

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

On the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington, Lee Smith '65 and school administrators reflect on the school's integration and diversity at 10600 Preston Road

Headmaster Arnie Holtberg admires what Rogers and Berrisford did for the school.

"They were courageous. There were an awful lot of people who were adamantly opposed to integration," Holtberg said. "But it was just the plain right thing to do. It was about justice and about equality—yes for African-Americans, but for all American citizens. It took a lot to do what they did."

Assistant Headmaster David Dini is thankful because he sees how students and faculty benefit from the decisions that were made 50 years ago. He sees the decision as an example of what we should continue to do, and believes a leading institution cannot just follow in others' footsteps.

"You have to do something that is right regardless of what the consequences would be," Dini said. "But the idea that merit and excellence ruled the day was important. Lee Smith deserved to be here, and the tremendous degree

never met." Further, Smith was glad to see some students were forward thinking and accepted integration without protest.

Robert Hoffman '65, Smith's classmate at St. Mark's and later at Harvard, remembered noting Smith's arrival calmly.

"It was high time the school integrated," Hoffman said in a 2002 interview.

Not all students were so welcoming though. Smith was sent home several times during the year in order to "protect his safety" from death threats. Even the Parents Association was hostile towards Smith.

"Some of them wanted my expulsion because I danced with a white girl," Smith said.

The Dallas Country Club, where football victory parties were held, told the school Smith would not be welcome at future events. Smith was also advised not to attend the Senior Party for fear of backlash.

"I was uniquely suited to this," Smith said. "Anyone more fragile would have been messed up. Berrisford was confident that I would do well, and if I did, doors for others would open. And to this day I consider St. Mark's to be my school as much as any other graduate would."

Smith paved the way for where the school is today. With a record 44 percent of students self-identifying as a "student of color," the school has undeniably changed dramatically since its inception in 1906 and eventual integration in 1963. But Director of Admission David Baker searches for many types of diversity — not just ethnic.

"I use the word perspective more accurately than I do the word diversity," he said. "In that sense, I value all kinds of diversity. Not just ethnicity. I think it's just as important that we have kids in the school who have grown up in teachers' homes, students who have grown up in firemen's homes, in mid-level manager's homes. Those are world views that we are impoverished without."

While students here may be accustomed to learning and growing amongst the diverse group of people Baker speaks of, the struggle in the 1960's that got the school to this record point is not to be taken for granted.

Holtberg knows a large factor in the growth of students of color can be traced back to the men who integrated the school in the 1960's.

"We did the right thing in the 60's, which was a very hard right thing for people to do, with a lot of controversy," Holtberg said. "Those are very brave people

— Tom Hartmann, Mr. Green, Mr. Rogers. And here we are, the population of the greater Dallas area has changed, we are so much more diverse than we were. And St. Mark's now reflects that."

Holtberg also acknowledges the fact that as 50 years have passed, times have changed. The flashpoint issue that was the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s has evolved as American society has matured to become more accepting and more willing to learn from what makes us different rather than separate for those reasons.

"I think once the school became integrated in the 1960's, and we created a different non-discrimination policy here — coupled with the fact that American society and the population of America has changed dramatically over that period of time — we were going to be a more diverse place simply because of natural forces," he said.

For Baker, bringing together a student body that is diverse in many ways — ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic or other — provides a foundation upon which students can improve each other's learning experience by being exposed to different perspectives.

"I have many times referred to school in general as a large conversation," Baker said. "St. Mark's School of Texas is a large conversation. That's what it is. We talk about football. Coaches with coaches, players with each other, players with coaches. We talk about *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and what it means to stand up to injustice. The teacher talks to the students, the students talk to the teacher and the students talk to each other. We talk about lunch, we talk about opponents on the field and we talk about how to do differential equations. It is all one big conversation."

In making admission decisions, Baker takes all of these types

of diversity into account.

"I say to parents a lot, 'What our goal is for your son is to make the young man sitting next to him smarter, and for the young men sitting around your son to make him smarter,'" he said. "The best conversations you will ever be in your life will be those in which there are a wide variety of perspectives, and we choose students who have a good perspective on the conversation. They make the conversation better."

HEADMASTER
ARNIE HOLTBERG

We need to work with, to play with, to disagree with people who are different from us. That's America.

Holtberg sees Smith as one of the pioneers of the school because Smith was the first trailblazer who allowed many to follow.

"We need to work with, to play with, to disagree with people who are different from us," Holtberg said. "That's America. That's the world. That is fundamental to who we are. When it comes to who joins the school as a student, we want students who are up to the challenge. Students who will make the most of the opportunity and thrive. Students who will seek to contribute. That is the fundamental goal."

Now that the school is nearing 45 percent students of color, Smith has simple advice to offer.

"When I came, there were a few people who weren't particularly happy that I came to their school," Smith said. "What you need to know is that St. Mark's is not their school... St. Mark's is your school. St. Mark's gave me an excellent education. Take advantage of everything your school has to offer. Your classmates are your friends for life."

Paving the way



"Some of them (parents) wanted my expulsion because I danced with a white girl."

— Lee Smith, first African American student enrolled here.

Lee Stanley Smith
Smith's signature in the 1965 *Marksmen*.

of integrity those leaders had led them to that decision. That's what is special to St. Mark's to this day. There is a willingness to stick to the mission and make hard decisions that preserve integrity. We benefit from people who came before us, and hopefully others will benefit from what we do."

Smith, now a lawyer at the University of Texas at Austin, saw kindness as well as animosity during his time at 10600 Preston Road.

For example, an anonymous donor offered to pay his full tuition.

"If I had the fortune to meet the anonymous donor that made it possible for me to attend St. Marks, I would say a simple 'thank you,'" Smith said. "Our lives are connected even though we have



SCHOLAR Posing with nine white classmates, Lee Smith '65 (top row, second from the left) was a National Merit Scholar his senior year. The first black student in school history, Smith had to deal with trials and tribulations but considers the school as his as much as any other graduate would.

