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PHOTOS BY SUZANNE KREITER/GLOBE STAFF

“Education is not just about academics, it’s about character,” said Father Paul O’Brien, president of Lawrence Catholic Academy.

A BUILDING FALLING APART; A SPIRIT UNITING

Deep-pocketed donors, others lift Lawrence Catholic school toward glory



The Lawrence school’s playground consists of an expanse of asphalt.

By Shirley Leung
GLOBE COLUMNIST

LAWRENCE — The floors of Lawrence Catholic Academy are warped from a century of use. A window remains cracked by a bullet. A statue of Saint Therese of Lisieux is adrift in a third-floor auditorium deemed unsafe for anything other than storage space.

And if that’s not enough, the gym floods whenever a major storm comes along.

Perhaps it’s what you would expect of a school in one of the poorest cities in Massachusetts. Yet these crumbling walls hold a story of hope and generosity at a time when the world desperately needs both.

Lawrence Catholic Academy, known as LCA, serves about 475 students, predominantly Latino, from preschool to eighth grade. Six years ago, when it became all but certain that the dilapidated campus was reaching the end of its useful life, the school launched a Hail Mary attempt to raise millions of dollars to build a new urban Catholic school — the first in the Archdiocese of Boston in more than half a century.

What’s happening feels nothing short of a miracle.

Deep-pocketed donors, many of whom had never been to Lawrence, began arriving one-by-one to tour the campus, often coaxed by Peter Lynch, LCA, Page A9

For these first-time buyers, being home for the holidays a special joy

By Daniel Kool
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

From her living room window in Roxbury, Nate Smith can look onto a tapestry of mansard roofs, the winding roads of her neighborhood, and beyond, to the downtown skyline and even the islands in Boston Harbor.

“At night everything’s lit up,” said Smith, 36, during a recent tour of the condo she moved into in July with her daughter. “It’s amazing.”

Next to the window stood a frost-white Christmas tree, flush with presents wrapped in matching silver and white. Opposite, a half-dozen silver stockings hung from a home bar. It is the first time she is hosting Christmas in a space that is truly her own.

In a region with crushing housing costs, Smith is among a select group that has been able to move into the ownership class, a key step in



JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

With help from city and state programs, Nate Smith has moved into her new condo in Roxbury after a three-year search for a home.

building wealth, thanks to recent efforts by the state and city governments to help a demographic that historically were on their own: the

middle class.

Much of Smith’s arduous journey to home ownership will ring familiar HOMEOWNERS, Page A9

Healey joins push to rethink clemency

Governor revives power of granting pardons

By Matt Stout
GLOBE STAFF

Joanne Booth was 18 in 1979 when, while out at a club in Cambridge, she saw her brother getting arrested, pulled her shoe off, and threw it at the officer. She was arrested when she literally hopped into the Police Department to check on her sibling, she said.

On her attorney’s advice, she pleaded guilty to assault and battery with a dangerous weapon — which, she notes, was “a little white sneaker.” She completed her probation and community service, and, she thought, paid her debt for her “punk” teenage behavior.

Until January 2021, that is, when she was abruptly fired from the Boys & Girls Club, where she’d worked as a pre-K teacher, because the 42-year-old conviction, which she twice had sealed, reemerged on a background check the club was mandated to run after receiving a grant.

“It was absolutely demoralizing,” said Booth, 63. So in the fall of 2022 she turned to what has been, at best, a Hail Mary option in Massachusetts for decades: She sought a gubernatorial pardon.

But suddenly it doesn’t seem such a long shot. Booth is among the 13 people to whom Governor Maura Healey granted pardons during her first year in office, reviving the state’s little-used clemency power in ways unseen for decades so early in a governor’s term. She also released new guidelines that vastly expand who can qualify for clemency.

CLEMENCY, Page A12

Day of deaths, defiance amid battles in Gaza

Netanyahu vows to keep fighting; refugee camp hit

By Isabel Kershner and Hiba Yazbek
NEW YORK TIMES

JERUSALEM — Israeli leaders vowed Sunday to pursue their war against Hamas, even as Israel’s own casualties mounted, with at least 15 soldiers reported killed in the Gaza Strip since Friday. An Israeli strike killed at least 68 people in central Gaza, health officials said Sunday.

“The war is exacting a very heavy cost from us,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Israelis. “However, we have no choice but to continue to fight.”

All but one of the 15 soldier deaths were Friday and Saturday.

Netanyahu said Israel was intensifying its campaign in Gaza. About 200 targets were hit over a 24-hour period, according to the military.

Associated Press journalists at a nearby hospital watched frantic Palestinians carry the dead, including a baby, and wounded following the Israeli strike on the Maghazi refugee camp east of Deir al-Balah. One bloodied young girl looked stunned while her body was checked for broken bones. The 68 fatalities include at least 12 women and seven children, MIDEAST, Page A6

The Patriots withstood a furious comeback by the Broncos to win 26-23, beating Denver with a late 56-yard field goal by Chad Ryland. C1.

A change of leadership could offer opportunities to improve the state’s overburdened child welfare system. B1.

‘Then one foggy ...’

Monday: Misty and drizzle. High 46-51, low 38-43.

Tuesday: Clouds and fog. High 47-52, low 40-45.

Weather and comics, D4-5. Obituaries, C12.

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