

Ring out the good news of St. Coletta's of Illinois

"Start by
doing what's
necessary;
then do what's
possible, and
suddenly you
are doing the
impossible."

-St. Francis of Assisi

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Fresh Cookies, Meaningful Impact

Learn how St. Coletta's is expanding employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities on page 2.

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A Letter from The CEO



Greetings from St. Coletta's of Illinois. I am writing this on a day that it is so hot we had to cancel all outdoor activities, but by the time you receive it we will all be thinking about the fall. Just another simple reminder that time passes and things change whether we like it or not. As we all look forward to another seasonal transition I am so grateful to be able to share the highlights of life at St. Coletta's over the last several months. We celebrated our 25th anniversary in our building on Crossing Drive in April. It was nice to take the opportunity to acknowledge the milestone and celebrate so many of the successes that have taken place in this location.

We are all very excited about the opening of Coletta's Crossing Bakery. The bakery will offer training and paid employment for people we serve. We are proud to say that the treats are delicious too! The bakery program, along with other new employment opportunities, is part of the larger initiative to eliminate sub-minimum wage employment for IDD individuals. While this is a major change for all of us, we are very excited about the new possibilities ahead.

I hope you enjoy hearing about some of the other highlights including Kennedy School graduation, our annual May Crowning, and the pilgrimage trip to Italy. Pictures truly do speak a thousand words about these events. Sometimes I look at the pictures we take and remember that one day they will be looked at by people who will not know the names, but will see the joy in the faces. It is a reminder to all of us to stay present and appreciate all the moments.

As always I am grateful for the blessings brought by all our persons served, family members, and supporters. Together we will all go confidently into the future.

With Gratitude,

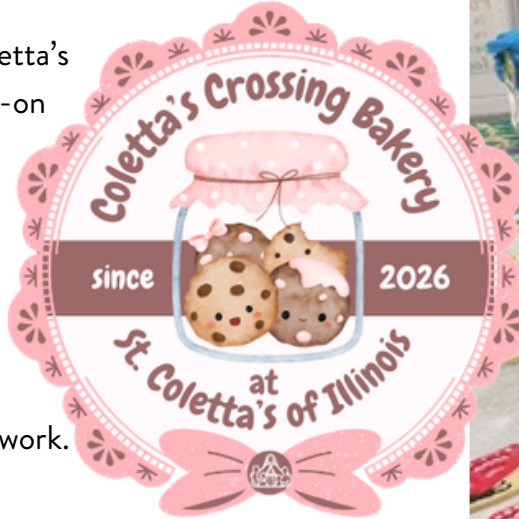
Heather Benedick, CEO

Fresh Cookies, Meaningful Impact

St. Coletta's relaunches bakery job training program

St. Coletta's of Illinois has relaunched its in-house Bakery Job Training Program, expanding employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Located in Transition Town, Coletta's Crossing Bakery provides hands-on training and paid, real-world work experience using commercial-grade equipment. The program is led by pastry chef Elsa Espinosa Diaz, who helps participants build skills in baking, kitchen safety and teamwork.



The program's return is made possible through a Dignity in Pay grant from the Illinois Department of Human Services, providing \$150,000 annually through 2027 to support inclusive employment and eliminate subminimum wage work.

Participants complete a four-week training program, earn their ServSafe Food Handler certification and transition into paid roles within the bakery. Up to 40 individuals will be served each year, gaining marketable skills and meaningful community connections.

Baked goods from Coletta's Crossing Bakery are available for purchase in St. Coletta's lobby Tuesday through Friday or can be ordered online through the organization's website, stcolettasofil.org/bakery. Proceeds support the Bakery Job Training Program and its mission to create pathways to competitive, integrated employment.



Following in the Footsteps of St. Francis

A journey of faith, service and Franciscan inspiration

Three staff members from St. Coletta's of Illinois participated in a 10-day Franciscan pilgrimage to Italy, an experience that renewed their connection to the Franciscan values that guide the organization's mission of serving children and adults with developmental disabilities.

Kennedy School Occupational Therapy Assistant Shalini Kumar, Adult Support Services Vice President Meredith O'Brien and Marketing Coordinator Charla Brautigam participated in the pilgrimage Feb. 21-March 2, visiting sacred sites in Assisi and Rome connected to the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare.

Shalini Kumar reads about Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint, at a shrine dedicated to the Catholic teenager inside the Cathedral of San Rufino.



Shalini Kumar, Meredith O'Brien, Sr. Joanne Schatzlein, OSF, and Charla Brautigam pause for a photo on a rooftop garden in Assisi following Morning Prayer during a Franciscan pilgrimage to Italy.



Meredith O'Brien stands in St. Peter's Square, awaiting a Papal Blessing from Pope Leo – the first American Pope.

Pilgrims wait to enter the Porziuncola, a historic chapel that St. Francis restored around 1209 and used as the original headquarters of the Franciscan Order.



Organized by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, the journey included prayer, reflection and visits to historic locations such as the Basilica of St. Francis, San Damiano and La Verna. Pilgrims also renewed their Baptismal promises, prayed at the tombs of St. Francis and St. Clare, and received a papal blessing in Rome.

"Walking in the footsteps of St. Francis offered a powerful reminder of the compassion and humility that are at the heart of the Franciscan tradition," said Brautigam. "It was a deeply moving experience that will continue to inspire the way we serve the children and adults entrusted to our care."

Celebrating 25 years in Tinley Park



St. Coletta's marks 25 years at Crossing Drive

St. Coletta's of Illinois celebrated the 25th anniversary of its Crossing Drive campus in Tinley Park, marking a milestone in its mission to serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The organization relocated to the 75,000-square-foot facility in 2001, bringing education, vocational training and Community Day Services under one roof. The move also transitioned residents from on-site cottages in Palos Park to community-based homes, supporting greater independence and inclusion.

Since opening, the campus has provided hands-on job training for hundreds of children, teens and adults, helping build skills for meaningful employment. More than 300 people attended the dedication in July 2001, led by Cardinal Francis George, who called the campus "a resource for the entire community."



Cardinal Francis George blesses the Crossing Drive campus in 2001.

To mark the 25th anniversary, the agency handed out individually wrapped cookies from Coletta's Crossing Bakery featuring a sticker that read, 'St. Coletta's Crossing Drive Campus: 25 years strong.'

"For 25 years, our Crossing Drive campus has been a place where individuals discovered their strengths and built skills," said CEO Heather Benedick. "This anniversary celebrated that impact and our continued commitment to expanding opportunity."

Founded in 1949 by the Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Coletta's of Illinois has served individuals with developmental disabilities for more than 75 years.



Kennedy School celebrates graduates



Eight high school students and three eighth grade students from the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. School for Exceptional Children celebrated graduation during a heartfelt ceremony on May 20.

The event honored the Class of 2026 for their perseverance, growth and achievements while recognizing the families, educators and supporters who helped guide them along the way.

New stories await at Kennedy School Book Fair



Students at Kennedy School had plenty to explore at this year's Book Fair, with a wide selection of new titles to spark every interest. Before browsing, Miss Maria's class offered a brief, lively introduction to the day, setting the tone for the excitement ahead. Students then eagerly made their way through the displays, discovering new favorites and enjoying the chance to choose books of their own.



Community Corner

Summer picnics bring community together



Xavier and Kevin select their picnic favorites as volunteers from All Saints Lutheran Church serve lunch during the first Summer Picnic of the season on June 16.

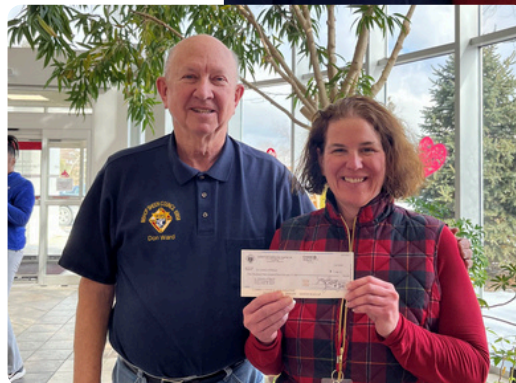
This summer, participants in our Community Day Services program are enjoying a season filled with friendship, fun and fellowship thanks to the generosity of Pastor Don Borling and the congregation at All Saints Lutheran Church. The church is graciously hosting a series of summer picnics, giving every participant the opportunity to spend a special afternoon together enjoying hamburgers, hot dogs, homemade side dishes and delicious desserts lovingly prepared by congregation members.

These gatherings are a wonderful example of community, inclusion and friendship in action, and we are deeply grateful for the kindness and hospitality shown to those we serve.

Thank You, Knights of Columbus

St. Coletta's of Illinois is grateful for the continued support of local Knights of Columbus councils. Recent donations were received from fundraisers hosted by Crusaders Council #10151 at Our Lady of the Woods Catholic Church, Knights of Columbus Council #10858 at St. Michael Catholic Church, and St. Paul the Apostle Council #11232.

Their generosity helps support children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities served by St. Coletta's.



Help Save Our Legacy

May Crowning launches statue preservation effort

St. Coletta's of Illinois marked its annual May Crowning on May 8 with a special Mass and outdoor ceremony honoring the organization's beloved Blessed Mother statue – a treasured symbol that has watched over generations of students, participants and families.

During the ceremony, led by Fr. Dan Korenchan of Saint Elizabeth Seton Church, Kennedy School student Najee L. and Community Day Services participant Cole Z. crowned the Blessed Mother with a wreath of flowers as participants and staff placed flowers at the statue's base.

This year's celebration also launched a special campaign to preserve the historic marble statue, which has begun to deteriorate after decades of exposure to the elements.

Donations will help protect and restore the landmark so it can continue inspiring future generations at St. Coletta's.



Kennedy School student Najee L., St. Coletta's CEO Heather Benedick and Community Day Services participant Cole Z. pose for a photo after crowning the Blessed Mother with a wreath of flowers on May 8.



From our archives: The Rev. Raymond Hillinger presides over the dedication of St. Coletta's beloved Blessed Mother statue on July 15, 1962.



Donor Recognition

We are grateful for the generosity of these businesses, foundations and individuals for supporting those with intellectual and developmental disabilities between January 1, 2026 and June 30, 2026. Donors are not listed by monetary giving levels.

A

A Better Door & Dock Services
Abbott Laboratories
Dawn Angelini
Jack Angelus
Atlas Putty Products Company

B

Dylan Baltazar
Bank of America
Karen Bartmann
Janet Bender
Joanne Benedick
Linda Beneventi
Benevity Community Impact Fund
Xavier Berrios
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Sandra Brooks
Deanna Browder
Louis Buescher

C

Concetta Cammarata
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CBIS
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Susan Colella
Sharon Cordin
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Josephine Cox
Samuel Cutrara
CVC Corporation

D

Vanessa Davis
Dealer FI Services
Agatha DeFranco
Erlinda Dimayuga
Linda Dozier
William Droel
James Dykas

F

Sandra Flanagan
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Susan Funke
Nicole Furnas

G

Emily Gagliano
Alyssa Galassini
James Gallagher
Give Lively Foundation Inc.
Danielle Goga
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

H

Linda Ham
Nia Harris
Heide Wealth Management
Hendricks Family
William Hess
Robert Hock
Eileen Hoey

J

Jackson Charitable Foundation
David Jensen



K

Felix Kaczynski
Joan Kadlec
Meredith Kahn
Kean Edge Lab
Drake Kelly
Eric Kitchell
Tasia Kladis
Marilynn Klotz
Knights of Columbus #11232
Knights of Columbus #6993
Knights of Columbus #10151
Knights of Columbus #10858
KODO Care
Karen Kozenczk
Constance Kreif
Mark Kummerer
Sharon Kummerer

L

Cathleen Lehocky
Lenny's Gas N Wash
Joseph & Linda Lopez
Russell Luce
Jose Luque

M

James Mangan
Mars Medical
Ken McCrea
Jeffrey McCroy
Kathleen McKay
Katie McLaughlin
Margaret McNulty
Darren Miller
Mario Minotti
Robert Moroney
Susanne Mosel
Mrs. B Parking Lot Maintenance, Inc.
Janet Murray

N

Helen Nelson
Rosemary Newhuis
Northern Trust Charitable Giving



Donor Recognition



O

Meredith O'Brien
Katie & Tom O'Halloran
Olatunde Owolabi

P

Susan Pavish
Paypal Giving Fund
PDM Plumbing, Heating & Cooling
Dale Penn
Eric Peterson
Bruce Petkus



Q

Amy Quinn

R

Jeffrey Ray
Kathleen Ring
Melvin Rodney
John Rodney
Janet Russ
Frank Rutkowski
Bill Rybak

S

Richard Sauer
Robert Scheive
David Seaman
John Shapiro
Jozel Shwatal
Joseph Skender
Skender Legacy Trust Fund
Margaret Smith
St. Bernard's Parish
Mike Strunka
John Sullivan

T

The William F. O'Connor Foundation
Thomas & Jeanne Palmisano Charitable Fund
Cynthia Tinaglia
Ruth Tomasek
Town Center Bank

U

United Way of Champaign County

V

Jerome Van Zeyl
Laura Vander Meulen
Ignatius Villasenor

W

Toyia Washington
Mary Wellek
Mary Whitten
Wintrust Tinley Park
Wolniak Funeral Home
Sharon Wsol



Thank you for supporting our mission. Your generosity empowers St. Coletta's of Illinois to offer life-changing programs and continuous care for over 300 children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We apologize for any oversights or inaccuracies. If our records are incomplete, please reach out to the Foundation Office.

Tribute Gifts

These donations were made by our generous donors in memory or honor of loved ones between January 1, 2026 and June 30, 2026

In Memory Of

Dolores Durkin

Sharon Cordin

Ronald Schultz

Karen Kozenczk

Margo Ham

Linda Ham

Tracy & Allison Geimer

Constance Rae Kreif

Joseph Torrisi

Marilynn Klotz

In Honor Of

Pat & Cathy Hennessy

The William F. O'Connor Foundation

Kevin Kummerer

Sharon Kummerer

Mr. & Mrs. Xavier Berrios, Sr. & Family

Anne Marie Leofanti

Jack Wsol

Sharon Wsol

We apologize for any oversights or inaccuracies. If our records are incomplete, please reach out to the Foundation Office.

Tree of Possibilities



Celebrate a loved one, special moment or achievement with a lasting tribute on our Tree of Possibilities. This beautiful lobby display features engraved leaves, stones, boulders and doves—each symbolizing a commitment to St. Coletta's mission.

- Leaves – \$250
- Stepping Stones – \$750
- Boulders – \$2,500
- Doves – \$5,000

Your gift creates a permanent tribute while supporting the life-changing work of St. Coletta's of Illinois. Order today at www.stcolettasofil.org/tree-of-possibilities or scan the QR code.



Save the Date



Caritas²⁰²⁶

*Honoring Humanitas Award Recipient:
The Kowalis Family*

Saturday, November 7th
Crystal Tree Golf and Country Club

Cocktails | Dinner | Silent Auction | Live Entertainment
Black-tie optional

St. Coletta's of Illinois

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Donate Now!

Freshly baked cookies with a purpose!

Stop by St. Coletta's of Illinois for freshly baked cookies that do more than satisfy your sweet tooth. Every purchase supports hands-on job training for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Open 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday on a first-come-first-served basis.



Donations can be made by visiting our website at www.stcolettasofil.org.
All proceeds support adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



St. Coletta's mission is to serve children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities so they can achieve their greatest potential within society.

St. Coletta's provides a lifelong continuum of care beginning in early childhood. Our educational and vocational training programs provide a home for individuals that enhances their independence and well-being.

We serve participants without regard to race, religion or economic background.
St. Coletta's meets individuals' needs and abilities while providing the least restrictive environment for growth.