

Chicago Tribune

October 14, 2014

From the community:

Southland College Prep's Juniors Visit University of Notre Dame Campus



Southland College Prep juniors tour the University of Notre Dame Campus.(Joseph Raymond photo) (Posted by richard barry, Community Contributor)

By Community Contributor Richard Barry

RIGHTON PARK, ILL. October 14, 2014-- On a picture perfect fall day, 129 Southland College Prep Charter High School juniors, together with several seniors who made a return visit, were led on a tour of the University of Notre Dame campus by two Beverly area alumni of the University, attorney Robert Hall and college counselor Robert Lane.

"This annual trip is an opportunity for Southland students to tour the iconic high points of the Notre Dame campus and to absorb the many challenges and opportunities that a world-class university could offer them," explained Hall.

A partner at Odelson & Sterk, Ltd, where his practice is focused on education law, Hall is a 1985 graduate of the University of Notre Dame where he received a bachelor's degree in accounting and philosophy before earning a law degree from the University of Illinois where he was editor of the school's Law Review. He serves as legal counsel to Southland College Prep and to Matteson Elementary School District 162.

"This trip was a game changer," said Lane.

Lane, who is assistant to the Southland College Prep CEO and a college counselor at the charter school, earned a master of arts degree in English with a concentration in American and African-American literature from the University of Notre Dame in 1998. He also has a bachelor of arts degree in English and a minor in business from the University of Illinois. Earlier in his career, Lane was successively an English teacher, Dean of Students and Campus Director of the Middle School of The University of Chicago Charter School.

"Beyond touring the outstanding physical attributes of the University, I love to be part of Southland's annual visit to the Notre Dame campus, for this trip represents a milestone in the lives of these Southland students.

"The campus visit is much more than an opportunity for Southland's students to capture Kodak moments of Notre Dame's Golden Dome, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, the Grotto, on the field of the Fighting Irish's 80,000 seat Knute Rockne Stadium, in the locker room where the school's championship trophies are displayed or inside the tunnel where they touched the iconic "Play Like A Champion" sign that Notre Dame football players tag as they run onto the field," explained Hall.

"But it's experiences like this when Southland's students begin to appreciate fully what their futures could be in places such as Notre Dame and other world- class colleges and universities," he said.

"From the moment when I meet the Southland students on the day of our trip, their excitement is palpable. As a matter of pride in themselves and their school, each student is in perfect Southland uniform, with shirts and blazers pressed, ties knotted precisely," Hall noted.

"When I asked the seniors who made their second trip to the Notre Dame campus, what prompted their focus on this University, they explained that they wanted to attend a college that would continue the educational rigor that they experienced at Southland and believe that Notre Dame mirrored the values that made them who they are, including the importance of becoming well-rounded, good people and serving others," Hall said.

"Southland's students were given the opportunity to see what their hard work in high school is all about. They understood that college is a dream-like experience, and the work that they will put in during high school will deliver them to the school of their dreams," noted Lane.

"The Notre Dame visit gave them an opportunity for a chance to live, breathe, and walk the campus of the school of their dreams. Even if their top choice isn't Notre Dame, they now have a taste of what awaits them. It was no surprise to me that since our visit to South Bend, we've had near perfect attendance for our 'optional' Saturday morning ACT prep courses," Lane said.

"The University of Notre Dame admissions team provided Southland's juniors with invaluable information about how to apply and dispelled the myth that test scores and grade point averages are the only determinants to gaining acceptance to one of the top 20 universities in the nation.

"The Southland seniors who made the trip, solidified their aspirations to attend Notre Dame and had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with the University's Admissions Director," Lane explained.

"Southland's annual visit to the University of Notre Dame campus is a memorable opportunity for our students. Hopefully, the experience will prompt them to focus on higher education and their own future. It's most encouraging that many Southland students have in their sights on the University of Notre Dame, a top-ranked institution that has earned an international reputation and is less than 100 miles from our own campus," said Dr. Blondean Davis, Southland CEO.

The Notre Dame trip was one of several college and university campus visits to Chicago area and Midwest schools that Lane and Ronald Anderson, Southland College Prep Charter High School's college counselors, have arranged this year. In addition, on the basis of grade point averages and test scores, Southland students have been invited to other campuses by individual schools.

About Southland College Prep Charter High School

Southland College Prep opened in August 2010. It is the only public charter high school in Chicago's suburbs. Southland's total enrollment capacity, as set by the Illinois State Board of Education, is 500 students. The new school is designed to prepare all of its graduates for academic success in college.

Now in its fifth year, Southland posted a remarkable accomplishment last spring when every member of its first graduating class was accepted by one or more top colleges and universities. Together, Southland's first graduating class received more than \$ 8.5 million in merit-based scholarships

Located at 4601 West Sauk Trail, Richton Park, on eight acres in a three-story, 85,000 square foot, state-of-the-art learning center, Southland has small class sizes, an extended rigorous European model nine- hour school day, five days a week. The college prep curriculum emphasizes foreign languages, math, science and the arts

After 5 p.m. when classes are over, only then do Southland's students begin their extra-curricular activities such as speech and forensics in which they excel, dance, band, chorus or a select group of IHSA sanctioned sports teams such as track, basketball, volleyball, golf, tennis and bowling.

Southland's students use 21st century classroom tools including an electronic portfolio of work and a blog for each subject area. Students engage in technology-based collaborative learning with other students, have access to video conferencing and technology assisted home-school communication to keep parents informed of progress.

Southland College Prep Charter High School has a non-selective enrollment policy. Its students gain entrance to the freshman class by a well publicized public lottery. The only requirements are that they are graduates of an elementary school and reside in Rich Township District 227 which includes the communities of: Country Club Hills, Flossmoor, Hazel Crest, Homewood, Matteson, Olympia Fields, Park Forest, Richton Park and Tinley Park.