

Pushin' Paul Addams, St. Mel Principal

St. Mel Principal Turns Every Stone To Save School

"If the students here at St. Mel didn't show such a drastic improvement over public school students in studies and a basic enthusiasm to learn, one might just walk away from this. But we have no drug problem here, we have no absentee problem here nor do we have any major discipline problems". These are the words constantly bellowed by the principal of the Westside's last Catholic School scheduled to be closed by the Archdiocese of Chicago.

Paul Addams says the closing of St. Mel signals the church's abandonment of secondary education in the area stretching from the Loop to the western suburbs. The Archdiocese has announced that they will close Providence St. Mel High School as of June 30th.

"We are not closing, says Paul Addams, but we plan to rally support of everybody in this community who believes in a decent, quality education for these young Black students."

For the most part, not enough people have concerned themselves with the most important aspect of community survival. That of the development of its young folk. Of all the positive programs that are going on in the vast Westside area, Providence St. Mel has a most impressive record. Ninety-five percent of its students go on to college. (It is standard that all students take the college entrance exam whether they plan to go or not). That if a student is going to St. Mel, he is first interested in learning, or he is shown the door. Addams says that if a student can make the honor roll, the school will refund his tuition as more incentive.

"That's why our school is different, adds Addams, "We expect top students, we almost demand it. St. Mel is about the business of turning out intelligent people, if they can't keep up then they should find somewhere else to go."



Paul Addams

We have the same type of students that attend the public schools, but here we don't play. Being economically depressed has nothing to do with it, we see to it that the parents are interested, we insure that the teachers are.

"Our school building is over 50 years old and its dead in the heart of the ghetto, but it looks ten times better than Orr High, and its only a little over four years old."

As you stride through the halls of St. Mel you can feel the intensesness of young people wanting to learn. You will not see the common omen of young Blacks with earrings in their ears—symbolizing whatever cult or faction he surmises, but a more scholarly young gent about to embark in a curriculum of worthwhile studying.

"Even tho the cost per student a year is \$550.00, it is well worth it, Addams says, it runs about \$1,000 for us to educate one student per year, but I wouldn't care if it took \$3,000, it would be worth it to graduate a bright kid than to see him end up in Cook County jail."

Addams feels that if the Catholic Archdiocese won't continue to support the school then it is up to the community to do so.

"When I think of more than 125 taverns between Pulaski Rd. and Austin Blvd., I believe that we should benefit some support of these businesses to perpetuate a more stable community and elevate our values with a more positive approach. Naturally we plan to press on for the Archdiocese's support but if that fails this community could very well keep this school going."

Some important facts regarding where the money is needed according to Addams is for the annual oil bill which runs about \$40,000. Maintenance takes in a considerable sum as well as repairs. Altogether it takes an annual budget of \$450,000 to operate this school. "We already have raised 65 percent of that figure thru our Bingo games, donations and fund-raising efforts... Ironically, says Addams, most of it comes from suburbia. We would like to get more from our immediate area, where the impact can be felt. With all the talk among our residents about inferior education, here's a school on the Westside with the highest standards possible for its students, who by the way are 60 percent non-Catholic, trying to achieve the ultimate in quality education, about to suffer its most drastic setback..."