

\$600,000 Gift Gives Science a Lift at Bishop Diego High

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By Margo Kline, Noozhawk Contributor |



Dr. Randall Hahn is a popular biology, human anatomy and physiology teacher in Bishop Diego High's STEM Academy. (Bishop Diego High School photo)

Anonymous donation helps school close in on \$1.2 million goal for STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) Academy

[Noozhawk's note: Dr. Sean Kelly teaches chemistry and physics. An earlier version of this story was incorrect and it has been updated below.]

Bishop Garcia Diego High School, Santa Barbara's Roman Catholic college preparatory school, is well on its way to upgrading its science lab, thanks to an anonymous gift of \$600,000.

The Rev. Tom Elewaut, C.J., principal and chaplain of the school, said he would not speculate on the identity of the donor, respecting the person's wish to remain unidentified. "But, obviously, it's someone who is a friend of the school," he said

Elewaut did wax eloquent about what the gift will mean to Bishop Diego, however. The money will upgrade the STEM Academy, the school's four-year program covering science, technology, engineering and mathematics, he said.

“The facilities are 50 years old,” Elewaut said. “It will mean new plumbing and electricity, upgrading our technology.”

Last year, the school completed its library technology upgrade, which included a new 28-station Apple computer lab.

Dr. Randall Hahn, who has a degree in dentistry and teaches biology, human anatomy and physiology, and Dr. Sean Kelly, who teaches chemistry and physics, will conduct classes in the new science labs.

“The STEM program is designed to help students prepare for science careers, and we have the personnel in place to do that,” Elewaut said.

Danny Kwock, honorary chairman of the committee to renovate the science wing, said the donation will go a long way toward the fundraising goal of \$1.2 million to complete the work. “We have 66 percent of the funding, and now we have to work to get the final 33 percent,” he said.

Kwock and his wife, Stephanie, have three sons, one a graduate of Bishop Diego, one presently enrolled, and one “who’s on his way in,” Kwock said. “I think it will really enhance the standing of the school. And the renovations will all be green, including solar technology.”

Kwock and his family moved to Montecito from Orange County five years ago, and have been involved in Bishop Diego ever since. “The school has been a diamond in the rough, and now it’s coming into its own,” he said.

“I think it’s so strong because it’s a tight-knit, family-oriented school,” Kwock added. “It’s a closed campus, and the kids know they’re safe in the school.”

Bishop Diego Garcia High School was opened at its present location, 4000 La Colina Road, in 1959. The student body numbers close to 300 boys and girls, and accepts children of all faiths, according to Kwock. There is help for families who need financial assistance.

The school was named for Francisco José Vicente García Diego y Moreno, the first bishop of California, who was born in Jalisco, Mexico, in 1785. Educated in Mexico, he was ordained a Franciscan priest and in 1840 became the first bishop of both Upper and Lower California. He is buried on the grounds of the Santa Barbara Mission.

Parents and students interested in the STEM program can obtain more information by calling Paul Harrington, vice principal and dean of studies, at 805.967.1266 x115. Those wishing to contribute to the renovation project can call Lori Willis, the school’s advancement director, at 805.967.1266 x119.

— Margo Kline is a Noozhawk contributor.

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