

# Ups and downs of a principal for a day

*In one school I felt like an alpha, but in the other it was closer to omega*

St. Josephat, I ruled. Technically, I was just one of three volunteer principals overseeing the small, Lincoln Park elementary school for the Chicago Archdiocese's "Lend a Shoulder Day" last week. But as far as the kids were concerned, I was the boss.

This isn't to slight my fellow volunteers, attorney Grant Dixon and foundation president James Termond. They're great guys who've each done a lot to support Chicago's Catholic schools. It's just that as we visited the classrooms and were introduced to the students by their real principal, Elisabeth Rusin, I was clearly the alpha volunteer.

"Who has questions for our visitors?" Rusin would ask, and a dozen hands would shoot up in response.

"Um, I have a question for Ms. Pickett," each kid would begin. After several rounds—"How did you get to be in the newspaper?" "Can I be in the newspaper?" "Are you famous?" "How many famous people have you met?"—Ms. Rusin would diplomatically intervene, prompting,

"Does anyone have any questions for Mr. Dixon . . . Mr. Termond? They're lawyers, you know."

Dixon, a personal-injury lawyer, tried the whole "I help people who get hurt in accidents" line, but the kids were having none of it. He couldn't come up with a single famous client.

When Termond made clear that it's not actually his money he gives away as head of the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation, well, that was it for him.

But on Thursday, at the Franklin Fine Arts Center, a Chicago Public Schools magnet elementary school in Old Town, I was knocked back down to the minor leagues of Principal for a Day-dom.

The public schools are more troubled than the Catholic schools, which struggle for funding but consistently do well on all the standardized tests.

Chicago's Bonnie Hunt samples life at Crane Tech; Page 28

Bigger problems, of course, are sexier problems. So the celebrity bar for the "Principal for a Day" event is much higher than for "Lend a Shoulder." Heather Headley, the Broadway star, arrived at Franklin in a stretch limo, two handlers in tow. She had to skip a walking tour of the school—led by actual Principal Patricia Wells and members of the student council, local school council and parent teacher association—because so many students were eager to meet her.

The other volunteer principals—venture capitalist Barry Moltz and Chicago Board of Trade CEO David Vitale—and I tried to make up for our lack of star power with copious enthusiasm. We sucked up to the student council kids, hoping they'd be nerdy enough to understand our more cerebral appeal.

They weren't. Thought-entourage-less and a little dejected, I had a great morning at Franklin. It's a fabulous school, the kind of place I'd like to send my still-hypothetical children, diverse and friendly, with high academic standards and an innovative curriculum that uses the creative arts to help teach math, history and other core subjects.

Every student gets four sessions of arts education each week, and as part of my visit, I sat with a class of seventh- and eighth-graders working on ceramics projects. I tried to make a coffee mug for myself, but it didn't work out terribly well.

The thing you're supposed to say about these events is that they're not about you. They're about the kids. But if that were true, there wouldn't be parties, gifts and TV coverage.

At the end of Lend a Shoulder Day, we went to Cardinal Francis George's mansion to drink cocktails, eat hors d'oeuvres served by tuxedo-clad waiters and feel like we were on God's good side. Many of the city's philanthropic movers and shakers worked the room, getting misty-eyed as they described the noble mission of Chicago's Catholic schools, which serve many of the city's poorest neighborhoods, offering an example of



Debra Pickett



Sun-Times columnist Debra Pickett meets students at Franklin Fine Arts Center in Chicago, where she was guest principal Thursday.

scholastic excellence where failure has been the rule. They wanted to make sure we all felt suitably good about ourselves and the massive good we'd done in our three-hour visits to the schools.

People seemed a little disappointed when I told them I'd been to St. Josephat. It's a great school, their raised eyebrows seemed to say, but, nestled in a tree-lined block of Southport near Fullerton, it isn't very nerdy.

After being public school principals for a day, we got a buffet lunch—deli sandwiches and some odd, pizza-like mini-quiches—at the Chicago Hilton and Towers, hosted by Mayor Daley.

There were no cocktails at the Hilton, and the mayor didn't pose for pictures with all 1,300 of us, but there were nifty souvenir fountain pens to take home. And plenty of warm feelings about the leadership we'd shown.

The alphas, of course, were the celebrities: Headley, actors Chi McBride, Bonnie Hunt and Vince Vaughn. A half a notch below them were the folks who'd been to the most "challenged" schools. The rest of us were just tourists, unsexy in every possible way.

The woman seated on my left had spent her morning at a high school with actual gangs. She'd sat in on a discussion between community police officers and a group of troubled kids who insisted that they were associates of the gangs, but not really members.

I didn't tell her about my coffee mug.

Birkett was not quite as popular—or unpopular—in his own party as Madigan was in hers. Just under half of Republican voters

voters still making up their minds. Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

### Weather

Today: Cloudy with drizzle day and night. Highs in the upper 40s, lows around 40 Saturday: Variably cloudy.

Details on Page 62

### Lotteries

- Illinois**
  - Midday Pick 3: 1-001
  - Midday Pick 4: 4-850
  - Evening Pick 3: 4-758
  - Evening Pick 4: 0-217
  - Little Lotto: 05 16 22 24 25
  - Lotto Grand prize: \$21 million
- Mega Millions**
  - Grand prize: \$50 million
- Indiana**
  - Midday Day 4: 8-387
  - Day 3: 8-01
  - Day 4: 20-40
  - Midday Max 5: 0-3-15
  - Evening Max 5: 0-2-15
  - Midday Lucky 5: 0-5 06 27 31 33
  - Evening Lucky 5: 11 15 17 21 36
  - Midday Lucky 5: 11 15 17 21 36
  - Lotto grand prize: \$4 million
- Michigan**
  - Midday Daily 3: 5-17
  - Midday Daily 4: 1-597
  - Evening Daily 3: 0-46
  - Evening Daily 4: 7-368
  - Rollover: 07 08 13 23 30
  - Millions jackpot: \$12.9 million
- Wisconsin**
  - Pick 3: 1-96
  - Pick 4: 8-408
- City Picks - Super Cash**
  - D-S-TR-MIL-G-B-CF-K-WR-Mad
  - Super Cash: 02 05 08 15 23 34
- Megabucks jackpot: \$4.9 million**
- Powerball**
  - Jackpot: \$84 million

### TO REACH US

Customer Service/Home Delivery/Newsstand Sales Chicago/suburbs 1-(888) 848-6337 or 1-(888) 84-TIMES News/Editorial (312) 321-3000

# Poll

ers. And despite fierce campaigning on both sides—rife with plenty of negative attacks—more than one in 10 voters are still unde-

Madigan is viewed favorably by 35 percent of voters, nearly equal to the 32 percent who view her unfavorably.

Birkett was not quite as popular—or unpopular—in his own party as Madigan was in hers. Just under half of Republican voters