

Meet Our Athletic Director: Louis Bandlow, Saint Thomas Class of 1983

How does it feel to not only send your children to your Alma Mater, but also to work as Athletic Director and Coach for the teams you were actually on? Well, according to Louis Bandlow, Saint Thomas' Athletic Director and a Saint Thomas alum, "I think it's a really neat thing to be able to do—to have my kids be able to experience some of the same things I did—the friendships and the spiritual aspect."

Louis went to Saint Thomas from Kindergarten through the 8th grade, graduating in 1983. His parents were both married and buried from Saint Thomas so he's a lifelong parishioner. "It's like a tiny tradition," he says, "My kids are now third generation parishioners." He attended Catholic Central High School and also graduated from Grand Rapids Community College.

Louis works full time in an engineering department for an automotive parts manufacturer, but his job at Saint Thomas as Athletic Director is the title he truly enjoys, "Because it just feels good—it feels good to give back& to be with the kids. It's a reprieve from reality."

Louis met his wife Tracy while working at Chuck E Cheese when he was in High School along with about 10 other people who also met and got married from there in that "era." They have been married for almost 16 years and still maintain friendships with a lot of those people. Both Louis and Tracy are active parishioners and school volunteers. Even while manning Saint Thomas' gym (their home-away-from-home) most weekends and during tournaments and while coaching several Hornet sports teams (football and basketball), they also find time to be involved with the Home & School Association, Boosters and several parish committees.

When they first had children and were looking at Saint Thomas Louis said he was "Impressed with how much Saint Thomas had advanced technologically to prepare our kids for a different world than we lived in." They now have four children. Their oldest son Logan graduated from Saint Thomas last year and is currently a freshman at Catholic Central. Louis said Logan had some of the same teachers he had including Mrs. Witkowski (now retired) and Mr. Keller (our current Junior High Religion and Social Studies teacher). Tara is in the sixth grade at Saint Thomas and participates in many sports that her parents and even brother coach. Being Athletic Director at Saint Thomas is truly a family job for the Bandlows. Their youngest two children, aged 3 and almost 1, are being raised in the Saint Thomas gym. Tyler learned to walk scooting his walker across the gym floor and Landon's crib stands filled with toys in his dad's office, a central home base for the family. It's homey, but Louis is still lobbying for cable t.v.!

What is the one thing he treasures most about his years at Saint Thomas as a student? "It isn't any one thing," he said, "It's the entire package and the friendships that you remember. You have the same group of friends for 9 or 10 years. I remember those friends even more than some of the ones I made in High School. And I felt prepared to go on."

Louis really enjoys his involvement in Saint Thomas now. “It’s nice to be involved there again as an adult. It’s a comfort thing. You’re proud. I went to Saint Thomas and I’m proud of this school. It’s neat to see alumni from Saint Thomas and to see how much they’re doers. We’re a ‘doer parish’ and that is reflected throughout the entire community. You see something getting done and you say, ‘Oh, that’s a Saint Thomas grad or parishioner.’”

The thing he most wants for his kids at Saint Thomas is that they have the same type of opportunities that he had as a kid. “You don’t realize how much you have as a kid, but you do as an adult—how many opportunities, religiously and academically—and the stability of not going through pastors or principals or even teachers every couple of years. Everything just stays together and works together. There’s security here.”

The memory that sticks with him the most of his years as a student at Saint Thomas happened between his 1st and 2nd grade years. He said the principal, for some reason, decided that he should have a pet. “She came to my house over summer break and gave me a cat—my very first pet. It was a black and white cat and being the ever creative first grader I was, I named him Blacky. Ironically, when Logan was little and got a cat he named it Blacky as well, never knowing about my Blacky.”

Louis’ favorite part of his job at Saint Thomas “is the kids—watching them grow and develop, not just winning, but watching them grow.” He said that he and his wife have gone to the 8th grade graduation for the last ten years, every year since he’s been Athletic Director, just to watch the kids. “We just sit in the back and watch and smile.”

His advice to current Saint Thomas students, “Treasure your friendships now because they truly do last a lifetime.”

His goal as Athletic Director is to “Provide an environment that promotes participation. That’s the only thing I ever keep track of all year long is how many kids participate and we’ve always been in the high 90 percents.” That’s a goal and record of which he can truly be proud. Go Hornets!