

Guest Column: In praise of St. Gerard campus

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By PAT GREENFIELD

On Friday, June 14th, St. Gerard Campus graduated another class of the young women whom we serve. An officer of the board of directors, I attend these moving ceremonies to witness how these young lives are set on to the path to success. Every year, heroic young women, who have chosen to keep their babies, fight all of the odds and graduate — many with honors and many receiving scholarships. Unfortunately, there were several negative remarks published online about “those women” and “that school.”

Let me tell you about “that school” and “those women.” St. Gerard Campus is a fully accredited high school. A diploma from our campus is recognized and honored at any college in the nation. The school empowers young women who are pregnant to make the choice to keep their child, to complete their high school education and to go on to college, as 90 percent do. We rescue young girls (many are thrown out of their homes by their relatives) and prevent them from spiraling down into poverty, dependency and welfare. They learn to cope with difficult situations, to rise above daunting challenges and to become nurturing mothers, productive citizens and a positive force in our community. Sheriff David Shoar has called St. Gerard Campus “a hidden gem in the community.” He states that this facility saves the community uncounted thousands of tax dollars by rescuing these girls from welfare, illegal drugs, or possibly even prostitution, and making them productive citizens. Often the baby’s father becomes the husband and a family is created as a positive force in our society.

St. Gerard’s is a state-licensed foster home for teens 13-18 years of age. Class attendance and passing grades are mandatory. In addition to the high school curriculum, classes include childbirth, child development, psychology, sociology and theology. State licensed teachers are some of the few paid employees at the Campus. Most of the workers are volunteers. The campus is non-denominational and our services are delivered without one single dollar taxpayer dollar or cost to the young mother. Operating funds are graciously donated by individuals and corporations that believe in our mission.

When a baby is born before the student graduates, the infant stays with the mother in the classroom until 2 months of age. After that, they are cared for in our on-campus state licensed nursery. Transportation is provided for medical check-ups, appointments and any emergencies. Critical support and a quality education are provided by licensed or certified employees who act as teachers, housemothers, nursery assistants and counselors.

If the choice is made to place a baby for adoption, there is an adoption team with a counselor, an attorney and home study personnel ready to assist. St. Gerard’s also provides free pregnancy testing for women ages 13 years to 41 years of age. Approximately 1,000 pregnancy tests are performed each year at no cost to the individual. In addition, food and housing assistance are provided for young families in need in our community.

St. Gerard Campus is a remarkable institution. Mothers and babies who have resided with us many years ago are now grown. They are working as doctors, dentists, hospital technicians and teachers in our community. They frequently return to say “thank you” and to provide emotional support and encouragement to our current students, testifying that the odds can be overcome. Young women can keep their babies and they can become successful. Consider that in our 31 years of community service, St. Gerard’s Campus has saved the lives of 31,000 babies. That is our true value, our critical mission and our lasting legacy.

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Pat Greenfield is a 20-year resident of St. Augustine Beach and a retired educator, mother of six, grandmother of

16 and great grandmother of 15.

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