

# MINNEAPOLIS ST. PAUL BUSINESS JOURNAL

November 23, 2007

Vol. 25, No. 24

## Ryan Cos. builds, backs Cristo Rey school and youth center

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As the Midtown Exchange neared completion on East Lake Street, developer Jim Ryan wanted to know what else Ryan Cos. US Inc. could do to help the neighborhood.

In a series of meetings with community leaders, he listened to stories about the struggles in the Phillips neighborhood, including persistent crime and low graduation rates.

He also heard about solutions: Art Erickson's vision for a youth leadership center, and the Society of Jesuits' idea for a private school serving inner-city students. Erickson is CEO of the

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**David Haschka**  
President, Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis

key role in making both projects feasible.

The Colin Powell Youth Leadership Center and Cristo Rey Jesuit High School opened this fall in a state-of-the-art building designed and built by Ryan Cos. The shared, 160,000-square-foot facility is on East Lake Street and Fourth Avenue in south Minneapolis.

"What the Ryans did was reawaken the dream and say, maybe if we could put these two projects together, we could come up with the critical mass," said the Rev. David Haschka, president of the Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Minneapolis.

It started with a small request from the school's planners.

Urban Ventures Leadership Foundation, a nonprofit community-development organization serving the communities in south Minneapolis.

By proposing a partnership between the organizations — and donating countless employee hours — Ryan Cos. played a



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**Above, left to right: Tim Gray, Jim Ryan, Pat Ryan, Art Erickson and the Rev. David Haschka. Below: Students are pictured with the aforementioned group at the Colin Powell Youth Leadership Center.**



The Cristo Rey model involves placing low-income, inner-city youth in the classroom four days a week, with the fifth day spent working at a corporate internship.

The Jesuits wanted to know if Ryan Cos. would be willing to offer internships to a small handful of students each semester.

On a trip to Chicago to visit his daughter,

Ryan and his wife Colleen decided to make an unannounced visit to the original Cristo Rey school.

"It's in one of those neighborhoods you drive into and start looking over your shoulder wondering if you should be there," Ryan said.

When they walked inside the school, they were stunned by what they observed: an inner-city school full of well-dressed, well-behaved students — all of them apparently happy and engaged — as well as an enthusiastic staff and quality amenities such as a gym and library.

It was the kind of place they'd be happy to send their own kids.

"It just struck us that we were looking at Art Erickson's dream," Ryan said.

They returned from the trip convinced that a Cristo Rey school would be a perfect fit for both the Phillips neighborhood and Urban Ventures.

And Ryan Cos. wanted to offer much more than a few internships. The Minneapolis company wanted to do whatever

possible to see the school and youth center become reality.

The Jesuits and Urban Ventures had been searching unsuccessfully for an existing building in the neighborhood. Ryan's proposal for a shared, new space was met at first with skepticism, but both sides came to see what the Ryans saw.

"The Ryans have a way of being persuasive with their energy and their vision and their finances," Haschka said.

Ryan Cos. set about designing a joint facility for the projects, partnering with a national leader on school design.

CEO Jim Ryan and Pat Ryan, president, also spearheaded a fundraising campaign to raise the estimated \$31 million that it would cost to build.

"Everybody basically worked for no fees, and in most cases gave an additional gift in dollars," Jim Ryan said.

Ryan Cos. also encouraged other corporations to sponsor students, helping round up the support of more than 20 other companies in the Twin Cities.

The school's freshman class started in the fall. It will eventually enroll about 500 students. Other Cristo Rey network schools have a graduation rate of 98 percent, with 95 percent of those students going on to attend a two- or four-year college program.

The leadership center will serve another 25,000 neighborhood children and their parents with additional services.

Now that the facility is up and running, Ryan Cos. is continuing its relationship with the youth center and school. Four Cristo Rey students have internships at Ryan Cos.

Seeing the center and school in action is a powerful experience, Jim Ryan said, recalling a moment one morning watching students lined up and shaking hands with the principal.

"I tell you, it's a great joy," Ryan said. "It's really a labor of love."

Dan Haugen is based in Minneapolis.