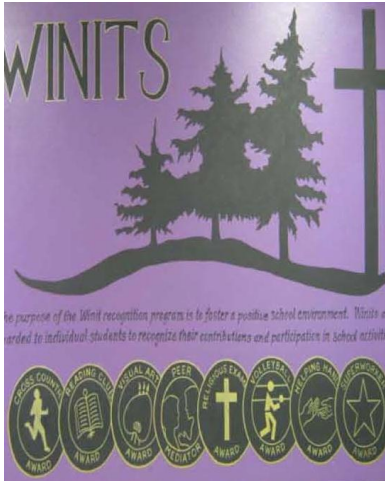
to the school. This system awards individual students in recognition of their contributions and participation in school activities. A great believer in the aesthetics of a building, Mrs. Walsh continued to support the library, purchasing beautiful area rugs and chairs for the children to enjoy. She also started the first Professional Learning Room, with books and materials to support teachers in literacy, mathematics and other areas of the curriculum. It was a time of much change in education, but St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. continued to excel in education, sports and the arts, remaining the vibrant community that started in 1995.



WALT tells Seton students what we are learning to ...



WALT uses his Seton GPS to follow Success Criteria



In 2010, Jill Jacobson became the principal of St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. Construction of homes around Altona Forest had slowed, so the school now had a population of 710 students. The spirit of community involvement continues to thrive, through school administration and community fundraising efforts. Basketball nets have been placed in the yard for students to enjoy. Lighting and sound equipment for the gym and auditorium have also been purchased to enhance student presentations. Research in education serves as a catalyst for change within St. Elizabeth Seton C.S., and Mrs. Jacobson continues to lead her staff in the school improvement planning process, with a focus on having students actively involved in bringing the school plan to life via technology.



This has been a time of much change and planning within the school board. Mrs. Jacobson has been actively involved in the Pickering Accommodation Review Committee, which has a mandate of ensuring the continuity of the presence of Catholic education within our community of Pickering.

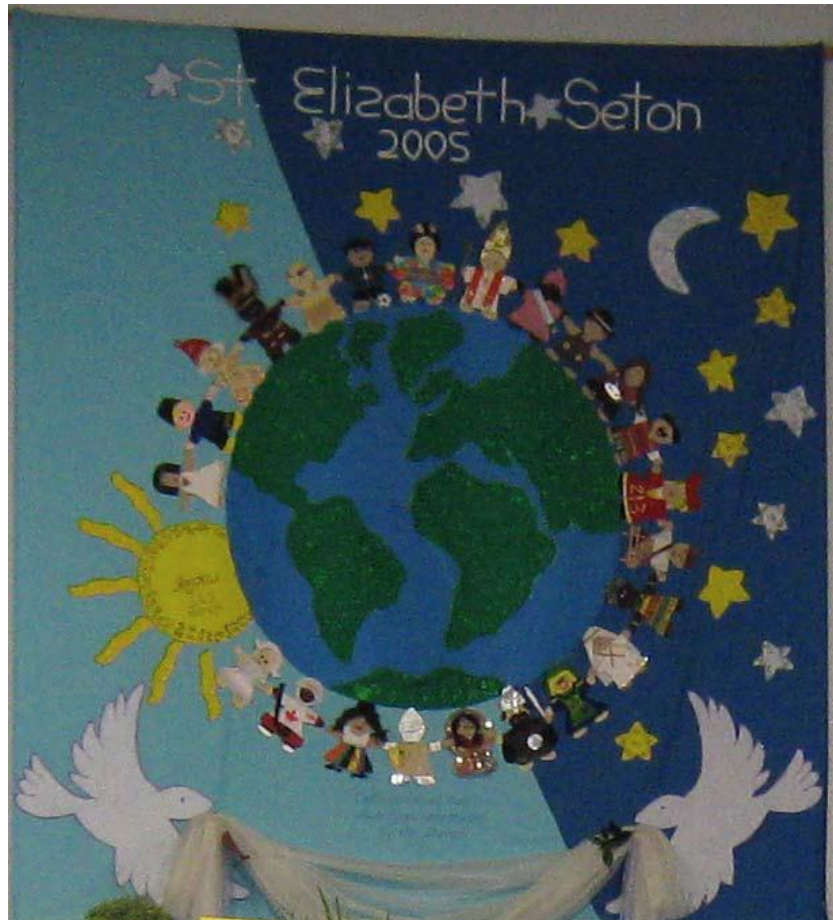
St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. continues to enjoy a close relationship with St. Isaac Jogues Catholic Church. Students are immersed in their faith, whether they are being bused to the church or enjoying visits from the parish priest. They consistently raise money for ShareLife and donate toys to the St. Vincent de Paul Christmas Outreach Program. The Rosary Apostolates visit regularly to ensure that the students at St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. develop a close relationship with Our Lady. Life at St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. is centred on faith and the teachings of Jesus.



St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School's prayer space

The community of St. Elizabeth Seton C.S., as people of faith, is committed to social justice and to helping those in need. To this end, parents and students have donated their resources to assist many charities over many years, including ShareLife, St. Vincent de Paul, Operation Christmas Child and the Cancer Society.

The community also rises to immediate challenges, such as fundraising for the tsunami in Indonesia and earthquake assistance for Haiti. Recently, the school became affiliated with Free the Children, and will now be participating in the building of wells in impoverished nations. The community hopes that through such worldwide involvement, the students will learn about diversity and social justice, and more importantly, will always walk in the footsteps of Jesus.



St. Elizabeth Seton, the patron saint of the school, was a woman who embraced change, a mother who loved children and family, a compassionate woman, and a person of hope, even in the face of adversity. Over the years, the community of St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School has lived up to her beliefs. We have dealt with challenges, even deaths, embraced one another to create a loving community, shown compassion to a larger world community, and accepted change in the knowledge that God's gentle hands are always guiding and protecting them.

St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School now faces another change, another beginning. Starting in September 2012, the community welcomed French Immersion students in Grades 1 and 4. It is anticipated that these new students and their teachers will add another dimension to the vibrancy of this school. With such a caring, diverse community of learners, with the continued support of our church and Board, and with such a rich history of academic excellence and social conscience, it is certain that St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School will continue to make a difference within the community. And so, we walk with God our Father into the future.



Annual St. Elizabeth Seton C.S. Dance-a-Thon



Dancing up a storm

School Crest

The St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic School crest and logo reflect the theme “This is my Father’s World!” The trees, sun and cross represent the connection between spirituality and respect for the environment. The school logo, “Where Futures Begin,” was designed by retired staff member Brenda Wessely and sculpted by craftsman Angelo Belluz.

Our Patron Saint

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton was born in New York in 1774 to a prominent Protestant family. After her conversion to Catholicism a few years later, she made her first vows as a nun and became known as Mother Elizabeth Seton. She founded the first religious community in America, the Sisters of Charity, in accordance with the ideals of St. Vincent de Paul. She devoted her life to God and was committed to making life better for all humanity.

Elizabeth’s life included joy and suffering, wealth and poverty, hard work and the satisfaction of seeing her work improve the lives of many people. She died at the age of 47 but her work continued through the Order she founded.

On September 14, 1975, Pope Paul VI canonized Elizabeth Ann Seton, making her the first native-born American saint. Her feast day is January 4. We feel very honoured to have her as our patron saint.

School Prayer

St. Elizabeth Seton, bless our school and all who enter.
We thank God for those who love us, care for us and teach us.
Help us to follow your examples of love and compassion,
so that we always respect others and ourselves.
As we strive to achieve our goals,
help us find comfort in the knowledge
that God’s gentle hands are always guiding and protecting us.
Amen.

St. Elizabeth Seton, pray for us.

Principals

Nancy Drynan (1995–2003)

Tom Haslam (2003–2006)

Kim Walsh (2006–2010)

Jill Jacobson (2010–present)

Contributors:

Anjalee Panday, Librarian

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