

Backer Award Presentation
Given by SLUH President David Laughlin
April 30, 2010

Today I confer our school's highest alumni honor, the Backer Award, to one of our own faculty members. We honor him today as an outstanding educator, a champion of the arts, a mentor and a role model. During his 52-years as a faculty member at St. Louis University High School, he has touched the lives of thousands of students. He has inspired dozens of young men to undertake careers in the performing arts. He has instilled in thousands of students a life-long appreciation for live theater and a love of mathematics. He has attended and assisted with numerous retreat and liturgical experiences. He is one of the most respected members of the performing arts community in St. Louis and throughout the region. Today, we honor Mr. Francis Joseph Schulte of the class of '54.

Joe Schulte began his association with St. Louis University High School in 1950, when he enrolled as a Freshman. He has remained a part of our school continuously for the next 60 years.....almost 1/3rd of our school's history.

During his years as a student at SLUH, Mr. Schulte achieved academic honors, and was a member of the Dauphin Players. During his Senior year, he led a special effort to involve freshman in the Dauphin Players. He directed two short plays which exclusively featured freshman as performers. Early in his time as a student, his passions and talents were known.

Mr. Schulte went to St. Louis University and studied mathematics. During his time there, he continued his involvement in the performing arts. He also continued his role as a mentor and teacher by volunteering at SLUH. As a volunteer, he assisted with Dauphin Players productions throughout his four years of college.

In the fall of his senior year of college, Mr. Schulte was working on a play at SLUH. The principal at the time, Fr. Gerry Sheahan, SJ stopped Mr. Schulte in the hall and asked what his plans were after college. Mr. Schulte replied that he'd like to teach math and direct theater. Fr. Sheahan, SJ, invited him to join the staff at SLUH upon his college graduation, and the matter was settled right there, in the hallway. He became a full-time member of SLUH's faculty in the summer of 1958.

Since 1958, Mr. Schulte has taught and inspired thousands of SLUH students. He is a former longstanding chair of the mathematics department. His booming laugh, his passion for getting the very best out of his students and performers, and his care and concern for others have endeared him to three generations of juggling Jr. Bills.

Many credit Schulte's inspiration for their success. Jim Byrnes of the class of '66, an award-winning blues musician and actor, said that "other than my parents, Joe

Schulte is the person most responsible for every good thing that has happened in my life...every positive thing that I've become."

Filmmaker George Hickenlooper of the class of '82 said that "a career in art or entertainment is very risky. It was Mr. Schulte who gave me the sense of conviction and the courage to go out and do what made me happy."

In the 1960s, Mr. Schulte was approached to work summers as a staff member at a summer camp for underprivileged children called Sherwood Forest Camp. Mr. Schulte was there every summer, working with kids. He often tapped his SLUH students to join him as junior counselors. By 1970, he was named the Program Director.

In the mid 1970s, Mr. Schulte was approached for a new summer job. He would join the Muny as an Assistant Stage Manager. Joe has been at the Muny since 1974, and has been the Resident Stage Manager since 1978...one of the Muny's longest-serving employees.

Denny Regan, President of the Muny (he is with us here today to honor Mr. Schulte), said that "Joe Schulte is the most knowledgeable person I know. If I have a question about musical theater, I ask Joe." So valuable is Mr. Schulte to the Muny that when knee surgery limited his mobility, the Muny built a special monitoring station so that Mr. Schulte could continue to do the job. Regan said that "For a while, right after his surgery, I sent a chauffeur out to pick him up, and then take him home again after the show...that's how valuable he is to us. I'm not sure we could do a summer at the Muny without Joe...but even if we could, it wouldn't be nearly as much fun."

Of all the summer jobs that Mr. Schulte had, the one that brought him the greatest reward was in the early 1970s. He worked for St. Louis University directing students in the college's theater department. It was there that he met his late wife of 33 years, Judy. She was a graduate student at the time, and was helping with the play.

Judy went on to become the theater director for Ursuline Academy. Together, Mr. and Mrs. Schulte directed four plays each year. This partnership between SLUH and Ursuline – and between Joe and Judy – produced some of the best high school theater in the region. Not only have Mr. Schulte's gifts influenced many young men over the years, but many women count themselves as blessed to have been under his direction as well.

In the greater metropolitan area and region, Mr. Schulte has been at the head of many Arts endeavors. He directed Nun Sense on the old Golden Rod Showboat downtown. He helped Direct the Christmas Pageant at the Old Arena for years. In connection to his work at the Muny, Mr. Schulte toured the country working on productions in locations like the Kansas City Starlight Theater as well as in the Dallas Summer Musicals. He has appeared in cameo roles in major Hollywood

productions, the result of his former students leading various film endeavors. His former students include the Deputy Director of the California State Film Commission, the most recent winner of the St. Louis Arts Film Festival Award, the Emmy nominated former Director of television's "The Office", the former President of the Screen Writers Guild and a writer for Conan O'Brien, an Academy Award nominated screen writer, a writer for the show "Real Time" with Bill Maher, Award nominated set designers, a multitude of Broadway performers.....to name only a few. He has been a Lecter at his parish of many years, Holy Redeemer, where he has also served on his parish council. He is the loving father to his four children: Joey, Michael, Katie and Dan. Mr. Schulte is currently the proud grandparent of 6 grandchildren.

Over the years, Joe Schulte has received many awards and accolades. He has been named the Missouri Teacher of the Year by the Speech and Theater Teachers Association; the Educator of the Year by the St. Louis Arts and Education Council; and he received the prestigious Emerson Award for Teaching Excellence given annually by the Emerson Electric Corporation.

In the mid 1990's, Fr. Costello, SJ, then SLUH President contacted Mr. Schulte to discuss the possible construction of a new theater at SLUH. Could they meet? Could they meet? Mr. Schulte, it is reported, came to the office with the drawings of the theater he had been dreaming about for years. In 1996, that theater opened. And in the Fall of 2005, that theater was dedicated in his honor. Alumni came from coast to coast to take part in that celebration and production written by Chris Albers, the aforementioned head of the Screen Writer's Guild and writer for Conan O'Brien. An anchorman from NBC affiliate in Washington DC, a major Hollywood producer, the nationally known Mr. Science, the artistically acclaimed Jim Byrne were on hand with many other former students, men and women, whose life was touched by Mr. Joe Schulte.

Religioni et Bonis Artibus – Religion and the Fine Arts

So reads the Latin motto of St. Louis University High.

Jesuit education has a rich and longstanding history of surrounding the best academic education with a quality Fine Arts program to develop the whole person. Ignatian Spirituality emphasizes the imagination, creativity and expression as aspects of how one can well come to know God. So it is important that in the recognition of our Alumni, we match the aspirations of Jesuit education through the centuries with those we see today.

It seems often that in the presentation of the Backer Award, we look outside our walls for the accomplishments of our alumni. Indeed, we are blessed to count many alumni in our educational community at SLUH whose lives touch so many a generation of Junior Billiken. It is with great pride that today I recognize an

alumnus “inside our walls” and I am honored to present the Backer Award to Mr. Joe Schulte.