

Christopher Columbus High School Boston North End Celebrates 80th Anniversary

Peacemakers of the First Central Catholic High School of the Archdiocese of Boston

Many say that school days were like “being a prisoner”. Well, for us Columbus and Julie Billiart graduates – our high school building *literally* housed WWII prisoners! On June 21, 2025, nearly 200 alumni gathered for the 80th Anniversary Celebration of the founding in 1945 of Christopher Columbus Central Catholic High School in Boston’s North End. This was the first central Catholic high school of the Archdiocese of Boston which attracted students, not only from the North End and Boston neighborhoods of Charlestown, East Boston, South Boston, and Dorchester, but also from metro towns including Chelsea, Lynn, Milton, and Quincy. Students became “Peacemakers for Life”.

The 80th Anniversary Celebration on June 21st was held at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Woburn, MA from Noon to 5:00 pm. The Call to Order was by Arthur (Sonny) Lauretano ’57. The convocation was given by Fr. Robert Caprio, OFM of the Franciscan Friars – who was a beloved guidance counselor and a former principal of Columbus High School. A



scrumptious buffet was enjoyed by alumni of Christopher Columbus and Julie Billiart from graduating class years of 1950 through 1990. Of course, there were memorabilia tables, dancing, singing, and cannoli! Dolce Vita! Tall tales were shared of days gone by – a time of the street corner society, when your word was your bond, and when everyone in Boston knew that Wednesday was spaghetti night! Some walked, some took the EL (elevated train), and others commuted on suburban buses and then walked through the tunnel to Hanover Street. Still today, remnants of the old days remain in the North End with Mike’s Pastry, Bova’s Bakery, Pizzeria Regina, summer feasts, and St. Leonard’s Peace Garden still enjoyed by many.

On October 12, 1945, in the shadow of the historic Old North Church, Christopher Columbus Central Catholic High School was founded as a coed building by the Franciscan Friars of Immaculate Conception Province – the brotherhood of St. Francis of Assisi. Tuition was \$35 per year. In 1949, the girls school broke away as Julie Billiart High School and was directed by the Sisters of Notre Dame. Then, in fall of 1981, Columbus was combined into one coed high school directed by the Franciscans. The last Columbus graduating class was in 1990. Nominal love gifts were donated from the 80th Anniversary Celebration to the Franciscans and Sisters of Notre Dame.

Though the school closed 35 years ago, the impact on the lives of its graduates - Columbus “Friars”, still pulsates across Boston and the world! In the 1950s about 25 students per year entered the Franciscan Seminary. One graduate became Bishop of Honduras. Other graduates went on to great careers in the trades, as police officers and firefighters, or went to colleges in Boston, New England and beyond. Many alumni have been active, even



today, as coaches in little leagues and youth hockey programs. Some served as leaders of The Friends of the North End, while others led professional

organizations in Boston. Still others became teachers, engineers, bank executives, business innovators, and military leaders across New England and the world. Wherever our Columbus ‘Friars’ go, they carry the imprint of the Franciscan Friars motto which encouraged students to be “Christbearers”.



Thanks to the *80th Annual Celebration Columbus Planning Committee Members*: Arthur (Sonny) Lauretano '57, Sylvester (Syl) Di Diego '77, John Griffin '77, Robert (Bob) Mitchell, Jr. '78, and Josephine Guarino Torra '73 (*Julie Billiard*). Also, thanks to all the volunteers.

Note: A Gallery of pictures of the 80th Anniversary Celebration and other reunions, as well as “Discover Christopher Columbus High School” history article by Dr. Maria A. Cardullo can be found at www.columbushsboston.com. Email us at info@columbushsboston.com