

# Ghetto school gets a boost from Reagan

By Stevenson O. Swanson

**PROVIDENCE-ST.** Mel High School, the private school that has built a solid academic reputation despite its shaky financial condition and its location in the heart of the West Side ghetto, received a vote of confidence Monday when it was announced that President Reagan will be honorary chairman of the school's board of governors.

"This school proved to me once again that quality education is still possible when old-fashioned values are joined with a caring and committed group of teachers," the President said in a videotaped speech to a group of businessmen at a luncheon in the Mid-America Club in the Standard Oil Building.

Reagan visited the onetime Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago school at 119 S. Central Park Ave. in May and called it a "shining light."

Insurance magnate W. Clement Stone and Robert Ewing, president of Bankers Life and Casualty Co., the hosts of the luncheon, gathered representatives of the city's business community to recruit members for the board of governors and to raise money for the strapped school, which receives no government funds.

**ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH Bernardin** offered his moral support to the school, although he said that if he had been archbishop in 1978, he probably would have ended the archdiocese's subsidization of the school, as John Cardinal Cody did. The school has subsisted since then on donations, grants and the \$1,200-a-year tuition from its 400 students.

"The school [staff] has faced the challenge in a creative way," Archbishop Bernardin said. "I hail their courage in keeping it going."

"The archbishop's presence was most important," said Paul Adams, the school's principal, who has led the campaign to keep it open. "I think doors will open [among Catholics and the business community] that were closed."

**DESPITE THE school's surroundings, Providence-St. Mel** is free of gangs, drugs and violence, Adams



Tribune photo by Anne Cusack

Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin gives Paul Adams, principal of Providence-St. Mel High School, his autograph following a Mid-America Club luncheon honoring the school. Adams said "The archbishop's presence was most important. I think doors will open [among Catholics and the business community] that were closed."

told the group. The school's high academic standards have meant that 95 percent of its graduates go on to college, he said.

"Education is an investment in the future," Adams said. "Raise a million now and you'll save a billion later. Our students are winners. They will find a way, and, in some cases, I expect them to buy you out."

The school's five-year plan, which projects attendance of 800 in 1987, shows the school must raise \$156,550 more this year to meet its \$858,550 budget.

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