ASCENSION

With this project I would like you to take a moment, like I did, and reflect on what you have here, what you have experienced, and what you would like to become.

"How can I give back to the school that has provided me with so much?" Carlyn Ray '00 wondered. It started as an idea: each feather would represent a student at the Episcopal School of Dallas; each student would then hand-write a note for Father Swann about a favorite memory, a lesson learned, or a prayer to be delivered. The notes would then be collected; the feathers welded together in the shape of eagle's wings - the final product to be gracefully hung in the entrance to the Stephen B. Swann Athletic and Wellness Center.

"Together, the feathers create wings to uplift us to higher places," Ray explains. The 'Ascension' chandelier is a symbol of the power of positive thought, the belief we have in each other, and the love we have for ourselves, one another, and our community."

The process started back in the fall of 2011 when Ray contacted her former art teacher Vikki Martin with an idea. Fast-forward to September 2012 when during a sunny morning in Upper School Chapel, Ray returned to her alma mater to talk about the importance of self-discovery and hard work. Having dreamt about becoming an artist since she was just 8 years old, Ray credits Martin with helping her discover an inner passion for art. After graduating from ESD, Ray attended the College of William and Mary on a volleyball scholarship and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. She then moved to Washington to study at Dale Chihuly's glassblowing school. She even taught the Chihuly's young son how to make his own blown glass creations.

"I feel really fortunate to be here with these supportive teachers and loving parents," Ray told the students during Chapel. "What Father Swann and the faculty have created here has shaped who I am. With this project I would like you to take a moment, like I did, and reflect on what you have here, what you have experienced, and what you would like to become. Follow your bliss, and the world will open doors where there were only walls."

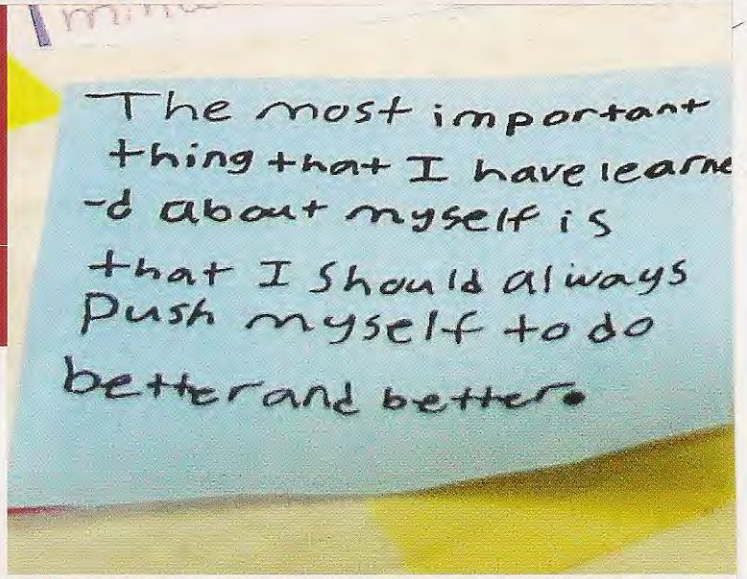
During the fall, Ray also visited Amy Henderson's Forensics class to explain how extreme heat and other scientific processes play a role in her work. Complete with live demonstrations and a looping video of her working in her Austin-based studio, Ray gave students a sneak-peak into how she is able to manipulate and cool the glass in mere seconds. That same week, a reception was held in the Jennifer and John Eagle Gallery in the Susan M. Frank Center for the Arts and Humanities. The spectacular exhibit showcased more than a dozen of Ray's sculptures, including some of the feathers included in the final 'Ascension' project.

"Ray came to my Forensics Chemistry class during our glass and soil unit," Henderson says. "It was a perfect talk and demonstration, complete with videos showing how glass is formed, molded, and broken. We then applied that to forensics in how to characterize glass at a crime scene and how various glasses are broken using different objects. It was a wonderful enhancement to our topics and we appreciate her coming."

As Ray started building the feathers, students from all grades penned heart-warming messages to Father Swann. Some of the notes drew on personal stories of achievement, while others offered prayers and expressions of gratitude. When the ideas were all neatly handwritten on different pieces of brightly colored construction paper, Ray meticulously folded copies of each message into the glass-blown feathers.

Then came the decorating. During lunch, fifth and 12-grade students decorated more than 100 yellow-tinted feathers will glitter, confetti, bird feathers, and streamers. Some pairs etched their initials in the glass with small machines. Once the glitter and glue was shelved, Ray started to explain to the students how the feathers would be attached to a metal armature and then

> "It really showed me the impact that an alum can have on the community"



hung from the ceiling.

"Working on a feather with my buddy felt like I was taking partial ownership of the sculpture," Sarah Spellings '13 says. "It really is the student body's sculpture, not just a donated piece of art. The fact that Carlyn Ray would take the time to make such a beautiful piece for her high school shows how much of an impact ESD had on her. My buddy, Sophia, and I named our feather Katniss after her favorite character, and it's nice to walk past the sculpture every day knowing that we have our own personalized feather somewhere in the wings."

"It really showed me the impact that an alum can have on the community," Tyler Good '13 says. "To see someone take their talents and give back to the community and thank and recognize ESD is something really special. Getting to be part of it too with my buddy makes it even more meaningful."

With the students' work complete, Ray spent the next month working at a warehouse in Dallas welding each feather to the frame. In November, 'Ascension' was carefully suspended across the entryway; LED lights were added to shed more light on the students' reflections. At completion, the sculpture weighs more than 200 pounds and is over six feet tall. Ray, working alongside ESD's Director of Facilities, Matthew Noack '94, worked with blacksmith Colby Brinkman and a team of engineers to ensure the soundness and integrity of the structure.

ESD's fine arts department was instrumental in helping facilitate the project and exhibition, including, at Ray's suggestion, binding the original reflections written by students, faculty, staff, alumni, and parents into a book. The Reflections Book was presented by students to Father Swann at a special chapel service held in November.

The chandelier will be officially dedicated to ESD and Father Swann at the Alumni Association's Eagle Laureate Dinner in May.