

# St. Mel can survive ...

Providence-St. Mel's High School, stripped of financial support from the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago, will survive to provide quality education to youngsters in the pit of the West side ghetto, if: — A full-page advertisement in the Wall Street Journal is successful at reaching the pockets of some of the nation's financial wizards; — A horse named Helen's music can outdistance the nags at Sportsman's Park Race Track and provide the school with a cut of her winnings;

— Bingo games are money makers, as well as a promotional marathon costing \$10 per runner, a "Ehop and Share" campaign by two large supermarkets and a benefit dinner dance thrown by the school;

— The students and faculty can survive the grind of trying to prevent the collapse of the 50-year-old granite landmark, which sends about 95 percent of its graduates to some of the nation's most prestigious universities.

"I don't know how the staff is going to make it. We've been working seven days and seven nights a week," said Principal Paul Adams, whose no-nonsense discipline is stamped indelibly on his 340 students. "Sometimes I'd like to collapse and take about two weeks sleep."

But Adams, who doubles as janitor, groundskeeper and counselor, and his underpaid staff have hardly rested since the nation's

largest Archdiocese announced it would withdraw its \$150,000 subsidy.

The announcement left the school, the last bastion of private, and some say — quality — education in the heart of the black ghetto, to fend itself or die.

For the Archdiocese, it was a matter of changing times and the bottom line. The West side changed from white to black more than a decade ago, few black families are Catholic, and faced with a financial drain, Providence-St. Mel's lifeline was severed.

"The decision is irrevocable as far as we're concerned," said Msgr. Francis Brackin, the Vicar General who controls the Archdiocese purse strings. "We have an obligation (to educate non-catholic ghetto youngsters) as far as our funds will allow."

Nonsense, said Adams, 37, a black man who terms

the decision "blatant racism."

"They told us when they wanted to close us four years ago that we were not raising enough money. So we increased our own fund raising from \$10,000 to \$100,000," he said. "The Archdiocese has really let us down. It's like spitting in your face."

"I think we are going to be open one way or the other. We've raised about \$40,000 in the last month. But it's a long way from the \$250,000 we need for structural repairs and operating budget," he said. "Most of it has come nickel and dime."

Supporters hope the big money will come from a wall street journal advertisement scheduled to appear next Thursday.

Designed by Tom Demint, senior vice president for J. Walter Thompson Advertising Agency, it will

feature a picture of the students topped by the headline, "340 kids are about to learn hard work isn't worth a damn."

The text will tell the story of the inner-city school where there are no gangs, drugs, pimps or prostitutes, and where all but a few kids from one of Chicago's toughest ghettos are college bound.