

Lunch lines: Cafeteria is alive with chatter

By VIVIAN S. TOY
of The Journal staff

The bell rings at 11:22 a.m., signaling the end of fourth period and the beginning of lunch at St. Francis High School.

Students assigned to the first lunch shift fill the cafeteria by 11:26.

Some line up at one end of the room where they can buy fast food such as corn dogs, burritos and giant chocolate chip cookies.

Others line up at the opposite end of the room, with lunch tickets in hand, to pile their trays with mock chicken legs, Wiener Winks, Ranger Cookies and the other daily specials.

Still others march right to their seats, toting brown bag lunches.

Although there are no assigned seats,

STEPPING BACK

the same faces appear at the same tables daily.

Seniors reign confidently at some tables; freshmen huddle at others. Sophomores and juniors eat with their own kind, too. The black transfer students from Milwaukee sit at their own tables.

There are other classifications at St. Francis, just as there are at most schools. Rarely are the boundaries crossed.

There are the "druggies," who do drugs, and the "freaks," who do drugs and drink.

Jocks, of course, are the athletes, and "frocks" are jocks who happen to be freaks.

Almost every table is segregated by sex, girls with girls, boys with boys.

For the most part, the sexes mingle only when there is a specific purpose, such as a homework assignment to complete or a club meeting.

There is great security in this informal, self-imposed order.

A student can enter the lunchroom daily, knowing exactly where to go to find refuge from the morning's worries.

But for the student outside the circuit at the beginning of the school year, it can be a lonely 30 minutes.

On the first day of school, one girl wanders up to another.

"Are you new, too?" she asks.

The answer is an anxious yes.

"So am I," the first girl sighs. "Can I eat with you?"

The answer is an eager yes.

Please see Lunch, Page 2B

All work, no play?

Part-time job means full-time schedule

Part-time jobs play such a large role in the lives of some St. Francis High School students that school almost seems like an afterthought.

In addition to the 6½ hours a day they spend in school, many of the students put in from 5 hours to more than 35 hours a week at jobs.

Many seniors and juniors hold jobs as clerks and cashiers at fast-food restaurants and discount stores. Many of the younger girls baby-sit.

Some spend their money on clothing and accessories; others buy food and entertainment.

And others diligently save.

There are those who look ahead to the costs of college, and those who stockpile income for a first car or a big vacation.

Because employment often absorbs so much time, it is a popular topic of conversation.

One day at lunch, a girl asks her friend why she was almost late for school. She explains that she had to find an alternate way of getting to school because the girl who normally drives her overslept. The driver apparently got home late the night before because she had to "close" at McDonald's.

"She didn't get home until like 11, and I guess she just couldn't get up this morning," she says. "I tried calling her at about 7:40 because she was late, but there was no answer, so she must have slept right through it. She didn't finally get here until after first hour."

The other girl says: "Well, why do they have her close? She should tell them she can't do that during the week."

Another girl remembers when she used to work at a Target store.

"A lot of times I didn't get home until 11 and sometimes not until 1 in the morning and I'd be the last one there," she recalls. "You'd ask them

to let you off early because you had school, and maybe they'd let you off 10 minutes early or something. Big deal."

One senior boy talks about his job at a local supermarket. He works from 3 to 9 p.m. three days a week and puts in nine to ten hours a day on weekends.

"How can you work so much?" his friend asks in astonishment. "When do you find time to do your homework?"

"I have an hour after I get home and I do it while the 'Tonight' show's on," he says with a grin. "And then I stay up for David Letterman."

"Do you have to save your money?" the girl asks.

"Yeah," he answers. "But I spend it behind my mother's back."

The boy says he's made more than \$600 since he started working two months ago.

"But I don't know where it all went. I mean I spent some on clothes, but I didn't hardly buy anything."

The guidance office keeps a list of available part-time jobs, and the students make good use of this service.

But finding work as a teenager isn't always easy.

One senior is desperately in search of a job. Her mother insists that she get one to save money for college. She interviewed at a few places listed in the guidance office, but didn't have much luck.

"My mom had a hyper-spaz last night," she complains one morning during the second week of her job search. "She came into my room last night at 9 o'clock and started yelling at me because I didn't have a job yet!"

She plans to spend the entire weekend job hunting. "I hope I get one," she sighs.

—VIVIAN S. TOY

Lunch

From Metro Page

"A lot of these kids seem snotty," the first girl whispers. "I asked them if you have to buy lunch tickets and they said, 'I don't know.' I asked them how long they've been here and they said, 'Three years.' It's like, I'm sure."

The second girl nods in understanding.

The two new students spend the period getting to know each another, while the activity of the returning students swirls around them.

One transfer student quietly plants herself at an already-established table of seniors. The other students say hello and are courteous. They recognize her from some of their classes.

But it isn't until the second week that they stop talking around her and actually try to involve her in their lunchtime chatter.

After that, the new girl begins to feel at home.

The noise level in the cafeteria is consistently high.

The banter runs the gamut of topics: "What's that you're eating?" "Did we have homework in English?" "Look at what that girl is wearing!" "Did you hear what happened to Jill?" "Did you have a fight with her or something?"

And it is here that they discuss their plans for the future: "I want to go to UW — Platteville, I think." "Me too." "Well, let's go together and be roommates." "I want to go to Europe when I'm in college." "Me too. Wouldn't that be great?"

When a discussion gets heated, students might call aside one of the teachers who patrols the cafeteria.

One day, some students try to help a friend who is having trouble with his parents. The student has been reprimanded by his parents for coming home after curfew.

His friends try to goad him into action. "You're 18! You're a man now. You shouldn't have to take that! Nobody in our age group has to deal

with that kind of a curfew on a Saturday night."

They seek the advice of a passing teacher. "Mr. B., what would you do if you were an 18-year-old and..."

The teacher listens quietly and advises the student to calmly talk


things over with his parents.

When things get a little dull, some students might whip orange seeds or other bits of food across the tables at one another. They chortle when someone gets hit, or when a projectile narrowly misses a teacher.

The bell rings at 11:52.

Students quickly gather their books. Teachers wander through the aisles, nagging them to clean up their tables.

The room clears as quickly as it filled.



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