
Lives *that* count

With help from the Christmas Joy Offering, Menaul School prepares kids to 'do something important' with their lives.

By Jordan Whitt

EMBRACING DIVERSITY: More than 75 percent of Menaul's students are of Native American, Hispanic or other racial ethnic descent.



After two hours of driving, I'm at Menaul School in Albuquerque, N.M., and ready to stretch my legs. Stepping out of the car, I take a minute to look around the campus of this racial ethnic secondary school affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Suddenly there's a large

golden retriever racing toward me, his master trailing casually behind. I immediately recognize the pair from photos on the Internet as Menaul School's president, Lindsey R. Gilbert Jr.—the person I've come to interview—and his dog, Copper.

"Hi, Jordan, welcome to Menaul," Gilbert says, extending his hand.

"I'm glad you could make it." Copper seems glad too as he rubs against my leg, his tail wagging in approval.

The warm welcome erases any lingering apprehension about whether my last-minute request for a visit to Menaul to gather material for promoting this year's Christmas Joy Offering was a good idea. I had

decided to squeeze in a visit to the school before catching a plane back home to Indianapolis after attending the Presbyterian Peacemaking Conference at Ghost Ranch, in Abiquiu, N.M.

It's July, so classes aren't in session. But the stillness of the campus provides an ideal backdrop for learning more about the school's history, about how it continues to be a standard-bearer for racial ethnic education in the Southwest and about why the Christmas Joy Offering is crucial to its success.

A rich history

The roots of Menaul School stretch back to the early 1880s, when legendary Presbyterian minister and missionary Sheldon Jackson first established Presbyterian-related education in the area. He opened the Pueblo Training School, in contract with the U.S. government, just north of what is today known as Old Town Albuquerque. A year later, the school moved to the current site of the Menaul campus, where it remained until 1891. That year, the government assumed full responsibility for the school and relocated it yet again, to a site west of the current Menaul campus.

In 1896, Presbyterian minister James A. Menaul received Presbyterian mission funding to open a boarding school on the site

formerly occupied by Pueblo Training School. The school was intended to serve Spanish-speaking boys, primarily from northern New Mexico, who had no access to public education. Menaul opened its doors to female students in 1934.

In 1972, the Presbyterian Church entrusted responsibility for the

A mission of preparing leaders

Visitors to Menaul School's website (www.menaulschool.com) can take a virtual tour of the campus. But the online tour doesn't capture the experience of walking along tree-lined sidewalks between the school's Spanish-style adobe brick buildings or watching Copper, the

Menaul School continues to be a standard-bearer for racial ethnic education in the Southwest, and the Christmas Joy Offering is crucial to its success.

school to an independent board of trustees. Since that time, the Christmas Joy Offering has been Menaul's most consistent source of PC(USA) funding. Troy Williamson, the school's director of institutional advancement, says these funds "underwrite a good portion of the need-based financial aid that we award each year." Without Christmas Joy Offering funds, Williamson says, more than a third of Menaul's students would miss out on "the opportunity to receive a quality, college-prep, faith-based education that they can only get at Menaul School."

campus guardian, chasing squirrels across the courtyard. Inside the 100-year-old buildings, replicas of the PC(USA) seal and other decorations serve as physical reminders of the school's Presbyterian roots.

"Our mission of preparing Christian leaders to serve the church is as vital now as any time," Gilbert declares. Noting that more than 75 percent of Menaul's students are of Native American, Hispanic or other racial ethnic descent, he says these students are beacons of hope for a predominantly white denomination that is committed to becoming more diverse. "We are the mission of



PHOTO BY JORDAN WHITT

Menaul School | BY THE NUMBERS

- » Menaul has produced more than **3,000 graduates** since the first class graduated in 1906.
- » More than **90 percent** of graduates overall, and **98 percent** of recent graduates, have gone on to **higher education**.
- » The college acceptance rate for graduating Menaul students is **100 percent**.
- » The **33 students** in Menaul's class of 2012 were awarded **scholarships totaling \$1,358,000**.



A WARM WELCOME: President Lindsey Gilbert's golden retriever, Copper, stands ready to greet visitors to Menaul's spacious campus.



DOLLARS AT WORK: Rehabilitation of school facilities is currently underway at Menaul, funded in part by the Christmas Joy Offering.

the Presbyterian Church," Gilbert insists.

With barely restrained excitement, Gilbert describes Menaul's recent efforts to cultivate a more globally representative student body. To attract international students, the school relaunched its boarding program, which had been closed in 2000 due to low participation.

humorous stories, including one about how Menaul routinely beat the University of New Mexico in football between 1903 and 1920.

Giving back

At the end of our tour, Gilbert invites me into his on-campus residence. Over coffee, he tells me he takes no personal credit for Menaul's success,

stays through February," Gilbert says. "I have never seen anyone rake leaves for five days straight, 10 hours a day. Whatever we need done, she does it. The campus looks great when Ray and Concha are here."

Motivating the Browns, Gilbert says, is the sense that "God has blessed us, we've lived good lives and we're still strong enough to help." They believe in the mission of Menaul and feel indebted to the school—"in a joyful way," Gilbert adds.

The Browns help decorate the campus for Bugg Lights, a Christmas tradition in Albuquerque that Menaul recently inherited. Named for the family that started it, the month-long festival features thousands of Christmas lights and brings 20,000 to 30,000 people to the campus each year. There is no charge for attending Bugg Lights, Gilbert says. He adds that he views the event not primarily as a means to drive revenue, but as a way of giving to the community. The school benefits from the exposure, however, and some visitors leave unsolicited gifts.

Those donations are used for student mission trips, Gilbert says.

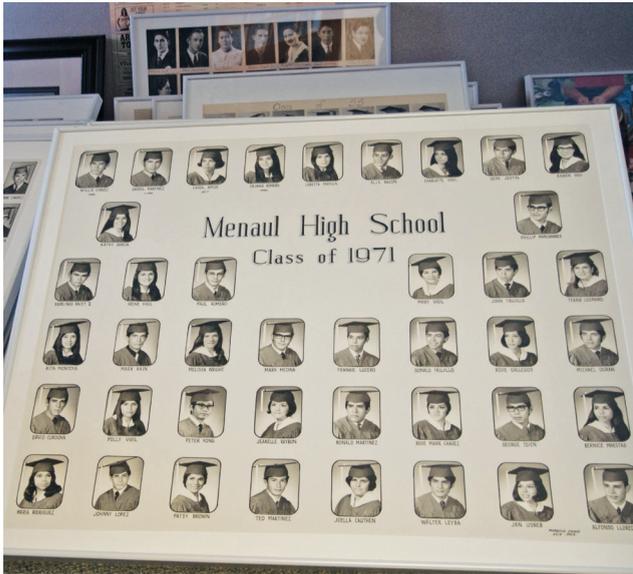
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"We've been growing in our international approach," Gilbert says, noting that the student body for the 2011–2012 school year included young people from 10 countries.

But it's not all business with Menaul's president. Gilbert intersperses school history with

pointing instead to the school's dedicated alumni. Each year, for example, 1959 graduate Concha Brown and her husband, Ray, travel more than 1,000 miles from their home in Minnesota to Albuquerque to help out around campus.

"Concha comes in October and



CONTINUING THE LEGACY: Menaul's roots go back to the early 1880s. Since opening, Menaul has produced more than 3,000 graduates.



TRUE TO HER SCHOOL: Every year, Menaul graduate Concha Brown and her husband, Ray, travel from Minnesota to help out around campus.

The school sets aside a whole week for the mission trips. The seniors go to Arizona to work with Native American churches. The juniors work at a homeless shelter in Denver. Middle-school students stay in Albuquerque and work with public-assistance programs for preschool students, the elderly and families in need of food.

“Even though many of my kids qualify for that kind of help themselves,” Gilbert says, “it’s vital that all of our kids realize that they have to give back.”

As I prepare to leave for the airport, Gilbert shares a final thought about what students take away from their time at Menaul School: “Our kids go on to college not just trying to get an education for themselves; they go because they want to do something meaningful with their lives. I hope what they leave with is a sense that ‘my life counts for something,’ and that ‘I was created by God to do something important.’”

Jordan Whitt is Special Offerings communication specialist for the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

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GIVE to the Christmas Joy Offering

The Christmas Joy Offering is one of four churchwide special offerings of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

What does it support?

- » Current and former church workers and their families (through the Board of Pensions Assistance Program)
- » Presbyterian-related education for racial ethnic students across the country

How can I give?

- » Show your support right now by giving \$10 via your mobile phone. Text “Joy” to 20222. The \$10 gift will appear on your mobile phone bill.
- » Give a larger gift online at <http://j.mp/CJGive>.
- » Give through your congregation. Most congregations receive the Christmas Joy Offering sometime during Advent.

Where can I learn more?

For more information about the Christmas Joy Offering, including stories of past beneficiaries: www.pcusa.org/christmasjoy

