

NARRAGANSETT

A brother's vow leads to new leadership at Ocean Tides

New president takes over; 40th anniversary will be celebrated this month.

By **Stephen Greenwell Jr.**
Staff Writer

When describing why he decided to take on the challenge of being the new president of Ocean Tides school in Narragansett, Brother James Martino cited the strong foundation left by Brother Brendan Gerrity and the ability to work more closely with an at-risk student population.

Martino began Aug. 1, and jokes that he's still settling in, both to the job and to the state.

"I think it's seven weeks and I still haven't broken anything yet," he said, laughing. "When I joined the [De La Salle Christian Brothers, the order that runs the school], the brothers have a vow and purpose to serve the poor, and this really resonated with me. I've spent 17 years in the business. I've spent my career

in child welfare."

Martino is a New York native, and a graduate of Central Michigan University. For the past 30 years, he has worked in New York, which included a three-year term as the president of the La Salle Academy in lower Manhattan during the Sept. 11 terrorism attacks. Martino has worked in education for about 17 years. For the past six years, he was director of administration for the Christian Brothers' District of Eastern North America.

"It's like working in the superintendent's office versus working in the school itself," Martino said, adding the new job will allow him more time with students.

The focused learning of the Ocean Tides program attracted Martino to the job when Gerrity retired after 30 years. According to figures provided by Ocean Tides, more than 2,000 young men have graduated from the school since 1975, with 75 percent of graduates remaining free of further legal trouble.



PHOTO: MICHAEL DERR

Brother James Martino is the new president of Ocean Tides school in Narragansett.

"We have a small learning environment with three or four kids per class, and that really helps them catch up," he said, noting that sessions were held year-round. "Seven days a week, 365 days a year. It's our job to help them find a better way."

For the next year, which also

is the 40th anniversary of the school, Martino said the students would be working on a community service project on the grounds, dubbed "The Yard." A patch of land at the rear of the school building, which sits on a 98-acre parcel on Ocean Road, will have a basketball court,

picnic area and barbecue pit installed. When completed, Martino said the project would expand the school's efforts to provide recreational and vocational opportunities for its students.

"They feed themselves and they feed the brothers," he said, referring to the older members of the De La Salle Christian Brothers who also live on the property. "Thirteen brothers live on the other half of the property. There is this great inter-generational taking care of one another. The vocational education piece, I think, makes the biggest difference."

As he settles into the job, Martino said he was still evaluating the school's needs, noting there has been turnover in the state Department of Education as well.

"The funding is good, the program is well-respected, and the staff is very experienced," Martino said, adding that all three contributed to his decision to take the job. "What are the needs of the at-risk community?

As that settles, we'll look at the next best steps for kids."

Martino said Ocean Tides provides three services on its campus in addition to education – residential living for its students, counseling and clinical treatment. About 30 to 35 students are in the residential program, with another 12 attending classes.

"This is one of the few places that brings those three things together," he said. "This place speaks to 30, 35 kids. It's a nice size. It's not a big, institutional place. It's a nice complement of services."

He said he's still exploring Narragansett, as well as the rest of Rhode Island. An avid cyclist, he said it's a great area to ride his bike.

"It's been a great experience so far," he said.

A 40th anniversary celebration will be held at the school Oct. 23 at 6 p.m. Tickets cost \$75, with the funds supporting the school's programs. For more information, contact Holly Palaia at hpalalaia@oceantides.org.