

Providence-St. Mel takes plea to business

By Jacqueline Thomas

PROVIDENCE-St. Mel, the last Roman Catholic high school on the West Side, is taking its plea for financial support to the business community.

An advertisement in Friday's Wall Street Journal describes the school's struggle to remain open, its successes and those of its graduates — most of whom go on to college.

A photo of principal Paul Adams and a group of students is featured under the headline "340 kids are about to learn hard work isn't worth a damn."

The ad was designed free of charge by Tom DeMint, a senior vice president of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. A similar ad he prepared for Indiana's St. Joseph's College raised \$175,000.

ORIGINALLY THE AD was scheduled to appear last week, but the Journal refused to run it until the school found an

organization that would act as its fiscal agent.

The Alliance of Catholic Laity agreed to do so, saying its relationship with Providence-St. Mel is consistent with its goal of "soliciting, receiving and distributing funds for the support of Catholic education in the neediest areas of the archdiocese."

In the event the school is unable to reopen in the fall, the alliance will return all donations, according to Harvey Gross, a spokesman for Providence-St. Mel.

In addition, the Assn. of Chicago Priests has scheduled an ad seeking support for the school for Saturday's editions of The Sun-Times. The names of more than 80 local priests will appear in the ad, according to The Rev. Joe O'Brien,

president of the association.

MEANWHILE, FACULTY and students at the school are making preparations for Sunday's graduation ceremony. The Archdiocese of Chicago, citing decreased enrollment and rising costs, has said it will be Providence-St. Mel's last.

But supporters have vowed to keep the school open. So far, according to school officials, close to \$35,000 in cash has been raised and several thousand dollars more pledged.

It will, however, cost more than \$100,000 to make the extensive repairs needed at the school, located at 119 S. Central Park, and an additional \$150,000 must be found to replace the subsidy the archdiocese had provided.