



BOARD PRESIDENT

**Nat Leonard**

sits down with

TRUSTEE EMERITA

**Jenifer B. Garfield**

to talk life, Lawrence,  
and making the future

of education  
brighter for all.

# 50 YEARS AGO, a teacher had an **IDEA.**

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## Meet one of the people who made that idea a **REALITY.**

**Jenifer, tell us about how you got involved with Lawrence School?** Dr. Kenneth Oldman, a Case Western Reserve University professor, started a reading center at University School for struggling readers. The program really helped those kids and he got the idea to expand it. He first set up a transitional school at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. I heard about what he was doing and I thought it was wonderful. I simply wanted to help out!

**What motivated you personally to volunteer?** I remember what school was like for my own children—it was hard. They would not want to go, we would sit and do homework for hours, and it was just a very difficult time. I wanted school to be better for my children and family, and all children and families. It's what motivated me to work hard at trying to make this school a reality.

**Did your children attend Lawrence or one of its predecessors?** They briefly attended The Oldman Transitional School. I knew how important this initiative was for other kids like mine.

**You served on the Board of Trustees for nearly fifty years and have been named Trustee Emerita. What inspired you to stick with Lawrence for so long?** I know the despair a mother feels when her really wonderful child comes home from school each day sad or angry. This school is essential.

**What are you most proud of?** Not giving up and persevering! When we originally selected the building on Wallings Road, many said we would never be able to raise the \$1M it would take to renovate. A group of us worked tirelessly, and despite all odds, we raised \$1.2M through grants and donations.

**As you watched the school evolve, was there a particular turning point in the development?** A big turning point was when Mimi Mayer joined us. She had enrolled her son, and she was so impressive that we immediately asked her to join the board. This eventually led to her being named Head of School.

During the time Mimi was Head of School, her mother made substantial annual donations. So it was natural that when we renamed the school from The DePaul School of Northeast Ohio in

1993, we paid homage to Mrs. Lawrence Jontzen.

Finding Lou Salza was another very critical moment. When he first toured the Upper School in 2006, it was under construction. He walked through the site and he was in tears. When he spoke with Mimi, he began to cry, and he said, "How can you leave it? It's so incredible."

When Lou retired, Doug Hamilton, who had been with the school nearly 30 years, was the perfect choice as Head of School.

**The school only served grades K-8. How did we end up with a high school?** Back in 2000, Doug Hamilton came into Mimi's office and let us know about a potential property that was coming available. He thought we could start an Upper School. Doug said, "We've got to do something with these kids. They're slipping through the cracks." It was that moment the fire was really ignited to get an Upper School Campus.

**Tell us how you feel about where the school is today?** Oh, I'm thrilled! I think everyone should be proud of what we have. It's a shared thing—so many people throughout the years worked together for this. Truly no one could have imagined what we have today.

**The Garfield Theatre is named after you and your husband. Have you attended events there?** Yes! We went to a number of the plays and shows. We were huge theater buffs, and it meant a lot to us. Bob and I also attended many graduations, and he would sit there and tears would just run down his face. He comes from a family of people who cry a lot; particularly if they're happy about something. The tears came from a happy place of knowing full well many of these kids would not have graduated from high school, let alone be destined for college, without such a place. Without Lawrence School, they would never have gotten to be the people they became.

**Jenifer you have literally watched this school transform over the last 50 years. Where do you think Lawrence will be in another 50 years?** Gosh, I don't quite know. But it sure is fun to think about! ■

