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Connection, Community and Captaincy

The Three C's are soon to regenerate

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The photo story burst onto the screen in a kaleidoscopic spectacle of colour and sound. Happy faces smiled down upon the congregation, coloured zinc drawn onto rosy cheeks like war paint which signalled the start of the battle. Whether that clash be for glory in the pool, or on the Athletics track, or on the stage for Performing Arts, House spirit and the will to win were easy to see. But then, just as quickly, the screen shifted and in place of the vibrant sea of technicolour an evolution occurred. Out with the colour, and in with the cyclic stream of school photos that showed the growth, change and maturing of our graduating Year 12's. The round cheeked, freckly and fizzing faces of Year 7's were replaced by the mature, sharpened and focused stares of our Year 12's. One after the other, our Luther students grew up before our eyes, transforming from children to young adults, emerging from innocence to knowledge, advancing from fledgling to world ready.



House spirit

In each of the House meetings that farewelled our Year 12 students during Term 4 of this year, not a peep could be heard amongst the student body. All students, no matter where they sat in their senior school journey, could feel the crackle of importance when watching these images pass before them. So too were staff dabbing at their eyes, as we teachers, who have nurtured these students and shared in their metamorphosis, also felt the sharp pang of gravitas as the sands of time shifted. The significance of this progression was palpable; these faces had grown up here, within these walls, and corridors, and fields. These faces had laughed, cried, shared joyous moments, and felt the pain of loss. These faces had converged in an experience, been a part of the same community, at the same time, and for some of these faces, for many, many years preceding. There is something monumental in this, and it is worthy of our restful reflection. At the heart of these House farewells is the soul of our school. A school is nothing without its students, and it is here that we hold the important task of helping these teens to 'grow up' each and every year.

This White Paper will unpack the importance of our Luther community spirit, with the House program at the cornerstone of all connection. It will consider the valuable regeneration that occurs year after year, cycle after cycle, and acknowledge that it will continue to do so for many years to come. And so, as one school year draws to a close, many doors will emerge, reveal themselves, and then open. Ultimately, opportunity awaits.

We've got Spirit, yes we do....we've got Spirit, how about you?

Parents, if you think back to your own secondary school days, you can likely recall the musty smell of a school gym, or a sunny oval ensconced in banners of colour, or a stage all lit up and ready to showcase the talent of the students who were waiting in the wings. Many of our formative school experiences are indeed significant House based events that burrow into our core memory, emerging from the chrysalis of our minds when we least expect it. Even writing this now, I am being drawn back to my own Year 8 swimming carnival in the 90s, when the bathers were on, the cap was secured, and the goggles were plastered tight. I can still feel the slap as I hit the water with a splash; as I tried my darndest not to sink but rather swim, for my rather un-mighty at the time, Douglas House. Our Luther students are given this opportunity each Term with a new challenge, and we should be encouraging them to try these new things. Celebrated Research Professor at the University of Houston, Brené Brown, has made a career out of inspiring millions of people globally to get up from our seats and to give things a go. She has sparked many a personal challenge, by claiming that "courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen", (Brown, B. 2012), and suggesting that true growth

spurns from vulnerability. All our Luther House Captains were vulnerable this year, all of them put themselves in positions of challenge to get the best from their House members, and all of them have grown through the experience.

When our School first opened in 1964, we only had students enough for two Houses, Yarra and Warran. Quickly, however, enrolments expanded and with the increased volume of students, so too did the need for more Houses. Two streams soon became four, but the names were replaced by those representing local landmarks, Birt, Cheong, Nelson and Wicklow. These four Houses continued to thrive in strength and capacity over more than 50 years and when it



2024 House Cup awarded to Warran

Cup for the very first time. What a remarkable achievement, and our congratulations must go to Mr Braden Keenan and his team of student leaders. Keenan reflects that *“encouraging students to step out of their comfort zone to either try something new or strive for a new personal best is the path to success. Involvement and effort across the board rather than overall results is what we have been working towards in Warran”*.

And so, at this point in time when the door closes on one set of school leaders, it most certainly opens on others and the cycle of student voice will regenerate again.

Belonging to a House community gives us all a sense of spirit – we are a group of people who are bonded together to work towards a common goal. The House structure underpins our proactive approach to pastoral care, with each vertical Home Group being welcomed by their Mentor each morning. This program is cohesively overseen by a Head of House for the six-year duration of secondary schooling, and the continuity of this program allows our young people to flourish. As Mr Malone explains, *“this structure allows students to be known and valued, with dedicated staff to share the ups and downs of the journey through adolescence”*, (Malone, R., 2024), and the student leaders provide another layer of support.



2024 Senior Birt House Captains

Ultimately, at the bedrock of this structure is student voice; their agency, their ideas, their vision is what drives the cohort into the future and provides them the opportunity to blossom. Head of Birt House, Mr Steve Dixon has seen many iterations of House carnivals and captaincies in his time with Luther College, and he has now been in the driver’s seat of Birt for the past couple of years. He knows what it means for students to stretch themselves beyond their perceived capacity, and then earn the skills and development that emerge from the experience. His personal farewell to his Year 12s sat warmly in the message, *“this is all for you”*, as he urged them to enjoy the moment, let the weight

of this achievement settle. And enjoy it they did, in spades. Dixon reflects that, *“the House structure gives students in Year 9 and Year 12 valuable leadership opportunities. While on the surface, students sometimes feel that the ultimate goal is winning events, it is clear that participation and getting involved in all aspects of college life is where the value lies. Having a reason to support and encourage others is essential to feeling connected within a community”*. Dixon and his fellow Heads of House walk side by side with our young people daily, and it is their unwavering commitment to their students that gives them, their charges, strength, confidence, and agency over their own future.

Student agency is currently recognised as being pivotal to classroom engagement, with extensive research reflecting that an individual’s “capacity to chart their own learning ...take risks, invest in learning to attain their purposes”, have all proven to boost student interest, growth, and capacity for connections, (Milligan, S., 2020). Students are much more likely to “become more interested and do better in school” when they can see how “their lessons connect to their personal goals and lives”, (Barr, S., 2024). For instance, one such study that emerged out of the US found that University students who saw the relevance in their studies found those subjects both rewarding and interesting, and hence, performed better academically, (Hulleman, C., 2010). And so, it seems fitting that our school House system is recognised as providing the scaffold for this engagement – proffering calculated risks for students to challenge themselves, invest in themselves, and extend on their school culture. The deliberately broad offerings of House challenges and carnivals that our students can choose from each year allows for the chance to try these ‘new things’. Conversely, some of our most talented acolytes strive to achieve their best during these events, by making age group champion, or winning first place as a House on stage, or taking out the trophy during the inter-House Chess competition. Ultimately, individual choice and agency is celebrated through our House system, and it is given a positive avenue from where it can thrive.

A school should be a place where people feel at home; where students feel accepted, and staff feel valued. Luther College prides itself on bestowing this sense of belonging to all who walk through the doors, and our Year 12s who closed the books on their final exams a few weeks ago are now firmly moving out of one life stage and are looking forward to another with both a sense of anticipation, as in some instances, gentle trepidation.

Out-going College Captain Ryan Farley laments that he, *“absolutely loved Luther for its community, teachers, and students...I will miss being in a community that is so accepting and so encouraging. I will miss being able to walk around the campus and stop for chats with teachers and lots of other students... I have been further realising that I won’t be able to remain a part of (each day) and therefore each cherished memory is (coloured) with a bittersweetness of what I will miss”*, (Farley, R., 2024).



2025 College Captains

And whilst Farley may be feeling both delight and apprehension for what life may now hold for him outside of the daily school structures, ultimately, the world is Farley’s oyster and there is much to look forward to in his path ahead. We look forward to seeing his journey outside of the Luther gates, and we look forward to welcoming him back to campus in whatever capacity he can offer, in the years to come.

The 2024 School Captains gave their hearts and souls to the role bequeathed to them this year, and with their calm approach, graceful respect, and warm interactions we will miss their smiling and positive faces. But, it is time for the guards to change. As one set of leaders, personalities, and people leave our gates for the last time, a new crop of students emerge to take their place. Incoming College Vice-Captain Jackson Smith shared that he is looking forward to the challenges ahead, and he hopes *“to foster*

a sense of connection among students, teachers, and others of the wider community, encouraging all to support and uplift one another, regardless of differences”. Smith is eager *“to bring the Luther College community together, to create*

a strong, connected environment for all,” (Smith, J., 2024) and we wish he and his co-captains a successful 2025 in their newly appointed positions.

As the guards continue to change, this term we will also welcome our youngest and shiniest group of new students, our Year 7 2025 cohort, onto the grounds for their Orientation Day. Out with the steely faced focus of the 12s, and in with the fresh and fizzing excitement of the 7’s, again. We will be ready to embrace this new legion to our Luther family, and we will be eager to see them start their secondary school journey with open eyes, minds, and hearts. And whilst opportunities await in abundance for our new and excited Year 7 students, so too do these new experiences sit at the ready for our recently completed alumni, our exiting Year 12s.

Whatever life wants to offer, our Luther leavers are ready; to travel, to study, to work, to play. Whatever their next chapter, we wish them every future success, and we want them to remember that they can always call Luther College, home.



Year 7 first day of school 2024

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