



the bucolic campus, revealing a relationship, simple and real. If you could somehow record for one day the conversations from each encounter, the number of “Fathers” would number in the hundreds. At least. All of them real, spontaneous, sincere.

Just like John Crews.

In sagging khaki pants, a sport shirt and a

field jacket, Father Crews could be mistaken for the Hanna handyman, a gardener, an affable classroom teacher.

But there is clever deception in his casual guise. On the Hanna campus there can be up to 119 kids, 13 to 18 years old, at any one time, and Father Crews clearly knows each one. In the course of an hour’s amble from building to building, from classroom to garden to basketball court, he knows every kid and every kid’s story, and every kid knows him. Put yourself in his position and imagine the level of interest, compassion and care that goes into those relationships, and you quickly understand the extraordinary level of commitment that flows out of the man called “Father.”

He is the son of an Army pilot, raised Presbyterian, a skilled classical pianist and a chaplain and captain in the Naval Reserve. Despite his modest demeanor, he has a doctorate in educational psychology and a mind that is comfortable crossing from subject to subject in extended conversation.

He is wise enough to leave administrative details to others while he applies the wisdom and insight of those 26 years to reviewing the personal applications that every Hanna candidate must write.

No kid comes here without a letter and a meeting with Father Crews, and while he freely admits there have been misses among the hits, his batting average in the game of redemption is high.

And one reason for that is what he describes as, “no surprises.” As in the Navy, every kid signs his name to an agreement that spells out the program. “No boy,” says Father, “can say I was tricked.” And while some don’t always honor the terms of their tenure, dropping out, going back to the dysfunctional life they left, many come back to the serenity and security and the love of Father Crews because they need to and because, often, they can.

It is a reciprocal relationship.

Sitting in the comfortable living room of his campus home, a grand piano in one corner, a table layered with stacks of paper suggesting some sort of filing deficiency, Father Crews is recalling the moment he was called up for

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Navy Reserve service following the horror of Sept. 11.

“When the kids were told I would be gone indefinitely, one of them said, ‘But who’s going to buy me Slurpies?’”

Crews stops and blinks back tears.

“It was the first time since 1983 that I’d been away from the Center.” He stops, taps his chest, more tears form, for a long moment he is silent, deeply moved.

“When I got to Pearl Harbor something felt wrong. I was surrounded by people in uniform, but I suddenly realized I was lonely. I missed the kids, their young energy.” He pauses again. “They have this genius for cutting to the quick. They’re not the least bit impressed by uniforms or stripes.”

There is, nevertheless, something of the military model in the details of daily discipline at Hanna. “We’re considered really old-fashioned,” Crews admits. “All adults are addressed as Mr. or Miss. We use all the little words, ‘please,’ ‘thank you,’ ‘you’re welcome,’ ‘sir.’ We learn how to eat properly, how you dress. When I’m walking around I notice, how do they look, what do they wear. Black or tan pants, a collared shirt. Do I see a smile? The military puts an emphasis on grooming, and the boys like it, they like the routine.”

There is also an effort to nurture the spirit and, while Hanna is clearly a Catholic institution, there is no sense of pedantic dogma on campus, the religion is as much lived as taught, and the boys gravitate to the order and direction of Hanna life like chicks to a warm lamp.