

Something Truly Amazing

By Chrissie Landolfi

CRISTO REY COLUMBUS HIGH SCHOOL

What would make an attorney who has not yet reached the age of 60 retire from a thriving practice as a litigation partner in Columbus's oldest law firm to take the helm of an urban high school? After 29 years of practice with Vorys Sater Seymour and Pease, Jim Foley made the life-changing decision to do just that. Effective January 1, 2012, Foley will become the first president of Cristo Rey Columbus High School.

Cristo Rey Columbus will open its doors in August 2013, joining a network of 24 Catholic high schools throughout the country that make a college preparatory education accessible to students of all faith denominations in some of the most challenging economic circumstances. Cristo Rey schools serve exclusively low income students. What makes Cristo Rey unique, however, is the Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP) that helps fund the students' education. With this innovative educational model, each student works five days a month. School fees are paid by employers for student work, and this comprises the majority of the school budget. The model allows Cristo Rey schools to educate students who have grown up in poverty and have few options – educational or otherwise. “Our students will be learning to work and working to learn,” said Foley. “By earning their own education, they will learn first-hand its value. By working in a professional setting, they will learn first-hand the importance of a college education.”

Bishop Frederick Campbell and the Catholic Diocese of Columbus are sponsors of Cristo Rey Columbus. At a time when Catholic schools are closing across America, Cristo Rey schools continue in the tradition of the Catholic Church by educating those most in need. And the record of these schools is impressive; 100% of last year's Cristo Rey seniors graduated and were accepted into college.

Ever mindful of and grateful for his own Catholic education, Foley who attended Catholic schools from grade school through Notre Dame Law School jumped at this opportunity to pay it forward in his new role. “It would have taken something amazing to lure me away from Vorys, but this is truly amazing,” said Foley. “By helping students from needy families receive a quality education and go on to be the first in their family to graduate from college, we will change lives, change families, and change communities.”

“Cristo Rey is the perfect confluence of my work at Catholic Social Services and other nonprofits on the one hand and my involvement with the local business and educational communities on the other,” said Foley. He does not believe his new position is a job so much as a calling. “I am excited to have this opportunity to help make this wonderful dream a reality,” said Foley.

In Columbus, more than 60 employers have already expressed interest in signing on as CWSP employers. “We are proud to support Cristo Rey Columbus and we encourage other Columbus law firms, big and small, to do the same,” said Joe Murray of Murray Murphy Moul + Basil. “What could be a better investment in the future of our community than providing educational and career development opportunities to the young men and women of Columbus?” Employers who sign on receive four energetic youths and the satisfaction of knowing they are helping these young people earn their education and a shot at a brighter future. It doesn't take long before the employers depend on these young people who excel in the workplace.

In Cleveland, Reminger was the first law firm to sign on as an employer for Cleveland's Cristo Rey High School. Since 2004, the firm has offered positions to four or eight students each school year. Several were also offered summer employment. “It's been a

fabulous program for us,” said Reminger partner George Coakley. “The students are sponges who are looking around for role models and watching how the people in the firm conduct themselves, their work habits, what kind of lawyers they are, and why they are dedicated enough to be there for a delivery at 7 a.m. and still be around at 8:30 p.m.”

Cleveland Cristo Rey Student Aaron Reynolds worked school years and summers with Reminger. Aaron is now a third-year scholarship student at Hiram College with plans to attend law school to “help people through the legal system.” He is a political science major with a double minor in history and religious studies. He will be the first in his family to graduate from college. During his time at Reminger, Reynolds said he appreciated the talks he had with attorneys who shared their college experiences and helped him think about his own path. He encourages potential employers to “be willing to have an open mind and not be afraid” of Cristo Rey's innovative CWSP.

Continued on page 38



Good News

Continued from page 37

“I think we get more out of it than they do,” said Coakley. He recognizes that through participation in the CWSP, his firm is able to help improve the educational opportunities of young people and give back in a meaningful way while effectively conducting daily business.

Other Cleveland law firms who are active CWSP employers include Baker Hostetler, Benesch, Calfee, Halter & Griswold, Hahn Loeser, Jones Day, Squire Sanders, and Thompson Hine.

“It’s a contagious idea,” said Coakley. “The more you get into it, the more the idea makes sense.”

Cristo Rey will offer an innovative approach to providing education, hope, and a way forward to the under-served urban youth population of Columbus, and Jim Foley has been called away from the law to lead them. Cristo Rey allows urban youth to dream big. This is truly something amazing.

(To learn more about Cristo Rey Columbus High School, contact Jim Foley at (614) 395-1505 or jimf@crestoreycolumbus.org.)

About the Author: Chrissie Landolfi practiced labor and employment law with Vorys, Sater, Seymour and Pease in the 90’s before staying home to mediate domestic disputes between her three sons with Vorys litigator, John Landolfi. She is proud to be serving on the Board of Directors of Cristo Rey Columbus.



cmlandolfi@yahoo.com



Alumnae of St. Martin de Porres Cristo Rey High School of Cleveland (from left) Tyler Hughley, Savannah Hogan, and Dominique Aaron, pose with Vorys’ partner Jim Foley and his wife Vicki at a recent event to celebrate the planned Cristo Rey Columbus High School and Foley’s appointment as the school’s President as of January 1, 2012.



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