Mary Buddig — then Mary Ryan — wasn’t too excited about leaving the friends she had planned to attend Mother McAuley High School with when her family moved to Hinsdale the summer before her freshman year. Her parents expected her to attend Benet Academy in Lisle, but a commute through endless farmland prompted Ryan to plead her case. The future lawyer drew up a contract with her parents promising to keep her grades up and swear off jeans if she could please go to Hinsdale Central. They acquiesced, and Buddig began a relationship with the school that continues today. She is in her third year of serving as president of Central’s PTO, a group she can’t say enough good things about. “I have met the most unbelievable people,” she said. “We had a dad who agreed to get us 501c3 status. He did it pro bono for us.” The parent volunteer group has evolved since the early 2000s, when the main activity was a monthly conversation with the principal. Although those talks continue, the PTO does much more today. The group now has 26 committees that focus on a variety of topics, from recognizing teachers to assisting families in need to special education. “All these committees have evolved from parents coming in and saying, ‘I’m seeing a need,’ ” Buddig said. The group’s big event this month is tonight’s screening of “Race to Nowhere” and a community discussion of the film next week. The documentary looks at the high-stakes, high-pressure culture that has become part of children’s lives and some of the consequences. Buddig, mom to four Central graduates and one senior, said she’s interested to hear how parents respond. “I just think as parents we need to kind of take a deep breath and realize our kids are going to be fine,” she said. “The world is run by C students.” Although she is happy her children did well in school, she is even more pleased that they have followed in her philanthropic footsteps. “Our family has been given so many blessings. It’s good for my kids to give back and see how other people live.” Among her blessings, Buddig counts the family-owned businesses that have allowed so many Ryans and Buddigs to stay in the area. Four of her siblings live in Hinsdale, as do two of her husband’s. “The cousins are close,” she said. “It’s a gift, as far as I’m concerned, that they get to see each other as much as they do. It’s almost like there’s 31 brothers and sisters.” When the Ryan side of the family gets together, the group numbers 47. That might seem too large for an overseas trip, but two years ago the clan traveled to Ireland, where Buddig’s mother grew up, to celebrate her parents’ 50th anniversary. Her parents taught her the importance of giving back, in part by supporting Adventist Hinsdale Hospital. She and her four sisters were all debutantes, and her four daughters have bowed as well. She will be president of the Hinsdale Assembly in 2012-13, when the group celebrates its 50th anniversary. “I actually feel very honored that I get to be the president then,” she said. She also sits on the hospital’s steering committee and is involved with Misericordia, an organization that is close to her heart because her sister, Jeannie, was born with Down syndrome and a hole in her heart and died at age 2. Buddig makes sure to carve out some time to spend with her friends, many of whom she met as a Central student. “The friendships are so important,” she said. “I have high school friends that moved back and our kids have gone to school together, and it’s really, really fun. It’s been wild.” — by Pamela Lannom